



CSA prevention and moral panic

Jeremy Malcolm
December 10, 2020



About Prostasia

- Formed in 2018 as a response to FOSTA
- Holistic, multidisciplinary and multistakeholder
- Has zero tolerance for child sexual abuse
- But we don't believe it's necessary to abandon our core values to protect children
- Demands child protection measures be fair, effective, and human rights compliant
- Has a positive agenda for child protection



Outline

In this presentation I will attempt to:

- Define moral panic
- Explain how it interferes with prevention
- Show why it is hard to counter with evidence
- Explain how a prevention framework can change the conversation
- Debunk common “fear-based” responses



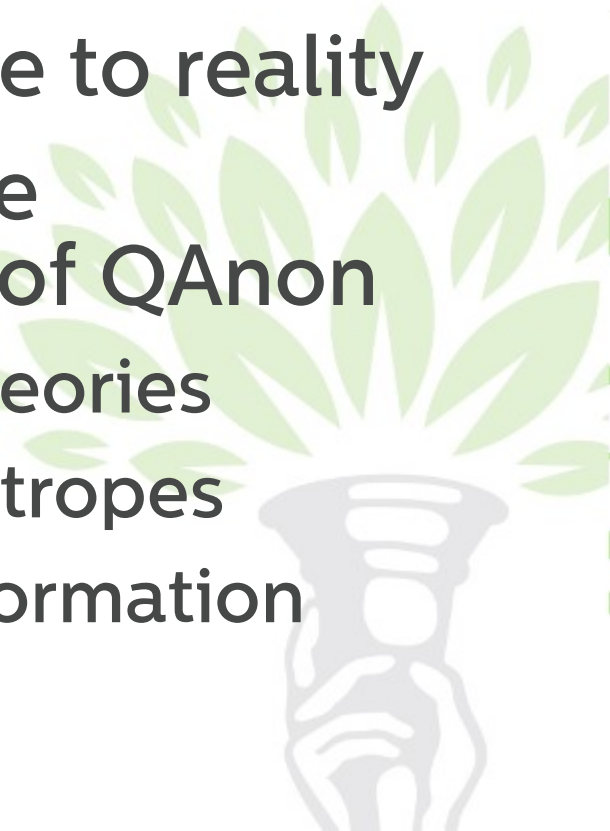
What is moral panic?

- Moral panic is an overblown fear about a threat to society that is used to justify state intervention that is not objectively justified
- Simplistically assigns blame to stigmatized, sociopolitically unpopular “folk devils”
- Actors who benefit from moral panic include:
 - Single-interest pressure groups
 - The mass media
 - Police and intelligence communities
 - Fascists



Child sexual abuse moral panic

- The folk devils most often invoked are the “pedophile” and the “child sex trafficker”
- Moral entrepreneurs extend these to include other marginalized and stigmatized groups
- They bear almost no resemblance to reality
- Elements of this moral panic have contributed to the development of QAnon
 - Satanic sexual abuse conspiracy theories
 - Racist and anti-semitic pedophilia tropes
 - Whorephobic sex trafficking misinformation



Moral panic is based on lies

- Understanding how abuse happens matters



95% of sexual offenses are committed by someone with no criminal history



77% of CSA is committed in a residence



90% of CSA is perpetrated by someone the child knows and trusts



73% of CSA is committed by those who are primarily attracted to adults



35% of CSA is committed by juveniles

- Nobody is condemned to become an abuser
- Prevention works!



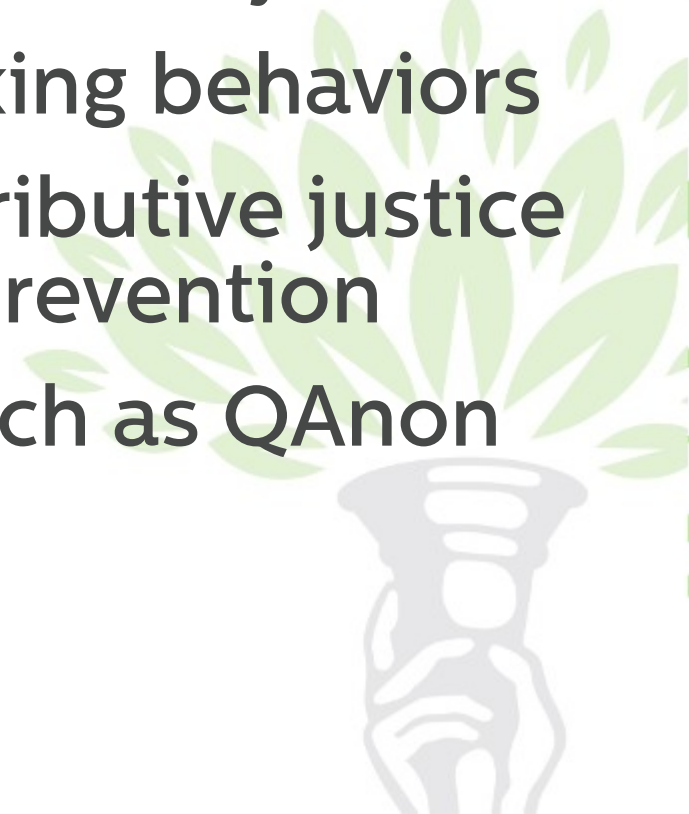
But responding to it is hard!

