

# Challenges of Well to do Siblings Raised in Middle Class Families - Insights from Mt Pleasant Heights, Harare

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## ABSTRACT

Employing observations and in-depth interviews, this qualitative study sought to explore challenges experienced by well-to-do siblings who were raised in middleclass families, with a particular focus on the Mt Pleasant Heights community in Zimbabwe. Purposive sampling approach was used to identify participants and twenty adult individuals were interviewed, constituting of professionals as well as business people. The researcher employed a qualitative thematic approach for data analysis. Two major themes that kept on emerging were the emotional and psychological burden experienced by participants as a result of the contrast between the current affluence and their previous backgrounds as well as strained relationships due to the new financial statuses. Results of the study revealed that indeed, well-to-do siblings who grew up in middle class backgrounds experience various challenges which are mainly linked to internal conflicts around belonging and authenticity especially when their current lifestyles contrast severely with their upbringing. The study underscores the importance of acknowledging these unique experiences and calls for supportive structures such as mentorship, counselling, and open family dialogue to help individuals balance their socioeconomic transitions with emotional well-being. By offering insights from a localized context, the research contributes to a broader understanding of socioeconomic mobility, family dynamics, and identity in Zimbabwe's evolving social landscape.

## INTRODUCTION

This study investigated the challenges encountered by well-to-do siblings who were raised in middle-class families, with a focus on the Mt Pleasant Heights community in Zimbabwe. It scrutinized how their upbringing within a modest socioeconomic context shaped their mental health, social relationships, distinctiveness, and overall well-being after achieving financial success. As these individuals transition into higher financial status, they often navigate complex emotional, psychological, and social experiences influenced by the contrast between their current affluence and their formative background. This chapter presents an overview of the study, including the background, statement of the problem, justification, research objectives, research questions, and the scope of the investigation. The aim was to provide deeper insights into the lived realities of upwardly mobile individuals from middle-class origins, highlighting both the struggles and the opportunities they encounter within family and community contexts.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This presents the research methodology used to explore the psychosocial challenges faced by economically well-off siblings raised in poor or middle-class families in Zimbabwe. It described the research design, sampling methods, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques. Additionally, the chapter addresses the ethical considerations observed during the study and the limitations of the chosen methodology.

### Research Approach

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore the intricate, personal experiences of individuals. Qualitative research delves into the meanings, experiences, and perspectives of individuals or groups, gathering rich and detailed data through methods such as interviews, observations, and focus groups (Denzin & Lincoln,

2018). This approach was ideal for addressing open-ended research questions that cannot be easily answered through numerical data. Qualitative research was particularly effective for examining complex phenomena like attitudes, opinions, behaviours, and experiences that cannot be reduced to simple numbers (Stake, 1995). By using this approach, we gained a deeper understanding of the complex, lived experiences of well-off individuals who came from poor to middle class backgrounds.

## Research Design

This study adopted a phenomenological research design to explore and understand the lived experiences of economically well-to-do individuals who were raised in middle-class families, specifically focusing on the psychosocial challenges and identity negotiations they encounter. Phenomenology, as a qualitative research tradition, seek to delve deeply into the essence of human experiences as perceived and interpreted by individuals themselves (Creswell, 2013). It was particularly suitable for this research because the phenomenon under investigation, navigating conflicting identities due to socioeconomic mobility was inherently subjective, personal, and emotionally nuanced.

Phenomenology enabled the researcher to uncover how participants made meaning of their socioeconomic transition and the interpersonal, emotional, and psychological implications associated with that change. As highlighted by Moustakas (1994), the goal of phenomenology was to describe rather than explain, and to start from the perspective of those who have experienced the phenomenon. This aligned with the aim of this study, which was to understand how well-to-do siblings from Mt Pleasant Heights perceive and cope with the duality of their social identities.

