

Self-Esteem Levels Among Algerian Middle School Students: A Descriptive Study

مستوى تقدير الذات لدى تلاميذ مرحلة التعليم المتوسطة في الجزائر: دراسة وصفية

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Abstract:

This study investigated self-esteem levels among Algerian middle school students, a critical psychological construct influencing academic performance and overall well-being. Using a descriptive approach, 30 students aged 11-16 from schools in Sidi Moussa and Kolea completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Results revealed a striking asymmetry in score distribution, with 93.33% of participants exhibiting high self-esteem. The mean score of 34.77 (SD=4.55) indicates an overall high level of self-esteem among the sample. These findings align with research documenting increased self-esteem from adolescence to middle adulthood but contrast with literature noting declining self-esteem at adolescence onset. The study underscores the complexity of self-esteem development during this critical period and highlights the need for further investigation into cultural and contextual influences on self-esteem formation in Algerian adolescents.

Keywords: Self-esteem, Adolescent development, Algerian middle school students, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Educational psychology.

ملخص:

تناولت هذه الدراسة مستويات تقدير الذات لدى طلاب المرحلة المتوسطة في الجزائر باستخدام المنهج الوصفي، شارك 30 طالبا تتراوح أعمارهم بين 11 و16 عاما من مدارس سيدي موسى والقليلة في إكمال مقياس روزنبرغ لتقدير الذات. كشفت النتائج عن تباين ملحوظ في توزيع الدرجات، حيث أظهر 93.33% من المشاركين مستويات عالية من تقدير الذات. يشير متوسط الدرجات البالغ 34.77 (الانحراف المعياري = 4.55) إلى مستوى عال من تقدير الذات بين أفراد العينة. تتوافق هذه النتائج مع الأبحاث التي توثق زيادة تقدير الذات من مرحلة المراهقة إلى منتصف مرحلة البلوغ، لكنها تتعارض مع الدراسات التي تشير إلى انخفاض تقدير الذات عند بداية المراهقة. تؤكد الدراسة على تعقيد تطور تقدير الذات خلال هذه الفترة الحرجة وتسلط الضوء على الحاجة إلى مزيد من البحث في التأثيرات الثقافية والسياقية على تكوين تقدير الذات لدى المراهقين الجزائريين.

كلمات مفتاحية: تقدير الذات، نمو المراهقين، طلاب المرحلة المتوسطة الجزائريون، مقياس روزنبرغ لتقدير الذات، علم النفس التربوي

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Problem Statement

Contemporary societal and educational challenges have brought self-esteem to the forefront as a critical psychological construct, particularly in the context of middle school students. This fundamental aspect of personality significantly influences an individual's interactions within social and educational spheres, playing a pivotal role in shaping a child's morale and perceived performance in daily life (Kim, Kim, & Lee, 2021). The extensive research on self-esteem in psychology has revealed its variability across different domains, including sports and leisure activities (Henriksen, Ranøyen, Indredavik, & Stenseng, 2017).

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High levels of self-esteem correlate with enhanced well-being, improved social relationships, and increased resilience in facing challenges. In contrast, low self-esteem is associated with various negative outcomes, including emotional disturbances, substance abuse, and eating disorders. While generally stable, self-esteem can exhibit fluctuations in response to recent experiences of success or failure (Henriksen et al., 2017). Research by Gawas (2024) has further elucidated the importance of self-esteem by demonstrating a significant positive correlation with optimism.

The relevance of self-esteem is particularly pronounced for middle school students, who are navigating a period of rapid biological and psychological transformation. It exerts a direct influence on their academic performance, educational engagement, and overall health (Acosta-Gonzaga, 2023). Students with higher self-esteem typically demonstrate superior academic achievement, more positive school engagement, and enhanced coping mechanisms in challenging situations (Cuc & Cuc, 2019; Alves-Martins et al., 2002). Multiple studies have established significant correlations between self-esteem, motivation, and achievement (Topçu & Leana-Taşcılar, 2018; Pullmann & Allik, 2008).

