

**“The Different Forms of Power Represented in a Marvel Cinematic Universe Character:
Wanda Maximoff”**

An Honors Thesis

by

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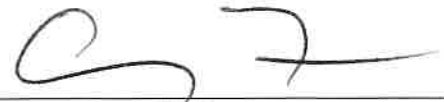
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Abstract

The Marvel Cinematic Universe has become increasingly popular over these past few years. At this point these heroes are shown doing more than just fighting villains and catching bad guys, you are able to see them as normal humans with everyday problems. Wanda Maximoff (Scarlet Witch), who I will be analyzing, has a lot of grief and trauma from losing her parents, brother, partner, and her kids. All those things influence how she performs as a hero and how people view her. These superheroes have power, whether that be their superpowers, mental strength, or their status alongside their teammates. I have found research papers discussing the different forms of power and used them to analyze Wanda. Through all of the movies and tv shows that she has been a part of I gathered evidence on how she uses these powers and how it shapes her character.

Keywords: MCU, Wanda Maximoff, power: social, mental, and physical, loss, grief, trauma, social hierarchy, relationships

Introduction

The Marvel Cinematic Universe is a massive franchise, with an extensive list of movies and television shows. The diverse range of characters leave room for everyone to find a favorite, these movies do not cater to just young boys obsessed with comic books like they used to (Meluso). These superheroes no longer just focus on fighting and defeating their foes, they suffer with the same things that normal people do, such as mental health issues and loss of loved ones.

The following document goes into detail about three of the different types of power: social, mental, and physical. A timeline of the influential events that occurred in Wanda's life and how her mental and physical power is shown throughout each. The movies and the tv show that will be discussed are *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), *Captain America: Civil War* (2016), *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018), *Avengers: Endgame* (2019), and *Wandavision* (2021). These events include the loss of her parents, brother, partner, and kids, her joining Hydra, then Ultron, and finally the Avengers, and her creating the hex. The next thing that will be discussed is her relationships with the other Avengers from a hierarchical standpoint. It will get into the different dynamics that are present between each one of them. To conclude the analysis on Wanda Maximoff, all of the information that has been gathered will be put together to show how they make Wanda the person she is today.

Marvel Background

The Marvel Cinematic Universe was created to bring the characters from the Marvel Comics to life on the big screen. Wanda and Pietro Maximoff are twins from Sokovia, a fictional Eastern Europe country. Wanda possesses powers as a witch, when she gains more power from experimentation and is eventually named the Scarlet Witch. Pietro has the ability to move at superhuman speeds and is named Quicksilver. Tony Stark is a billionaire, the CEO of Stark Industries (a company his father had started), and one of the original six Avengers as Iron Man. Steve Rogers was made Captain America in World War II when he was given the super soldier serum. While fighting in the war, he became frozen in ice until he was thawed seventy years later and became another of the six original Avengers. Another of the first Avengers is Clint Barton who is a skilled marksman, which gave him his superhero name of Hawkeye. Clint has a wife and three kids, that the rest of the Avengers do not know about until *Age of Ultron*. Vision is an artificial intelligence synthezoid that was originally Tony's AI system called Jarvis. His body is comprised of vibranium, which is a fictional indestructible metal in the MCU, an infinity stone (mind stone), and Jarvis. The infinity stones are artifacts within the MCU that gives whoever wields them immense power. There are 6 total stones which are power, mind, soul, time, reality, and space.

The Avengers were first created as a S.H.I.E.L.D. initiative. S.H.I.E.L.D. stands for "Strategic Homeland Intervention, Enforcement and Logistics Division" and was formed as a counter-terrorism and law enforcement agency. They are eventually used to fight Hydra, a terrorist organization that focuses on world domination. A member of Hydra, Brock Rumlow, for many years had posed as a S.H.I.E.L.D. agent, until

S.H.I.E.L.D.'s collapse. Following the collapse, he continued to work with Hydra and fight the Avengers.

