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## **Our Stories Will Be Told**

### *Deconstructing the Heterosexist Discourse in the Counseling Professions*

James M. Croteau

*Western Michigan University*

Julianne S. Lark

*Independent Practice, Kalamazoo, MI*

Teresa S. Lance

*Western Michigan University*

*It has now been 25 years since homosexuality has been removed from a diagnostic category of mental illness. How much longer will it take to explore LGB issues as natural forms of human diversity worthy of study and professional support?*

—Douce, 1998, p. 777

*But every memoir now is a kind of manifesto, as we piece together the tale of the tribe. Our stories have died with us long enough. We mean to leave behind some map, some key, for the*

*gay and lesbian people who follow—that they may not drown in the lies, in the hate that pools and foams like pus on the carcass of America.*

—Monette, 1992, p. 2

Taken together, these two quotations embody the purpose and method of this book. The first quotation is from Louise Douce, self-described as the first president of the Society for Counseling Psychology who has had the opportunity to be openly lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) at the time of her presidency (Douce, 2004). In her commentary regarding a major contribution to *The Counseling Psychologist* on training related to LGB issues, she noted the clear progress that has been made on LGB-affirmative perspectives in counseling, and then explained how emotional it was for her to review material that shows the extent to which LGB issues and people continue to be ignored and/or overtly and covertly devalued within professional circles (Douce, 1998). The quotation is a plaintive reference to the frustrations that many LGB-affirmative counseling professionals feel: “How much longer” are LGB issues to be “kept at the edge” of the profession? The second quotation is from Paul Monette, one of the most passionate voices of the contemporary gay American experience. It is part of his award-winning memoir about coming out, written as he battled the HIV disease that took his life in 1995. His words speak to the power in the telling of stories that break through a history of hate-enabling silence about sexual orientation and how such storytelling can be a guide in overcoming social oppression. Inspired by the words of both these LGB community leaders, we contend that the telling, listening, and reflecting on stories about navigating sexual orientation within the counseling professions comprise the missing “map” or “key” in the journey to bring LGB affirmation more fully into the heart of what it is to be a counseling professional.

Indeed, we have designed this book to be an avenue for listening to and making meaning from the voices of lesbian, bisexual, gay, and heterosexual counseling professionals, who narrate their personal experiences with sexual orientation issues within the counseling professions. A special issue in the *Journal of Counseling and Development (JCD)* (Robinson & Ginter, 1999) addressed racism from a narrative perspective and serves in some sense as a model for this book. In that *JCD* issue, 17 diverse professionals wrote moving narratives about their own experiences with racism, and three authors presented commentary on the themes contained in those narratives. The commentators noted that “the experience of racism is difficult to define without the use of storytelling” (Watt, 1999, p. 54) and that the narratives gave “personal, intimate glimpses of the authors’ struggles

with racism . . . creat[ing] horizons from which to view racism and understand at a deeper level some of the legacies of racism” (Glaser, 1999, p. 62). In a similar vein, we think that the experience of heterosexist oppression within the counseling professions is difficult to understand without using the medium of storytelling. Only with the “personal, intimate glimpses” that the authors in this book so bravely provide is it possible for counseling professionals to get a deeper understanding of the status of the discourse on LGB issues in the counseling professions; that is, a deeper understanding of the quality and extent of both the progress toward LGB affirmation and the continuing enmeshment in heterosexism.

This book contains chapters that are the personal narratives of counseling professionals’ own experiences. There are also chapters that use the personal narratives to “piece together the tale” of sexual orientation in ways that address particular purposes; that is, creating positive change in the professional discourse, shaping training programs, and guiding individual counseling professionals. Each chapter in the book, and especially the book as a whole, serves as a means for individual and collective self-examination that we hope will help transform the culture and norms of the counseling professions toward greater equity in regard to sexual orientation.