Conversely, individuals with low self-esteem often experience feelings of inferiority regarding their abilities and perceive a diminished status in the eyes of others. This can lead to social withdrawal and impair their capacity to form social relationships and express emotions effectively (Tafarodi & Swann, 1995). However, it is important to note that this relationship is not direct but likely mediated by intervening factors. Research by Hamida and Dawka (2007) revealed a positive correlation between self-esteem and achievement motivation among adolescents, suggesting a bidirectional relationship where higher self-esteem corresponds with increased achievement motivation, and vice versa.

Self-esteem represents a core component in personality development and an individual's life success (Mruk, 2006). A comprehensive understanding of its role can inform educators in creating supportive environments that foster student achievement. This study aims to address a

fundamental research question: What is the level of self-esteem among middle school students?

we posit that middle school students possess a high level of self-esteem.

1.2. Objectives

1. Assess the self-esteem levels of middle school students using a validated measurement instrument.
2. Enhance the theoretical framework in student psychology by providing evidence-based insights on self-esteem.
3. Emphasize the importance of in-depth self-esteem research among students to the broader scientific community.
4. Investigate the nature of self-esteem, including its developmental processes and influencing factors in middle school students.

1.3. Significance of the Study

This investigation aims to provide a nuanced understanding of self-esteem's pivotal role in children's personality formation and its implications for their present and future well-being. By concentrating on middle school students, we underscore the importance of youth as society's future cornerstone. Addressing psychological and social developmental challenges at this critical juncture is paramount, as unresolved issues may persist into adulthood, potentially compromising overall efficacy and life satisfaction.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1. Defining Self-esteem

Self-esteem is conceptualized as an individual's perception of their social competence and value, reflecting their capacity to navigate social interactions with ease. In the context of this research, self-esteem is operationalized through participants' scores on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, a validated instrument comprising 10 items that assess global self-worth via evaluation of both positive and negative self-perceptions.

The prominence of self-esteem in contemporary psychological research is evidenced by the voluminous literature dedicated to its examination, with over 35,000 publications exploring its antecedents, consequences, and correlates (Zeigler-Hill, 2013). This substantial scholarly attention is

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predicated on the hypothesized causal influence of self-esteem on various critical life outcomes.

The theoretical foundation of self-esteem can be traced to William James's seminal work in 1890, which posited that self-esteem manifests as positive self-regard resulting from an individual's consistent attainment or surpassing of salient life goals. James's initial conceptualization remains relevant in contemporary discourse, with current scholars generally defining self-esteem as the evaluative component of self-knowledge, reflecting individuals' positive self-regard and perceived competence (Malanchuk & Eccles, 2006).

Self-esteem encompasses a continuum of self-evaluations, ranging from high self-esteem, characterized by distinctly positive self-perception, to low self-esteem, manifested as ambiguous or negative self-appraisals (Wright, 2001). It is imperative to note that self-esteem is not inherently accurate or inaccurate; rather, it may align with or diverge from an individual's objective attributes and accomplishments.

Conceptualized as a relatively stable trait, self-esteem incorporates both motivational and cognitive elements (Kernis, 2003). This stability, however, does not preclude individuals from actively endeavoring to maintain or enhance their sense of self-worth. Indeed, the pursuit of high self-esteem is a pervasive psychological phenomenon, with individuals employing diverse strategies to bolster their self-regard.

Components of Self-Esteem

Researchers have proposed several frameworks to elucidate the components of self-esteem. The traditional binary model posits that self-esteem comprises self-confidence (or self-competence) and self-liking (Cast & Burke, 2002; Baumeister, Tice, & Hutton, 1989; Crocker & Park, 2004). Expanding on this foundation, Stets and Burke (2014) advanced a tripartite model, encompassing worth-based, efficacy-based, and authenticity-based esteem. These dimensions are linked to the verification of social, role, and personal identities, respectively, offering a more nuanced understanding of self-esteem's structure.