Power

Social Power

Where a person stands on a hierarchical scale represents how much power they hold in a given setting. This power is interpreted as unbalanced control of prized assets within social relationships (Gawronski). These social hierarchies are shown through someone's esteem, influence, and interactions with others (Redhead). All relationships have different dynamics and the ones that will be focused on in this analysis are the mentor, coach, father figure, equals, and the female character, in this case Wanda, being used to further the plot of her male counterparts. The female character is used to either create love or fear in the male character, which in turn affects his decision making and makes his storyline more interesting (Meluso). The specific relationships that will be critiqued are Tony Stark (Iron Man), Steve Rogers (Captain America, Cap for short), Clint Barton (Hawkeye), and Vision.

Mental Power

Mental power is mostly describing a person's decision-making skills and their overall mental strength. Someone can either make deontological decisions, which are based off set laws and rules, or utilitarian decisions where you focus on the greater good,

regardless of rules (Zheng). Cognitive load and time constraints can affect how you worry about the consequences of your actions (Zheng). Decisions are also subject to change following an adjustment of moral judgement from when the initial action was taken (Fleischmann). Someone with trauma will feel powerless, out of control, helpless, and overwhelmed (Maldonado). Experiencing traumatizing events can cause a person to seek control over other aspects of their life (Maldonado).

Physical Power

In this instance of analyzing Wanda, physical power refers to her superpowers. Wanda has a multitude of powers including matter manipulation, mind control, shields, red glow and blasts. It also includes her powers as a witch, which can also be considered mental due to her being able to use them subconsciously. Throughout her life her powers become immensely stronger, and she learns how to use and control them better.

Influential Events

Loss of Parents

The first influential event that occurred in Wanda's life was the death of her parents. She lived with her parents and twin brother Pietro in the country of Sokovia and at this time there was a war going on. One night while watching American sitcoms a missile was dropped on their building, killing her parents. Her and her brother went to hide when a second one landed right in front of them. Fast forwarding to *Wandavision*, it

is highlighted that this, the loss of her parents, is the first time Wanda uses her powers as a witch in order to prevent the bomb from going off and killing her and Pietro. She did all of this subconsciously, because she wasn't even aware she was the reason it didn't go off, they always just thought it was a dud. Across the side of the missile read "Stark Industries" which is the root of their hatred for Tony Stark. They were trapped in the rubble for two days and while there their tv surprisingly still worked so they watched *The Dick van Dyke show* as a distraction from everything that was going on. This and other sitcoms become a coping mechanism for Wanda to use throughout her life. When Wanda and Pietro grew up, they started to participate in Hydra protests against the Avengers and specifically Tony. This led them into the next major step of their lives.

Joining Hydra

Pietro and Wanda joined Hydra as volunteers because, at the time, that is what they believed to be the right thing. All they knew was that Tony was the one that killed their parents and destroyed their home and Hydra was fighting against him. During this time, they were under the lead of Baron Stucker. Part of being a volunteer was experimentation on the mind stone, which at the time was in Loki, The God of Mischief's, scepter. Unfortunately, all the other volunteers were killed due to the intensity of the stone. The reason the twins survived was because they already had powers that protected them from it, with Wanda was specifically the powers she possesses as a witch. The experimenting enhanced the powers she already had and also gave her new superpowers. These are the ones we more commonly see with her such as matter manipulation, mind control, shields, red glow and blasts. While at Hydra she is

kept locked in a cell and with nothing to do and no one to keep her company she would watch *The Brady Bunch*, which adds to the coping mechanism.

As a part of Hydra, Wanda gets used as a weapon against the Avengers. This will become a pattern for her, as she continuously is treated as a means for destruction rather than a human being. In *Age of Ultron* when Captain America (Cap) and the rest of the team attack the Hydra base, Strucker sends the twins in after them. She starts by controlling the minds of a few of them, making them see their worst fears come to life. Eventually Cap and Strucker face off and without hesitation Wanda blasts Cap away in order to protect her leader. This shows that she is loyal to whatever side she is on, it doesn't matter if they are good or evil, as long as she believes that whatever they are doing is right, she will fight for them.

Teaming up with Ultron

Ultron, an artificial intelligence robot created by Tony, meets with the twin to explain his plan to eliminate the Avengers. Their only goal at this point is to defeat Tony, so they decide to join him. Again, she gets used as a weapon to not only attack the Avengers, but to also protect Ultron. When he is first showing Wanda and Pietro what he's working on, he tells her that she will be the one to get inside the Avengers' heads and have them turn against each other (*Age of Ultron*, 38:05). In one specific scene that shows Wanda being a protector, Ultron is buying vibranium from a black-market dealer and when he gets suspicious about what is going on one of his henchmen grabs at his gun, but before anything can happen, she uses her power to prevent him from grasping it

(Age of Ultron, 45:30). This is another example of her proving her loyalty to the ones she works with.