The various authors in this book are all professionals in counseling or counseling psychology who are writing primarily to graduate students, practitioners, and academicians across the many subspecialties of counseling. The authors’ primary purpose is to provide perspectives to their readers concerning navigating and working for positive change on sexual orientation issues in the counseling professions. We expect, however, that the book will also have much to say to other helping and allied health professionals (e.g., social workers, clinical and school psychologists, health educators, etc.), as those individuals and their professions also journey toward more genuine and complete LGB affirmation. We find that the narrative method employed in this book is an engaging medium that is uniquely suited to both inspire and inform the kind of individual and systemic change that is needed to move these professions toward greater sexual orientation equity. Essentially, we hope that this book will help to move LGB-affirmative practice, training, and research from “the edge to the center” of the counseling and other helping professions, so that LGB issues and people can come to genuinely and fully “belong” in those professions (Douce, 1998, p. 784).

The purpose of this introductory chapter is to present a more detailed rationale for the book and its approach, as well as to introduce the structure and specific aims of the various sections within the book. In the first part of this chapter, we argue that while there has been much progress on sexual orientation issues, these issues often continue to be neglected, approached with bias, and rendered marginal within counseling. Furthermore, we argue that a key to changing this marginalization is to critically examine the discourse of

heterosexist dominance within the counseling professions. Second, we explain the necessity for the conscious articulation of multicultural contexts in the stories and analyses contained in this book. In the third part of this chapter, we discuss the particular power of narrative storytelling for deconstructing dominant discourses and its suitability as the primary method employed in this book. In the next part, we provide a guide for the reader in understanding the development and structure of this book. We explain the content and specific purposes of each section and how the three sections of the book were developed to build upon one another to accomplish a critical examination that can drive positive change on sexual orientation issues within the counseling professions. Finally, we conclude with our own personal reflections on the work and aim of this book.

### **The Discourse of Heterosexist Dominance and the Continued Marginalization of LGB Issues**

Robinson (1999) and Robinson and Howard-Hamilton (2000) employed the concept of “discourse” in providing a social constructivist viewpoint regarding racism, sexism, heterosexism, and other forms of social oppression. A discourse is a set of ideas and assumptions that underlie the social interchanges from which people construct meaning and take action (Robinson, 1999; Winslade, Monk, & Drewery, 1997). According to Robinson (1999), the “isms” are socially constructed through an interlocking system of discourses that rank social identities (i.e., valuing White people over people of color, those who are able-bodied over those with disabilities, and men over women, etc.) These discourses are referred to as “dominant” discourses to emphasize that the key principle within these discourses is one of dominance, or the valuing of one group over another. The discourse of dominance with regard to sexual orientation recognizes and values a heterosexual orientation while excluding and devaluing LGB orientations. This book of professional self-examination centers on the analysis of how the dominant discourse on sexual orientation is manifested and/or contradicted *within* the counseling professions and what this discourse analysis means for individual and collective action to bring about LGB-affirmative change within the counseling professions.

Great progress has been made in promoting LGB-affirmative perspectives in counseling and in moving the counseling field beyond pioneering on LGB issues (Brown, 2000; Croteau & Bieschke, 1996; Croteau, Bieschke, Phillips, & Lark, 1998; Douce, 1998; Mobley, 1998; Morrow, 1998; Perez, DeBord, & Bieschke, 2000; Rothblum, 2000). Nevertheless, research and the assessment of leading scholars indicate that LGB issues continue to be ignored, approached with bias, and rendered marginal in professional practice, research, and training (Bahr, Brish, & Croteau, 2000;

Bieschke, Eberz, Bard, & Croteau, 1998; Bieschke, McClanahan, Tozer, Grzegorek, & Park, 2000; Douce, 1998; Haldeman, 1994; Lark & Croteau, 1998; Mobley, 1998; Morrow, 1998; Phillips, 2000; Phillips & Fischer, 1998; Tozer & McClanahan, 1999).

Several authors have recently assessed the current status of LGB issues in counseling and related fields (Brown, 2000; Croteau, Bieschke, Phillips, & Lark, 1998; Douce, 1998; Mobley, 1998; Morrow, 1998). Brown (2000) wrote that the "enormous growth in theory and scholarship . . . in the last 3 decades now provides guidance" in work with LGB clients (p. xii). She declared that the "era of discovery" is over and that skilled work with LGB clients no longer requires "self-invention and discovery" (p. xii). Similarly, Croteau, Bieschke, Phillips, and Lark (1998), in a major contribution to *The Counseling Psychologist* on LGB professional training, used the term "beyond pioneering" to describe the current status of LGB-affirmative scholarship. Phillips, Ingram, Grant Smith, and Mindes (2003) provided a concrete representation of such progress in their content review of LGB literature in counseling journals in the 1990s. They claimed a threefold increase in the "sheer quantity" of LGB articles in counseling journals in the 1990s, compared with the previous 12-year period analyzed in an earlier content analysis (Buhrke, Ben-Ezra, Hurley, & Ruprecht, 1992). Phillips and her colleagues (2003) also noted increases in "free-standing" journal articles addressing LGB topics published outside of special issues or sections on LGB issues and concluded "that LGB issues have been increasingly integrated" into the counseling literature (p. 44).