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An alternative perspective, proposed by Fatiha (2014), identifies three core components of self-esteem: self-love, self-regard, and self-confidence. Self-love, considered the primary pillar, is an unconditional element that enables individuals to confront life's challenges despite awareness of personal limitations. Self-regard involves an individual's assessment of their traits and abilities, while self-confidence pertains to one's belief in their capacity to perform adequately in significant situations.

Ranjit and W. (2005) present a similar binary model, focusing on self-efficacy and self-worth. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to adapt to and manage fundamental life challenges, while self-worth relates to an individual's unconditional self-acceptance and belief in their inherent value and right to happiness.

It is crucial to note that self-esteem represents the emotional and evaluative component of self-knowledge, reflecting how individuals feel about themselves and their perceived competence (Lopez & Snyder, n.d.). This emotional aspect distinguishes self-esteem from the more cognitively-oriented self-concept, highlighting the complex interplay between cognitive self-perceptions and emotional self-evaluations in shaping an individual's overall self-regard.

while self-concept and self-esteem are closely related, they represent distinct aspects of an individual's self-perception. Self-concept provides the cognitive framework of self-view, while self-esteem adds the emotional and evaluative layer to these perceptions. Understanding this distinction is crucial, especially when studying middle school students, as it allows for a more nuanced approach to supporting their psychological development and overall well-being.

Sources of Self-Esteem

self-esteem emerges as a complex construct with various proposed components and sources. While early socialization plays a crucial role in its development, ongoing experiences and self-perceptions continue to shape an individual's self-esteem throughout their lifetime. Understanding these components and sources can provide valuable insights for fostering positive self-esteem in individuals and communities.

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The development of self-esteem is predominantly attributed to socialization processes. During early childhood, individuals begin to perceive themselves through the perspectives of significant others, such as parents, siblings, teachers, and peers, forming the foundation of their self-esteem (Fatiha, 2014).

Bandura's model expands this understanding by proposing additional sources of self-esteem. These include an individual's perception of the consequences of their behavior, social influence, observation of others' behavior, and information derived from physical conditions. This framework broadens our comprehension of self-esteem formation beyond early socialization to encompass ongoing experiences and self-perceptions throughout an individual's lifespan (Nabavi, 2012).

Distinguishing Self-Esteem from Self-Concept

Although intimately connected to self-esteem, self-concept constitutes a distinct psychological construct. Self-concept encompasses an individual's self-perception and understanding, including their beliefs, attitudes, values, and traits. This crucial psychological aspect exerts influence over various behavioral dimensions and self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1989).

The term "self-concept" has a rich history in psychological discourse, employed by early researchers and theorists such as Allport, James, and Combs. These scholars used the term to denote an individual's self-experience and the cognitive organization of their meanings and perceptions (OpenStax, n.d.). Self-concept formation occurs through the interplay of multiple environmental variables, each exerting influence on the others. Any enhancement in these formative variables contributes to the overall development of self-concept (Kahtan, 2004).

In contrast, self-esteem refers to the comprehensive self-evaluation of personal worth and is considered a fundamental human need. Patel posits that self-esteem significantly impacts mental health and serves as a motivating factor in adolescents' pursuit and practice of self-actualization. Elevated self-esteem among adolescents propels their quest for psychological well-being, fosters improved social relationships, promotes higher academic

achievement, and mitigates the occurrence of emotional problems (Özer & Korkman, 2022).

While often used interchangeably, self-concept and self-esteem are distinct psychological constructs that warrant clear differentiation. Self-concept encompasses the comprehensive cognitive beliefs individuals hold about themselves, including their values and perceived attributes. For instance, an individual might perceive themselves as a proficient writer. In contrast, self-esteem represents the emotional response and evaluative judgments associated with these self-perceptions, such as the pride one derives from their writing abilities (Cherry, 2022).