Using the vibranium and the mind stone that he took Ultron starts building himself a better body (which will later become Vision). While it is still in the process of being built Wanda is able to see into its “mind” and it reveals Ultron’s true intentions of world destruction. Her and Pietro got out of there as soon as possible once realizing this. The Avengers then start fighting Ultron to stop him and the twins come to help them because even though they do not see eye to eye, they know that what Ultron is planning to is wrong and want to stop him.

Becoming an Avenger

Ultron starts to carry out his plan of world destruction by lifting a piece of Sokovia into the atmosphere and then letting it fall back to earth, creating a massive explosion that would kill all life on the planet. The Avengers come to stop him, and the twins join them and help by evacuating the people of Sokovia. Pietro would run them out and Wanda controlled their minds into thinking on their own that they needed to leave. During this she gains the trust of the team, especially Clint, and even as the battle continues, she stays in the center of the city to stop Ultron’s robots from carrying out Ultron’s plan. She knows that she can fight them off, allowing the others to prioritize getting the civilians to safety.

Loss of Brother

In *Age of Ultron* while Wanda is alone in the center of the city fighting Ultron's army, Pietro is with Clint helping the citizens. At this point, Ultron is getting very angry that he has not succeeded in carrying out his plan and starts shooting at the Avengers. Clint and a little boy are in the line of fire and to save them Pietro runs them to safety, but unfortunately got hit because of it. Wanda could immediately sense that her brother was gone, and she dropped to her knees in agony. As she did there was an explosion of power coming from her, which disintegrated all of the robots in the area. This happens when she has uncontrollable emotions, so her powers just take over for her. She ends up blaming herself for what happened because she wasn't there with him to protect him. It is shown in *Wandavision* that following his death she would watch *Malcom in the Middle* as her way of coping with what happened. For all those years Pietro was the only person she had after the loss of their parents, so the grief hit her that much harder because they were so close.

Becoming an Avenger cont.

Throughout her time with the team, she slowly gains trust in herself and her abilities. She starts out really struggling and in anguish when she uses her power, and then eventually it becomes more natural for her. She learns to control her power and she gets comfortable using them. In the beginning of *Captain America: Civil War*, Wanda is on a mission in Lagos, Nigeria with Cap, Nat, and Sam. They are trying to stop a biochemical weapon from being stolen and Wanda is working well with the others, and it

shows that she's been building relationships with them. In a building tear gas gets released, so Wanda uses her powers to gather the smoke, pull it out of the building, and release it high into the atmosphere where it won't affect anyone. Towards the end of the fight, Cap is fighting with Rumlow, one of the leaders of Hydra, and he detonates a bomb. Just in time Wanda condenses it to save Cap and the civilians nearby and she starts to pull it into the air. It is very evident that she is struggling and before she is able to get it out of harm's way, the bomb goes off next to a nearby building. The explosion had killed Wakandans that were there on a humanitarian mission and Wanda is obviously devastated by this.

The Sokovia accords were then created as a way to keep the Avengers in check. They would have to get government approval to go on a mission and they would have limited freedom on the things that they do. Even as the Secretary of State is talking about the document, it is clear who is on the side of signing it, and who isn't. Wanda, Cap, Nat, and Clint are clearly against it because they all look at the bigger picture, meaning it is okay if a few lives get lost as long as they are able to save a greater number of people. They are focusing on utilitarian decision-making, because they are more concerned with saving the most amount of people and they are not bothering with following the rules. Tony specifically is all for signing the accords because he would rather save his conscience and save himself from guilt and he feels that this is the best way to do it. While part of the team was in Lagos trying to do good, Tony was giving speeches and handing out money.

Wanda has been shown in a bad light. The Sokovia accords were not brought up immediately following the incident in Sokovia, they waited until after what had happened

in Lagos. Even the government is afraid of Wanda and her abilities, so they try to contain her and because Tony is afraid of her, he tries to keep her locked in the Avengers compound. When the Secretary of State was showing pictures and videos of all of the damage that had occurred, he was just trying to trigger Wanda and make her emotional.