While great progress has been made, the description of being at a point of readiness to move beyond pioneering implies that there is a long way to go before LGB-affirmative perspectives become established in the counseling professions. Mobley (1998) stated that recent productivity in LGB scholarship "in no way meets the urgent needs of this unique cultural group" (p. 794). While acknowledging the progress on LGB issues within counseling psychology, Morrow (1998) noted that LGB issues continue to be relegated to "special topic" status, off to the margins of the profession (p. 797). Research on professional training and practice has indicated that LGB-affirmative perspectives are far from being well rooted in the counseling professions, with frequent biases and inattention in practice, training, and research/scholarship (e.g., Bahr et al., 2000; Bieschke et al., 2000; Bowman, 2003; Phillips, 2000; Phillips & Fischer, 1998; Phillip et al., 2003; Rodolfa & Davis, 2003).

A specific sign of the persistence of nonaffirmative perspectives is the recent upsurge in professional writing advocating conversion or reparative therapies to change LGB orientations and the relative lack of unqualified condemnation of such practices in mainstream professional circles (see discussions by Bieschke et al., 2000; Haldeman, 1994; and Tozer & McClanahan, 1999). Furthermore, while the recent LGB counseling literature content

analysis discussed earlier (Phillips et al., 2003) showed substantial increases in counseling scholarship that addresses LGB or sexual orientation issues, the overall percentage of articles addressing LGB issues in the counseling journals reviewed was about 2%. The authors noted that LGB issues continue to be “underrepresented in counseling journals given that issues related to gender attraction and sexual orientation likely affect a much higher percentage of the population” (Phillips et al., 2003, p. 44). In fact, in commenting on the content analysis, Bowman (2003) noted that 2% is “barely a blip on the radar” (p. 64) and is indicative of a lack of inclusion, and Rodolfa and Davis (2003) labeled the small quantity of literature found as “haunting and abysmal” (p. 78).

What has led to this continuing relegation of sexual orientation issues to the margins of the counseling professions? What is needed to more fully integrate affirmative perspectives on sexual orientation issues into the counseling professions? Elsewhere, we have noted that advances in LGB-affirmative counseling have been the result of the work of a small but growing community of counseling professionals who are focusing on LGB issues in their training, scholarship, and practice (Croteau, Bieschke, Phillips, Lark, Fischer, & Eberz, 1998). While these efforts have had some significant success, as discussed previously, we believe that an additional perspective is needed if LGB-affirmative perspectives are to become more central and pervasive in the counseling professions.

From a social constructivist viewpoint, the discourses of the counseling professions are what shape the way individual counseling professionals approach research, training, and practice. We believe that the failure of the wider profession to examine the professional discourse concerning sexual orientation is what keeps LGB-affirmative approaches on the margins of the profession. In a recent model of multicultural competence, Sue (2001) emphasized that efforts aimed at increasing multicultural counseling competence must be focused not only at the level of individual counseling professionals but also at organizational and systemic levels within the counseling professions. Consistent with Sue’s emphasis, we agree with Robinson (1999) that there must be an identification of “how oppressive dominant discourses are perpetuated in the counseling profession” (p. 73). An examination of individual, interpersonal, and institutional norms and practices concerning sexual orientation within the counseling professions—an examination of the professional discourse—is needed. This book is designed for that purpose.