In trying to collect rich and insightful data, this study utilizes semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection tool, supplemented by non-participant observations. Semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility in probing participants' lived experiences, while still maintaining a focus on the key themes relevant to the study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Participants were encouraged to reflect deeply on their upbringing, their current socioeconomic position, and the emotional and social dynamics involved in balancing these identities. The interview guide includes open-ended questions such as:

- “How would you describe your experience of becoming economically successful?”
- “In what ways has your background influenced your current social relationships?”
- “Do you feel a sense of tension or conflict between your past and present self?”

In addition to interviews, non-participant observation was employed to enrich the data. Observation allowed the researcher to note non-verbal cues, emotional expressions, and social interactions that may not be fully captured through verbal communication alone (Angrosino, 2007). For example, during interviews, the researcher paid attention to participants' tone, body language, and emotional responses when discussing sensitive topics such as family expectations or feelings of alienation. Those observations help contextualize the spoken narratives and offer deeper insight into the psychosocial dimensions of their experiences.

Furthermore, the phenomenological reduction technique was applied during data analysis, where the researcher brackets their own assumptions and biases to focus purely on the participants' lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). This ensures that the findings remain true to the meaning and essence of the participants' realities, rather than being filtered through the researcher's preconceived notions.

In summary, the phenomenological approach provided a robust framework for investigating the lived realities of economically successful individuals navigating complex social identities. By combining semi-structured interviews with observational techniques, the study aims to illuminate the deeper meanings behind these experiences, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of identity, class mobility, and familial relationships in the Mt Pleasant Heights.

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## Population and Sampling

The population for this study consisted of economically successful adult individuals in Mt Pleasant Heights, Zimbabwe who were raised in middle-class families. This population was characterized by their shared upbringing and current socioeconomic status, which was critical for exploring the unique challenges they face.

Purposive sampling was utilized to select participants who meet the study's inclusion criteria. Purposive sampling ensured that individuals with the most relevant experiences were chosen to provide rich and insightful data (Patton, 2002). The sample size of 20 individuals was deemed appropriate to provide a variety of perspectives while keeping the data manageable for qualitative analysis. Inclusion criteria: - Participants who have achieved notable economic success (as measured by income, professional status, or business ownership). Participants who were raised in middle-class households, participants who were willing to share their personal experiences and the psychosocial challenges they have faced. Ensuring diversity in experiences, participants were selected from various socioeconomic sectors, including business, professional services, and the public sector. Snowball sampling was also employed, allowing initial participants to refer others who fit the study criteria (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981).

## Data Collection Instruments

Data was collected using in-depth interviews and participant observations, consistent with the phenomenological research design. In-depth interviews allowed the researcher to engage in one-on-one, open-ended conversations with individuals to gain a comprehensive understanding of their experiences and perspectives on their experiences. This method also allowed for detailed exploration of the participant's thoughts and feelings, providing rich descriptive data. The advantages of in-depth interviews are that they are useful for exploring complex topics where numerical data may not capture. The open ended nature of in-depth interviews, allow flexibility and adaptability, enabling researchers to follow new leads and explore unexpected direction. The use of open-ended questions enabled the researcher to probe deeper into individual stories, uncovering nuanced identity conflicts and emotional struggles. Additionally, participant observations were employed during interactions and interview sessions to capture non-verbal cues, emotional expressions, and interpersonal dynamics that may not be fully articulated through speech. Field notes taken during these observations provided rich contextual insights, further enhancing the depth and authenticity of the data collected (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Groenewald, 2004). These instruments collectively enabled the researcher to gain a holistic understanding of participants' experiences from both verbal and behavioural perspectives.

## Research Procedure

This study used a qualitative research approach to delve into the complex psychological and social challenges faced by individuals from middle class backgrounds who have later become wealthy. Drawing on the principles of phenomenology, this study understood the unique experiences and personal meanings that these individuals have attributed to their past, present, and future (Creswell, 2013; Giorgi, 2009). The study was conducted in a non-invasive and no manipulative manner, allowing participants to share their genuine thoughts, feelings, and experiences without any external influence. The research's primary focus was to understand the participants' subjective experiences and perspectives. Instead, the researcher observed and recorded participants' natural behaviours and emotions in their everyday environment Giorgi (2009). After the data collection, participants were provided with a thorough debriefing statement, outlining the study's purpose, methods, and potential benefits and risks, ensuring transparency and respect for their involvement.