The Hex

After defeating Thanos in *Endgame* Wanda visits Vision's body absolutely devastated because she can no longer feel his presence. She goes to visit the foundation of the house that her and Vision were to share, and she explodes with grief subconsciously mind controlling an entire town and creating a false reality. What she created was named "The Hex" and it truly shows how powerful Wanda is. She controlled not only the minds of people miles away from her, but she was able to change the clothes that they wore, how they acted, and the environment. She did all of this without even having to think about it. This false reality was shown in the beginning of *Wandavision* with a spinoff of a 1950's sitcom and with each episode it runs through the decades recreating a different show. These sitcoms have always been a comfort for her, so it only makes sense for her to recreate them. In each episode there are commercials, and they represent each of the influential events Wanda has gone through throughout her life. The first one shows a Stark Industries brand toaster with a blinking red light similar to the one on the missile that landed in front of her and Pietro when they were kids.

In the show, Wanda and Vision were married and then end up having twin boys, Billy and Tommy. This is what she had been dreaming about and it is very evident that

she is at her happiest when she's with them. However, when Agatha takes the boys and then makes her relive all of her past traumas, she seems broken down. Even when she begins to realize what she's done by creating the hex, she tries to maintain this world she has created for herself because she doesn't want to lose her family. She feels helpless in this situation, she has already experienced so much loss and tragedy in her life she seeks control in other aspects of her life (Maldonado). This trauma response causes her to continue to hurt everyone in the town in order to save herself from the pain. This doesn't excuse what she did, but it does help you to understand why she did it. She does realize the right thing to do, so she takes down the hex, freeing the people under control. She then has to go through losing Vision for a third time and now losing her kids. In the post credit scene of the last episode, it shows her reading through *The Darkhold*, a book about magic, and you can hear Billy and Tommy calling for her in the background. She may be trying to find a way to get her kids back.

Relationships

Wanda and Tony's Relationship

From the beginning when Wanda and Tony have their first encounter, he is very afraid of her. This is because of what he saw when she first controlled his mind and made him see his worst fears. It is a flashback to *The Avengers* when Loki's army is coming down to earth, and he flies up into space to save everyone and it shows the rest of the Avengers dying and it being all his fault. Even after Wanda joins the team, he always associates her with what he saw, which resulted in him being fearful of her. Meluso states

that female characters in media have for the most part been used to advance the storyline of their male counterpart. In this case, the fear that Wanda ensues in Tony influences his decision making, which then creates conflict between him and other male characters: Cap. Tony is the main person that pushes for the Sokovia accords to be signed. He sees Wanda as an uncontrollable child, and this could be the answer to solving that. It shows that he isn't necessarily worried about her or anyone else, he just wants to save himself. He thinks of himself as the leader of the Avengers, so he feels it's his responsibility to keep everything under control.

As a part of the Avengers Wanda lives in the compound, but Tony won't let her leave and uses Vision as a way to keep her there. He doesn't do this to protect her, he does it because he is scared of what she can do and is worried that more people are going to get hurt if she leaves. Cap confronts Tony saying it's internment rather than protection, and he tries to justify his decision by saying that there are worst ways to protect someone. He then gets angry at Cap for not agreeing with him and calls Wanda a weapon of mass destruction. This just shows that he doesn't see her as a part of the team, just as someone who needs a babysitter.

Clint – The Father Figure

Clint has kids of his own, so he is very protective of Wanda and Pietro because they are much younger than the rest of the team. Him and Wanda have a coach/coachee dynamic where there is support and an atmosphere where vulnerable topics can be talked about (Lai). During the big fight in *Age of Ultron* Wanda is expressing her regret because

she feels as though her and Pietro are at fault for what is happening and she is doubting herself, not sure if she can continue fighting (*Age of Ultron*, 1:45:50). Clint gives her a stern talk saying that they're all at fault, there's no sense in dwelling over it when they have a job to do. He tells her that if she goes out and fights, she'll officially be an Avenger and you can see that he is confident that she will be able to do it. When she does come out, they have each other's backs, and he protects her.