### **Making Central the Multicultural Context**

We contend that the discourse of heterosexist dominance exists in a multicultural context and “interlocks” (Robinson, 1999) with the other discourses of dominance (e.g., racism, sexism, classism). Numerous authors

have noted that the greatest deficiencies in current counseling perspectives on LGB issues have to do with the lack of attention to racism and multicultural issues (e.g., Bowman, 2003; Croteau, Bieschke, Phillips, Lark, Fischer, & Eberz, 1998; Fukuyama & Ferguson; 2000; Greene, 2000; Lowe & Mascher, 2001; Morrow, 2003; Phillips et al., 2003; Smith, 1997). Too often, LGB-affirmative counseling has assumed a culture-less, race-less, economic class-less guise. LGB research has included predominantly White economically and educationally privileged research participants, and LGB scholarship has mostly been grounded in the cultural assumptions of the dominant social groups in this society. Greene (2000) provided what is probably the single most comprehensive and complex examination of how deeply the experience of sexual orientation is shaped by the cultural assumptions and the issues of privilege and oppression that surround age, race, ethnicity, economic class, disability, and gender. Indeed, there is growing literature in the counseling professions that outlines the limitations of considering only one social identity and that begins to construct more multidimensional perspectives (e.g., Arrendondo et al., 1996; Bingham, Porche-Burke, James, Sue, & Vasquez, 2002; Boden, 1992; Chan, 1992; Constantine, 2002; Croteau, Talbot, Lance, & Evans, 2002; D'Andrea & Daniels, 2001; Fassinger & Ritchie, 1997; Gutiérrez & Dworkin, 1992; Jones & McEwen, 2000; Morales, 1992; Pope-Davis & Coleman, 2001; Ridley, Baker, & Hill, 2001; Ridley, Hill, Thompson, & Ormerod, 2001; Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 2000). Greene (2000) advocates strongly that ignoring multicultural contexts and other social identities in LGB-affirmative study and practice is "an oppressive act . . . [that] does not ultimately undermine heterosexism because heterosexism has an interlocking relationship to other forms of oppression" (p. 39).

Thus, an examination of the professional discourse on sexual orientation, void of an explicit multicultural context, would be inevitably oppressive, limited, and distorted. An inclusive multicultural perspective is needed to "authentically achieve . . . a transformation of the discourse" (Greene, 2000, p. 40). The chapters in this book were written with the intent of rendering explicit the powerful influence of cultural contexts and of the convergences and intersections of multiple social and cultural identities.

### **The Power of Storytelling to Deconstruct the Heterosexist Dominant Discourse**

The aims of this book are the deconstruction of the heterosexist dominant discourse on sexual orientation in the counseling professions, the envisioning of a discourse of greater equity, and the provision of practical guidance to counseling professionals in navigating and changing that heterosexist professional discourse. The means to accomplish these aims center on

the use of narrative storytelling concerning the experiences of counseling professionals. Narrative has been defined as one of the means by which persons, individually and collectively, attempt to find and make meaning from the chaotic collection of experiences in their lives (Chase, 1995; Gonclaves & Machado, 1999; Monk, Winslade, Crocket, & Epston, 1997; Wilbur, 1999). Stories are “how people make sense of their experiences” and are used “to cope with the present and make decisions about the future” (Wilbur, 1999, p. 49). In essence, storytelling illustrates and shapes social discourse. Thus, to deconstruct the heterosexist dominant discourse in the counseling professions, there must be an avenue for listening to the stories, or “meaning makings,” of counseling professionals concerning their own experiences with sexual orientation within the profession. This book serves as that avenue.

After reviewing a number of authors’ perspectives on the power and purposes of storytelling (Chase, 1995; Glauser, 1999; Gluck, 1979; Mintz & Rothblum, 1997; Monk et al., 1997; Reinharz, 1992; Robinson & Ginter, 1999; Watt, 1999; Wilbur, 1999), we have come to believe that the telling of stories, and the critical examination of such stories, is a particularly potent means of challenging the heterosexist dominant discourse in the counseling professionals, for three primary reasons. The first reason has to do with the potency of storytelling in breaking through minimization, denial, and apathy in ways that other forms of education and/or training do not. In commenting on the personal narratives on racism in the aforementioned *JCD* special issue, Glauser (1999) said that the narrative structure allows for the myths that “perpetuate racism and other forms of prejudice” to be taken apart and examined anew (deconstructed) (p. 67). The narratives about racism show the reader the “how” of racism in a way that does not allow the reader to “underestimate or deny” racism, its impact, and its perpetuation (p. 62). Thus, the personal narratives in this book are aimed at exposing the norms of the heterosexist dominant discourse with an indisputable clarity that abstract explanation could never provide.