Self-esteem specifically refers to an individual's confidence in their intrinsic value as a human being. Generally considered a positive life factor, it correlates with achievement, satisfactory relationships, and overall life satisfaction. High self-esteem is characterized by positive self-regard, a sense of self-worth, and perceived positive regard from others. Conversely, low self-esteem involves negative self-evaluations, feelings of inadequacy, and a perceived lack of worth relative to others (Jhangiani & Tarry, 2022).

Implications and Developmental Perspectives

The absence of healthy self-regard can precipitate various negative outcomes, including depression, unfulfilled potential, and tolerance of abusive situations (Psychology Today Staff, n.d.). From a developmental standpoint, both self-concept and self-esteem are of particular interest due to their potential centrality in an individual's general adjustment, quality of life, and future planning (Alsaker & Kroger, 2020).

Multiple factors influence the formation and maintenance of self-esteem, including perceived performance across various domains, physical appearance, and the quality of interpersonal relationships (Jhangiani & Tarry, 2022). This multifaceted nature of self-esteem is particularly salient for middle school students navigating significant physical, cognitive, and social changes.

3. Measuring Self-Esteem

Self-esteem, a fundamental construct in psychological research, has been the focus of extensive study. To quantify this complex psychological attribute, researchers and practitioners have developed various assessment

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instruments. This article presents an overview of several widely utilized self-esteem measurement tools.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale is a prominent 10-item measure designed to evaluate an individual's sense of personal worth and self-respect. The scale comprises five positively worded items and five negatively worded items, a structure intended to mitigate acquiescence bias (the tendency to agree with statements regardless of content). Positive items are scored on a scale of 1 to 4, while negative items are reverse-scored from 4 to 1. The scale's reliability has been demonstrated through Cronbach's alpha, yielding a high reliability coefficient of 0.871 (Monteiro et al., 2022).

Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI)

The Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI) is a self-report questionnaire that assesses individuals' self-attitudes across various domains, including family, peers, school, and general social activities. The CSEI offers two primary versions:

1. The School Form (for ages 8 to 15)
2. The Adult Form (for ages 16 and above)

A Short Form is also available. The inventory consists of 50 items and provides an overall score along with subscores for different aspects of self-esteem: general self, social self-peers, home-parents, and school-academic. Notably, the CSEI incorporates a lie scale to identify defensive responses, enhancing the validity of the results (Potard, 2017).

Gordon Self-Esteem Scale

The Gordon Self-Esteem Scale adopts a multidimensional approach to self-esteem measurement. It encompasses four subscales:

- Ascendancy.
- Robustness.
- Emotional stability.
- Anxiety.

This scale enables a more nuanced assessment of self-esteem across distinct psychological domains.

Gabriel Self-Esteem Scale

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The Gabriel Self-Esteem Scale is a comprehensive measurement tool comprising 142 items. These items evaluate a broad spectrum of self-esteem aspects:

- Physical self-esteem.
- Moral self-esteem.
- Overall individual self-confidence.
- Social self-esteem.
- Intellectual self-esteem.
- Emotional self-esteem.

The scale incorporates both positive and negative statements to provide a balanced assessment (Fatiha, 2014).

In conclusion, these diverse measurement tools reflect the multifaceted nature of self-esteem and the ongoing efforts to capture its complexity. Each scale offers unique insights into different aspects of self-esteem, allowing researchers and practitioners to select the most appropriate instrument for their specific assessment needs.

4. Methodology

study Design

The study was conducted during the 2023-2024 academic year and consisted of a two-stage pilot process. In the initial stage, a theoretical evaluation of existing self-esteem literature was performed to guide the selection of an appropriate assessment tool. The second stage involved field visits to middle schools, allowing for direct interaction with potential participants. This approach enabled researchers to verify the comprehensibility of scale items and measure response times.

A descriptive approach was adopted, which involves the systematic analysis and interpretation of a phenomenon or problem without researcher intervention. This methodology was chosen because it aligns with the study's variables and objectives, allowing for objective data interpretation that reflects the actual characteristics of the phenomenon (SAGE Publications, Inc., 2016).