In *Civil War* Clint breaks Wanda out of the Avengers compound so that she can help him and Cap fight off Tony. He knows that she just tries to help everyone and looks at the bigger picture of things like him. Even when Vision tries to stop them, Clint has confidence in Wanda that she will go with him, despite Vision getting hurt in the process. This is also when her mentality switches because Vision tries to threaten her by saying that people will never stop being scared of her and she replies "I can't control their fear, only my own." She finally becomes confident enough in herself that she doesn't need the approval of everyone else, as long as she is doing what she knows is right.

After Tony's funeral in *Endgame* Wanda and Clint comfort each other. Clint lost Nat and Wanda lost Vision while battling Thanos and Clint says that he wishes there was a way to let Nat know that they won. Wanda assures him that Nat and Vision, even though they may not be with them anymore, they still know that they defeated him in the end. This goes back to the coach/coachee relationship that they have because they're able to be vulnerable with each other and have those emotional conversations.

Mentor Cap

When the Avengers are trying to take the body that Ultron is creating for himself in *Age of Ultron*, Cap is fighting with Ultron on a train. The twins come in and attack Ultron, helping Cap out and when the train runs out of control Pietro runs in front and saves the people in its path while Wanda uses her powers to stop the train. Following this he is still a little weary of them because he knows they were with Hydra and then Ultron, but when Wanda tells him that Ultron got his ideals from Tony, he believes her. She tells him that Tony will do whatever he can to make things right, regardless of what the rest of the team thinks. Neither Tony nor Ultron can see the difference between destroying the world and saving it, which Cap already knows because it is how Tony has always acted and this makes him realize that Wanda is telling the truth.

In Lagos on the mission, Cap is walking Wanda through surveillance tactics, it seems as though he is quizzing her on different things to make sure she knows them. He then tells her “Just like we practiced” and using her powers she lifts him into the building to go after the target. This shows that he has been training her not only in various fighting maneuvers but also in the things that lead up to a fight like surveillance and exit strategies. He knows that she has strength and potential and wants her to get to where the rest of them are. When Rumlow tries to blow Cap and himself up, Wanda is the one that protects Cap and saves him from the explosion. Back at the compound she is watching the news, they call her an ‘enhanced individual’ and paint her out to be a horrible person. Cap is the one that comes into her room and consoles her by reminding her that they were able to save a lot of lives. He says that there are lives that are going to be lost, but it is up to them to make sure that they save as many people as possible.

While the Sokovia accords are being discussed, the Secretary of State shows pictures and videos of the damage that was caused in Sokovia and Lagos. Wanda is very disturbed by seeing these because she feels guilty and blames herself for what happened. Cap is very quick to notice this and makes the Secretary take them down. He knows that she already believes that she's at fault and is upset with herself and he doesn't want her going through that. It shows that Cap genuinely cares for his team and those close to him, he makes sure they're doing alright, gives them advice, and tries to protect their mental well-being.

The Growth of Wanda and Vision

In *Age of Ultron* when Ultron was building a body for himself, Wanda was able to see into its mind and it showed the destruction of the world. Just on this alone she doesn't trust Vision when he is first created, but it was added onto by the fact that he was created by Tony and Ultron. She knows how both think and how they make decisions, so she is concerned that Vision will be the same way. By *Civil War* it is obvious that they have gotten much closer. He phases through the wall into her room and she says "Vis we talked about this." This shows that they've been spending time together and she is helping him gain humanity. Because he is an AI, he is very intelligent, but he lacks social skills. Then she feels betrayed by him when she tries to leave the Avengers compound and he won't let her and says that it was Tony's idea and it's not for her safety, but for everyone else's.

While Clint is trying to take Wanda to fight Tony, Vision tries to scare her into not going. He tells her that people will never stop being afraid of her if she goes. Luckily, she doesn't let his words get to her and she leaves with Clint. In *Infinity War* Wanda and Vision grow much closer and their relationship has really blossomed. They see each other as equals and they understand each other's struggles with their powers. Both don't fully understand the extent of their powers but want to learn to, so they relate with one another. It also has something to do with Wanda getting a multitude of her powers from the mind stone, and this might be another explanation for their connection. Vision has evolved since we saw him in *Civil War* because he better understands emotions and he is able to present himself as human. However, it is said that in *Infinity War* Wanda does nothing to further the plot and she is used as a bargaining chip so that Thanos' army can get the mind stone from Vision (Meluso). They also discuss that every decision that Vision made throughout that film was because of Wanda, making this another example of her being used to further the plot of her male counterpart (Meluso).