Second, the particular power of narratives to confront and challenge oppression may also be related to the narrative’s ability to “access emotionality” (Schreier & Werden, 2000, p. 367). Put simply, it may be a moving experience to read the firsthand accounts of the human pain that is wrought by heterosexism in the lives of the narrative authors. For the reader of the narratives, the process of personal internal change is then moved to the affective domain, where beliefs and attitudes are often rooted. Stories of discrimination may create motivation for change far beyond any mere quantitative documentation of oppression (Croteau & Talbot, 2000). In other words, some stories about oppression have “an uprooting effect because they do not settle peacefully in our ears, our hearts and our minds” (Robinson & Ginter, 1999, p. 3).



The third reason for the potency of a narrative approach is that the telling and reading of stories is a process that can empower those invested in changing the prevailing discourse of heterosexist dominance. Storytelling leads to empowerment and community building for the storyteller *and* for those persons who see their own experiences reflected in the story. From a perspective central in the feminist tradition, hearing one another and oneself to voice has been a means of making women's experience visible and audible where it had been denied, obscured, or ignored (Gluck, 1979). Because members of oppressed groups have often been deprived of their own experiences being reflected in the meta-narratives of the popular culture, there is incredible power in just hearing another speak or write about an experience that is similar to one's own (Gross, 1991). The impact often brings a sense of feeling validated and no longer alone with one's experience and perspective; in turn, leading to the formation and/or strengthening of community. The collective telling of stories of oppressed peoples carries the powerful message "We are here, we exist."

Only a few isolated essays have given voice to counseling professionals' experiences with the heterosexist dominant discourse and provided the consequent opportunity for community empowerment (e.g., Croteau, 1999; Dworkin, 1997; Fygetakis, 1997; Gerber, 1997; Morrow, 1997; Reynolds & Pope, 1997). We believe that the systematic telling of such stories in the public professional forum of this book is particularly timely at this point in the history of the counseling professions, a point where, for the first time, there is a "diverse multigenerational community of lesbian, gay, and bisexual affirmative" counseling professionals (Croteau, Bieschke, Phillips, Lark, Fischer, Eberz, 1998, p. 810). For the last two-and-a-half decades, there have been increasing numbers of counseling professionals who have had the opportunity and courage to explicitly integrate sexual orientation issues into their professional lives. So now, for the first time in the history of the counseling professions, there are graduate students as well as new, midlevel, and senior professionals who openly identify themselves as invested in LGB-affirmative perspectives. There are now generations of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and heterosexual voices in the counseling professions who need to speak their stories about sexual orientation, and generations of ears that need to hear those stories. This community of LGB-affirmative counseling professionals must grow in number and strength to provide strong opposition to the heterosexist dominant discourse and to create a widespread and viable model for an alternative discourse of equity. The telling of these stories in the wider professional forum of this book will help further strengthen this community of LGB-affirmative counseling professionals in their work to change the discourse of heterosexist dominance that still pervades the counseling professions.

## **A Short Guide to the Development, Content, and Structure of the Book**

The first section of the book, titled “Narrative Voices” (Chs. 2–19), contains narratives by counseling professionals who describe their own personal experiences with the discourse on sexual orientation in the counseling professions. We selected these narrative authors by compiling a longer list of potential authors whom we believed had compelling and informative stories to tell about their experiences. Then, we invited authors from that list based on the criterion of having a group of authors who would capture a diversity of experiences. Thus, the narrative chapter authors are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and heterosexual counseling professionals of different racial, ethnic, cultural, gender, economic, ability/disability, and religious contexts and backgrounds. The authors work in academic as well as private, agency, and university counseling center practice settings. Furthermore, they represent a balance of graduate students, new professionals, midlevel professionals, and senior professionals.

We asked each author to write a personal narrative focusing on a significant experience, or set of experiences, concerning sexual orientation issues in their professional lives. We told them they could draw material from their professional or personal lives, past or present, but to focus their narratives in ways that directly relate to the discourse on sexual orientation within the profession. We asked them to focus on simply narrating their experiences and sharing how they reacted and made sense of such experiences. We also asked the authors to explicitly consider how their cultural contexts and multiple social and cultural identities affected their experiences and perspectives. Finally, we asked them to briefly comment about the implications of their experiences for the counseling professions.