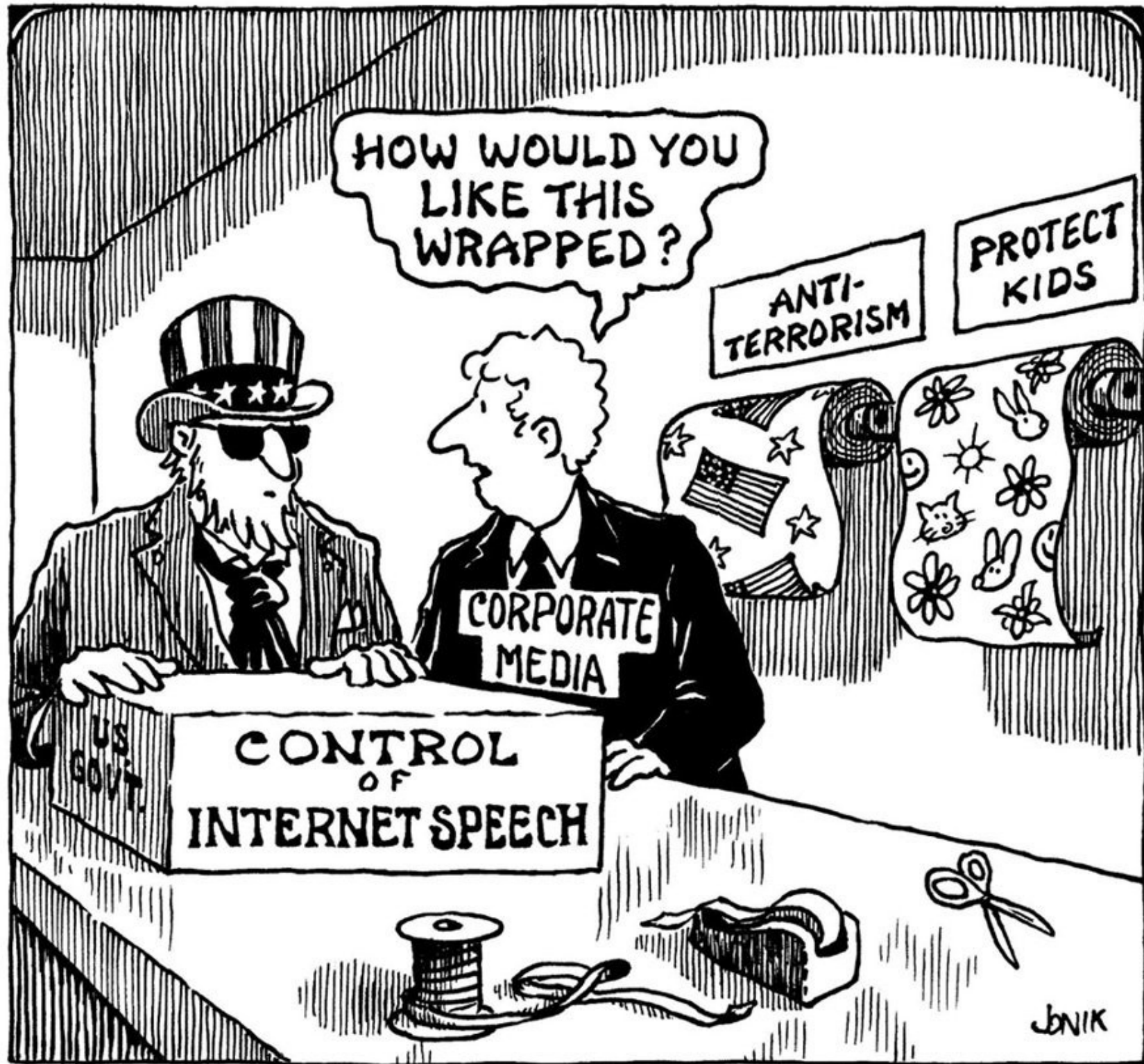
- Research reveals people who think of policy choices as issues of “moral conviction”:
 - Are more rigid in their thinking (insisting that their supported policies are *objectively correct*)
 - Are more likely to regard any ends (eg. vigilantism) as justified to secure policy ends
 - Find it more difficult to have conversations with or to compromise with people who disagree
 - Will not listen to scientific experts and are likely to assume that they are “corrupt” or “complicit”