Infinity War contains the most traumatic experience for Wanda. She is forced to destroy the mind stone, resulting in Vision's death. Shuri, Black Panther's sister, tried to surgically remove the stone from Vision's head, but with Thanos coming, they did not have time to finish it. Wanda was the only one powerful enough to destroy it and even though she did not want to do it, Vision told her it had to be done. She is in complete agony, and she finally destroys the stone, creating an explosion that disintegrates Vision. Just when you think that is the extent of the misery, Thanos uses the time stone to reverse time to bring Vision back. Wanda screams and tries to stop him, but he knocks her away. Then he grabs Vision and pulls the stone out of his head, leaving a giant hole in his head

and his body turned gray. Thanos snapped his fingers and disappeared, and Wanda was kneeling next to Vision's body when she was turned to dust. She didn't even have time to cope with basically losing him twice in the span of a couple of minutes.

In episode 8 of *Wandavision* it is shown how exactly she created the hex. In her explosion of power, she uses matter manipulation to create a new version of Vision and a new environment to fit the recreations of the American sitcoms. She uses the power of the mind stone she has within her to generate an almost exact copy of him, it wasn't just an illusion like the FBI agents that were investigating the hex had originally thought. Her and Vision were married and throughout the episodes they have two boys, and they seem like a happy family. As time goes on Vision starts becoming very suspicious about Wanda's actions. Certain people act very strange around Wanda and sometimes they would ask her if they should redo something in case she isn't pleased with it. He eventually tries to leave the hex to try and get the people inside help, because Norm [his coworker in the false reality] expressed the pain he is in. Norm describes that Wanda is in his head and that everything hurts. As Vision tries to walk through the force field of the hex his body is forcibly being ripped apart because he cannot exist outside of Wanda's creation. In the end, Wanda must give up her happy life with her husband and kids, so that the people under her control can finally be free again.

Conclusion

After looking into all of the aspects of Wanda's life, it is easy to see that she has had a lot of traumatic life experiences to try to cope with. These influential events, the

various forms of power that she holds, including mental, physical, and social, and lastly the relationships she has with her teammates, that tie into social power, all shape her into the character that we see today. Because of the trauma that she has experienced, she tries to seek control in any aspect that she can, which has led her into making some questionable decisions. She has lost so many loved ones through the course of her life, so when another loss is threatened, she will try to do everything in her power to prevent it. The hierarchical relationships that Wanda has with a few of her comrades are also key to how she has developed as a person. With characters like Cap and Clint, their bond has helped her grow as a person and as an Avenger, unlike her relationship with Tony where they never see eye-to-eye. Even with them butting heads, she becomes resilient, and she learns that she doesn't need the approval of other people in order for her to feel content in life. Throughout her time in the MCU she has truly developed and fully understood her powers. She is arguably the most powerful person in the franchise.

Despite Wanda always trying to do what's right and accomplishing great things, she is highly criticized over her actions in *Wandavision*. What she did to those people under her control was terrible and there should be accountability taken on her part. However, I would think that after analyzing her life and everything that she has been through, people would empathize with her and better understand why she did the things she did. After all the loss that she has suffered, it is hard to blame her for wanting to keep a "perfect" world and live out her days with her family. I also believe that Wanda is an amazing character for people to relate to. People experience loss and traumatic events all of the time and for her to come out of these ordeals as the strongest Avenger is inspiring.

When characters have flaws, it makes it easier to understand them, creating a connection between them and us (Harris).

In my opinion, even though it hasn't been perfect, Wanda has dealt with her trauma as best as she can up to this point. She definitely has a lot of growing to do in order to cope with everything she has experienced in a healthy way. For the unreleased movie, *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness*, I believe that Wanda will be in even more agony than before due to her losing her children, so she will try to hide out trying to find peace. I am not sure whether or not she will be a hero or villain in this film, but I know that her main goal will be to get her kids back based on the post-credit scene of *Wandavision*. Regardless of what happens throughout this film, I know that in the end she will do what's right because that is always what she's done.

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