The narrative chapters (Chs. 2–19) appear in alphabetical order by author last name. To allow the reader to be selective as to which narrative chapters to read at any given time, we have classified information from each chapter that indicates the authors’ race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, economic background, disability/ability status, and religious heritage, as well as their work roles and settings. This classification information appears in the introduction to the first section of the book, following this chapter. To facilitate individual and group exploration of the narratives, we also provide reflection questions in the introduction that can be used in professional education and training.

The second section of the book (Chs. 20 and 21), titled “Narrative Perspectives on Special Issues,” provides narrative perspectives on two issues that we believe need particular attention in order to fully understand the discourse on sexual orientation in the counseling professions. Chapter 20 responds to a limitation of the approach to narratives taken in the first section of the book. The narratives in the first section are by authors who

were willing and able to name themselves as LGB (or as a heterosexual ally) in the public forum of this book. In contrast, Chapter 20 attempts to illuminate the often-untold stories of counseling professionals for whom that type of public self-disclosure is too risky given their personal/professional contexts or for whom such public disclosure is incompatible with their cultural or personal constructions of sexual identity.

Chapter 21 provides narrative perspectives on a second often-unvoiced issue: the professional discord that can exist over the inclusion of sexual orientation alongside race in multicultural counseling. Approaching this sensitive issue with some depth, Chapter 21 includes discussion of the minimizing or obscuring of race and racism that can occur when sexual orientation is included in multicultural counseling, as well as the neglect of sexual orientation that can occur when multicultural counseling focuses primarily on race.

The purpose of the final section of the book, titled “Deconstructing, Envisioning, and Making Practice Suggestions,” is to employ the preceding narrative-oriented chapters in the first two sections of the book to explicitly deconstruct the professional discourse on sexual orientation, to envision a discourse of greater equity, and to make practical suggestions for counseling professionals in navigating sexual orientation and challenging the heterosexist dominant discourse. Chapter 22 focuses its analysis at the level of discourse and illuminates the current heterosexist discourse in the counseling professions, the current LGB-affirmative counterdiscourse, and how that affirmative counterdiscourse can be strengthened. Chapter 23 focuses on the implications of the narrative information in this book for academic and clinical training. Last, Chapter 24 focuses on how attention to affect, relationships, and power can help guide individual counseling professionals as they cope with and act to change the heterosexist discourse in the counseling professions.

## **Reflections on Storytelling Toward Equity**

Inspired and challenged by the many authors in this book who have written so powerfully about their personal stories, we wanted to conclude this introductory chapter by grounding the work of this book in a point of view that is based in our own perspectives and experiences as lesbian (Lark and Lance) or gay (Croteau) counseling professionals. For LGB people like ourselves, there is often a time in our lives when we internalize the heterosexist dominant discourse and live in shame, even self-hatred, about our sexuality and capacity to love. This has certainly been true in one form or another for all three of us who authored this chapter. The painful isolation and desperate emptiness of that experience are difficult to describe to those whose sexual orientations are privileged rather than stigmatized. Paul Monette (1992) spoke eloquently about this painful time and at one point

described it as a time in his life in which “I was the only man I knew who had no story at all” (p. 1).

The history of the oppression of LGB people in the larger society is intimately tied to enforced silence, rendering LGB people both psychologically and socially “story-less.” The counseling professions have shared in that history of enforced silence. The silence in the larger society is beginning to be broken, and the silence in the counseling professions has certainly been broken in the last decade. Those of us who are LGB-affirmative counseling professionals of any sexual orientation are no longer without voice or story in professional circles. Yet our stories of navigating sexual orientation as counseling professionals have neither been told nor heard in any systematic or extensive way. Our stories have certainly never been explored for the key they can provide to building a professional counseling community that is truly committed to sexual orientation equity.

We conclude this introduction by returning to the notions contained in the Monette and Douce quotations that began this chapter. Speaking on behalf of the more than 30 counseling professionals who have contributed to this book, we declare: We are here. Our stories will now be told! In the telling, we hope to leave a map that can empower and guide counseling professionals toward actions that will move LGB-affirmative practice, training, and scholarship from the margins to the center of what it means to be a counseling professional.

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