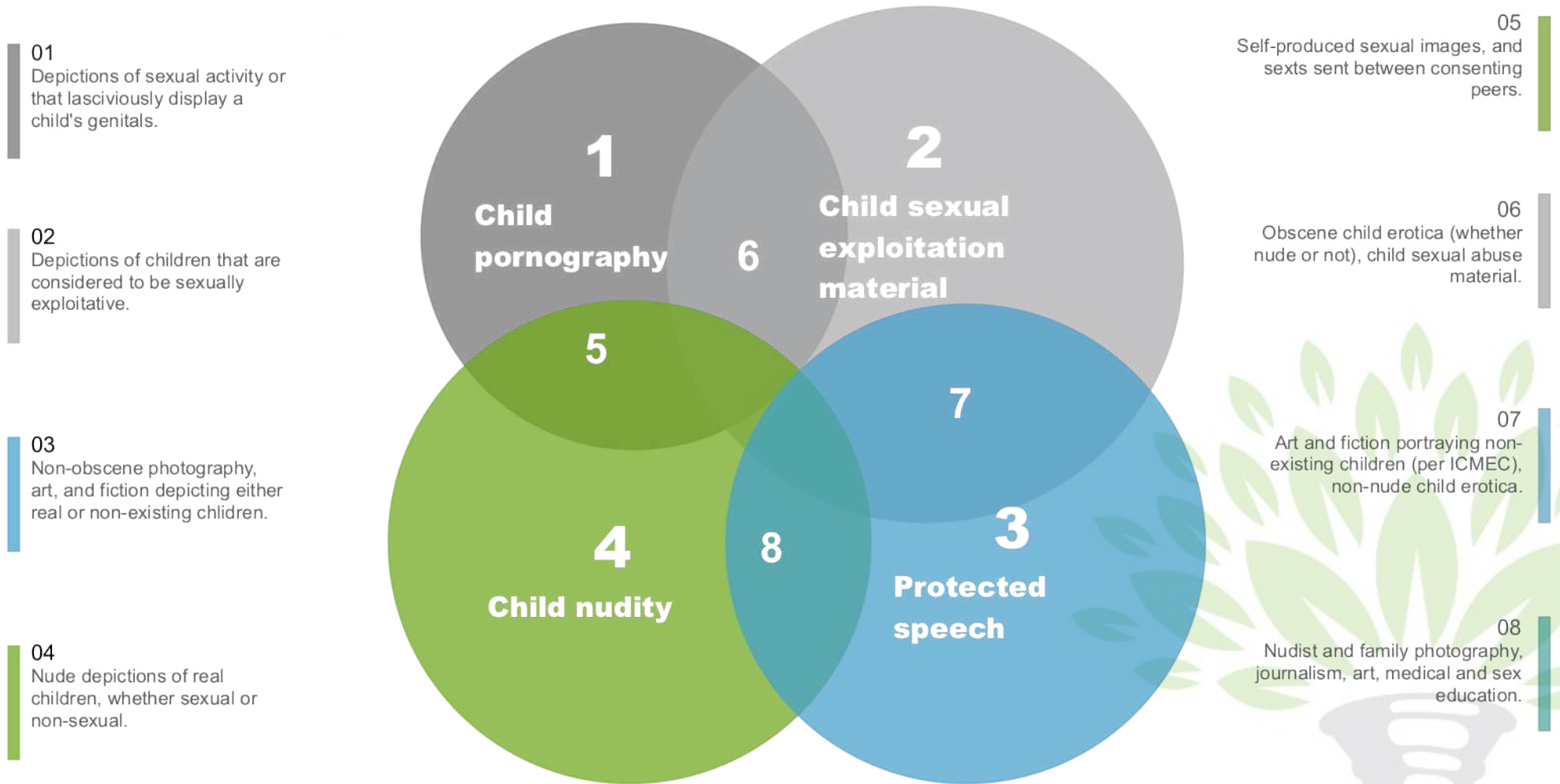
Why is moral panic a problem?