Participants

A purposive sample of 30 middle school students (age range: 11-16 years) was recruited from schools in Sidi Moussa (Algiers) and Kolea

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(Tipaza), Algeria. The sample included students from all four years of middle school education, with the extended age range accounting for potential grade repetition.

Instruments

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), developed by Morris Rosenberg in 1965, served as the primary assessment instrument. This widely-utilized 10-item scale evaluates global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative self-perceptions. The RSES comprises five positively worded items and five negatively worded items, rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (4 points) to strongly disagree (1 point). Negative items are reverse-scored to maintain consistency.

Scoring involves summing all ten items, with possible totals ranging from 10 to 40. Higher scores indicate elevated levels of self-esteem, with 40 representing maximum self-esteem and 20 serving as the midpoint. This scoring method facilitates a nuanced assessment of individual self-esteem levels (Rajlic & Kwon, 2018).

The RSES was selected for this study due to its established reliability and validity in measuring self-esteem across diverse populations.

Scale Reliability

The Self-Esteem Scale demonstrated sufficient reliability for application within the Algerian context. Reliability assessment employed the test-retest method, utilizing a random sample of 33 third-year middle school students (comprising both genders) from Colonel Bouguerra Middle School in Bir Khadem. The interval between initial and subsequent administrations was two weeks. Analysis yielded a Pearson correlation coefficient (r) of 0.70, significant at the 0.01 level, indicating robust reliability of the scale.

Scale Validity

Prior research has substantiated the consistency and predictive validity of the Self-Esteem Scale in Arab and Algerian contexts when juxtaposed with alternative self-esteem measures (Mokaddem, 2003). This established validity enhances confidence in the scale's applicability to the current study population.

Data Analysis

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Data analysis aimed to ascertain self-esteem levels among the study sample. We utilized IBM SPSS Statistics version 22 for statistical computations. The analytical process encompassed calculations of means, standard deviations, and percentages, providing a comprehensive overview of self-esteem distribution within the sample.

5. Results

Table 1. Students' scores on the Self-Esteem Scale

Sample Size	Low Scores	Percentage	High Scores	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
30	20	6.66%	40	93.33%	34.76	4.54

An analysis of the self-esteem score distribution within the study sample reveals a pronounced asymmetry. The vast majority of participants (93.33%) exhibited high self-esteem scores, while only a small fraction (6.66%) fell into the low-score category. This stark contrast in score allocation raises concerns regarding the sample's representativeness and prompts inquiry into the factors contributing to such a concentrated distribution in the upper echelons of the scale.

The calculated mean score of 34.7667 (SD = 4.54619) indicates an overall high level of self-esteem among the study participants. However, the marked disparity between high and low scorers necessitates further examination. Subsequent research should investigate potential influencing factors, including but not limited to sampling methodologies, classification criteria, and underlying population dynamics, to elucidate this observed distribution pattern.

These findings underscore the importance of cautious interpretation and suggest the potential need for refinement of either the measurement scale or sampling procedures in future studies within this population. The extreme skew in score distribution may have implications for the generalizability of the results and the validity of the self-esteem assessment tool within this specific context.

6. Discussion

This study's hypothesis posited that middle school students would demonstrate high levels of self-esteem. The statistical analysis of participant responses corroborated this hypothesis, with an overwhelming majority

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(93.33%) scoring in the high range on the self-esteem scale. This finding aligns with Orth and Robins' (2014) research, which documented a general increase in self-esteem from adolescence to middle adulthood.

However, it is crucial to contextualize these results within the broader literature on self-esteem development. Zeigler-Hill (2013) noted that while self-esteem is typically high during childhood, it often experiences a sharp decline at the onset of adolescence. The apparent discrepancy between this trend and our findings may be attributed to the specific developmental stage of middle school students, who occupy a transitional phase between childhood and early adolescence.

Several factors may contribute to the high self-esteem observed in our sample. Orth and Robins (2022) identified supportive family environments and positive social interactions as key elements in fostering self-esteem among children and adolescents. In the context of our study, the elevated self-esteem scores may reflect strong parental support and encouragement characteristic of this developmental stage, where children often receive significant material and emotional support from their parents.