- It creates stigma that harms innocent people
 - CSA survivors, young people, sex workers, LGBTQ+ people, sex educators, the consensual kink/BDSM community, artists and fans, Internet users, families of perpetrators, and many others
- It acts as a barrier to help-seeking behaviors
- It leads us to over-invest in retributive justice versus restorative justice and prevention
- It feeds illiberal hate groups such as QAnon





Example: CSEM blocking



Exaggeration of image abuse

10%	The proportion of images reported by NCMEC to foreign police that are actually found to be illegal
0.5%	The proportion of child abuse images located by the Internet Watch Foundation on social media websites
0.3%	Child sexual exploitation violations as a proportion of all policy violations reported to Twitter in 2019
7-8%	Internet users who have ever seen any child sexual abuse images online (Sweden and Denmark 2018)

Over-blocking hurts people

- Cartoons reported as child abuse led to the arrest of a 17 year old artist in Costa Rica
- Russian trans woman imprisoned in a men's prison
- INHOPE refused to change their policies



NATIONAL
COALITION
AGAINST
CENSORSHIP



Denton Howard
Executive Director
INHOPE
Bos en Lommerplein 270-300
1055 RW Amsterdam, NL

January 20, 2020

Dear Mr Howard,

INHOPE members reporting artwork as child sexual abuse

As the international association of Internet reporting hotlines, INHOPE and its members are charged with a vital responsibility to help rid the world of child sexual abuse material (CSAM), and to ensure that those who produce and share it are reported to authorities. Because of the gravity of the content involved, most hotlines are either government-run or are granted statutory authority to act without the safeguards that the public would normally demand for a body exercising such sweeping censorship powers.

That's why we are very concerned that several of your members are misusing this important and trusted public charge to censor works of art, and to criminalize those who create and produce it. These actions disproportionately affect those from marginalized artistic and LGBT communities, and have resulted in the arrest and imprisonment of people who are innocent of any wrongdoing against children. One of these is a 17 year old Costa Rican girl, who was arrested for posting

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18 Bartol Street #995
San Francisco CA 94133
Tel: +1 (415) 650 2557

National Coalition Against Censorship
19 Fulton Street, Suite 407
New York NY 10038
Tel: +1 (212) 807-6222

Article 19
Free Word Centre
60 Farringdon Road
London EC1R 3GA UK
Tel: +44 20 7324 2500

Comic Book Legal Defense Fund
811 SW Naito Parkway, Suite
100
Portland, OR 97204

Failure of censorship responses

“ In the long term, we can't continue to just censor and arrest our way out of the problem of image-based child sexual exploitation. This requires a serious and long-term investment in prevention as well as co-operation and resources from government, the charitable sector and the industry itself. As a society we always tend to favor intervention once a crime has been committed (or the illness incurred) rather than in the less glamorous and longer process of prevention. But until we take this approach, we will always be fighting fires.

— Andrew Puddephatt, Chair, Internet Watch Foundation



Moral panic is hard to fight

- Human rights advocacy is ineffective against the fear-based rhetoric of moral panic
- Optics of pointing out the flaws in child online protection measures are perilous
- Groups who benefit from moral panic will try to smear you:
 - Trans-exclusionary radical feminists
 - Pro-censorship authoritarians
 - Family-values conservatives
 - Fascists



Combating moral panic

- A roadmap for responding to moral panic:
 - Connect on the shared goals
 - Use language mindfully, emphasizing actions not thoughts
 - Establish prevention as a public health approach
 - Explain why this is *proactive* rather than *reactive*
 - Boost credible, scientific experts
 - Include marginalized groups in advocacy
- If all else fails:
 - Unmask bad actors who manipulate public discourse on “pedophilia” to promote homophobia, transphobia, etc.
 - There’s a block button—use it!



About primary prevention

- **Primary prevention is about intervening to prevent offending before it occurs**
- **We don't know who will offend so it targets the entire population or populations of interest**
- **Education and support are key components**



Olympian and CSA survivor
Margaret Hoelzer, April 2020

How does it work?

- **Protective factors:**
 - Comprehensive sex education
 - Dismantle pro-offending cognitive distortions
 - Availability of peer and professional support
- **Risk factors:**
 - Family conflict
 - Parental mental issues or alcoholism
 - Harmful gender norms
- **Stigmatizing and shaming does not work**



Who is doing this work?



The
Global Prevention Project
PREVENTION IS THE INTERVENTION

b4uact



Absent from this list are the pro-censorship child safety groups which rely on moral panic

Conclusions

- Gently call out moral panic when you see it
 - Connect with the emotion behind their concern, how how evidence-based approaches can help
- **Child sexual abuse is preventable but we're not doing enough**
 - The lifetime U.S. social cost of the new cases of child sexual abuse each year is about \$9.3b
 - The total U.S. government grants for CSA prevention research this year is only \$2m
- The best response to moral-panic solutions is to support those with positive alternatives



Q&A

- Ask your questions now!
- Alternatively email info@prostasia.org
- Engage with us on Twitter (@ProstasiaInc)
- Or join our forum at <https://forum.prostasia.org> (also on Tor)
- Other resources of interest:
 - <https://prostasia.org/faq>
 - <https://prostasia.org/about>
 - <https://prostasia.org/media>





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