This interpretation is bolstered by research such as Dewi and Sumarni's (2023) study, which demonstrated a positive correlation between parental care styles and children's self-confidence. Conversely, Rodriguez (2003) found that harsh physical treatment by parents was associated with psychological disorders, including low self-esteem. Similarly, Adou's (2012) study on domestic violence and mental health in Algerian adolescents concluded that parental practices characterized by leniency and acceptance do not lead to psychological disorders, consistent with high self-esteem.

It is important to acknowledge that social desirability bias may have influenced our results, as it is generally more socially acceptable to present oneself as having high rather than low self-esteem (Blascovich et al., 1991). Additionally, high self-esteem in this age group may be attributed to a positive perception of competence and effectiveness. As adolescents acquire new social standards and roles through peer interactions, they build broader social relationships, potentially enhancing their self-esteem (Ishak et al., 2007). This perspective is supported by studies such as Vogel et al. (2014),

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which emphasize the role of social comparisons and accepted social standards in shaping self-esteem.

The high self-esteem observed in our sample may also reflect the developmental characteristics of adolescence. This period is marked by the onset of independence and identity formation, processes that every child undergoes to achieve autonomy and a sense of self. During adolescence, individuals experience significant physical and emotional growth, often testing their abilities and skills independently. This push for autonomy, even when it conflicts with parental desires or societal expectations, may contribute to increased self-esteem (Jakobsen & Fischer, 2023).

These findings can be interpreted through the lens of Field Theory and Social Identity Theory. Field Theory posits that self-esteem is influenced by an individual's social environment and interactions. Social Identity Theory suggests that self-esteem and social identity are deeply interconnected and shaped by the social contexts and group memberships that individuals navigate throughout their lives (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). Together, these theories provide a framework for understanding the complex interplay between individual development, social context, and self-esteem in adolescence.

While our findings of high self-esteem among middle school students align with some existing literature, they also underscore the complexity of self-esteem development during adolescence. Future research should explore the specific mechanisms through which family dynamics, social interactions, and developmental processes contribute to self-esteem in this age group. Additionally, potential cultural factors that may influence these patterns in the Algerian context warrant further investigation.

7. Conclusion:

This research sought to examine self-esteem levels among middle school students. The findings revealed a prevalence of high self-esteem within this demographic. Our investigation integrated insights from relevant studies and expert perspectives on the topic.

Self-esteem emerges as a crucial factor in attaining psychological, educational, and pedagogical equilibrium for middle school students and individuals broadly. It represents a multifaceted construct encompassing

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various components, including self-confidence, self-deprecation, and dimensions based on worth, efficacy, and authenticity. The significance of self-esteem extends to mental health, occupational performance, and social interactions.

Elucidating the distinctions between optimal and high self-esteem, as well as comprehending its developmental trajectory and stability across the lifespan, can yield valuable insights for both theoretical research and practical applications. Assessment tools such as the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and the Self-Liking/Self-Competence Scale play a vital role in accurately evaluating these dimensions.

Multiple factors contribute to the development of self-esteem, including familial environment, educational experiences, and social support networks available to students. Further investigation into these influencing factors could provide additional insights into nurturing healthy self-esteem among middle school students.

The complex nature of self-esteem and its far-reaching implications underscore the importance of continued research in this field. Future studies should aim to deepen our understanding of the specific mechanisms through which various environmental and personal factors shape self-esteem during this critical developmental period. Additionally, exploring potential cultural variations in self-esteem development could offer valuable perspectives on this psychological construct's universality and specificity.

In conclusion, while this study provides important insights into the self-esteem levels of middle school students, it also highlights the need for ongoing research to fully understand the intricacies of self-esteem development and its impact on various aspects of life. Such knowledge could inform educational practices, mental health interventions, and parenting strategies aimed at fostering healthy self-esteem in adolescents.

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