## Standardization of Instruments

Enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the data, triangulation was used, a process that involves comparing data from multiple participants to identify consistent patterns and themes (Denzin, 1978) to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. This approach helped to verify the findings by cross-checking the perspectives of different individuals, ensuring that the emerging themes were not isolated instances but

reflective of broader experiences. Additionally, member checking was conducted, where participants were given the opportunity to review summaries of their interviews and provide feedback on whether their experiences were accurately represented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This step helped to ensure that the interpretations were aligned with the participants' intended meanings, thereby increasing the study's internal validity. Furthermore, peer debriefing was employed as another validation technique. The research findings and the thematic analysis were discussed with colleagues and supervisors who provided critical feedback, ensuring the rigor, objectivity, and impartiality of the research process. Peer debriefing served to minimize personal bias and to refine the interpretation of the data. For reliability, a consistent interview guide was used during data collection, ensuring that all participants were asked similar questions, which enabled a systematic approach to gathering information. The use of NVivo software further contributed to the reliability of the study by enabling systematic data management and coding. The software helped ensure that the coding process was transparent, repeatable, and organized, thus maintaining consistency across the analysis. Together, these strategies enhanced both the validity and reliability of the research, providing a comprehensive and trustworthy account of the psychosocial challenges faced by economically successful siblings from middle-class backgrounds in Mt Pleasant Heights.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The study adhered to strict ethical guidelines to protect the rights and welfare of the participants.

The following ethical considerations were observed:

- i. **Informed consent:** Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, the nature of the questions, and their right to withdraw at any time. Written consent was obtained.
- ii. **Confidentiality:** To protect participants' identities, their personal information was anonymized, and the data were securely stored.
- iii. **Voluntary participation:** Participants were assured that their involvement was voluntary, and they had the right to withdraw or refuse to answer any question.
- iv. **Emotional support:** Given the potential sensitivity of the topics discussed, participants were provided with information about counselling services in case they experienced emotional distress during or after the interviews (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001).

## **FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

### **Introduction**

This section presents the findings from the qualitative study on the challenges faced by economically well-to do siblings raised in middle-class families in Zimbabwe. The data was drawn from in-depth interviews and observations with 20 participants who shared their experiences regarding the emotional, psychological, and social dynamics of their socioeconomic success. The data was organized into key themes that emerged during the analysis, using the thematic approach described in Chapter 3. These themes include emotional and psychological challenges, social dynamics within families, cultural expectations, and coping mechanisms. The chapter also offer interpretations of these findings in relation to the study's research questions and objectives.

### **Demographic Profile of Participants**

The participants in this study came from various professional backgrounds, including business, public service, and professional careers. Out of the 20 participants, 12 were male, and 8 were female, with an age range of 30 to 55 years. All participants were considered economically successful by their own accounts and based on the criteria defined in Chapter 3. Most participants reported incomes that placed them in the upper-middle or high-income brackets, despite having been raised in families with limited financial resources.

## RESULTS PRESENTATION

### Emotional and Psychological Challenges

The first major theme that emerged from the interviews was the emotional and psychological burden experienced by participants. The majority of participants reported feeling a sense of guilt and anxiety about their success, particularly in relation to their family members who remain in poverty or lower economic status. Participants frequently expressed feelings of survivor guilt, where successful individuals felt they did not deserve their accomplishments because their family members had not achieved similar financial outcomes. One participant shared;

*"...I feel guilty that I've been able to make it while my siblings still struggle. It is like I'm not supposed to enjoy my success..." (P. 32)*

Another common emotional response was stress and anxiety, especially regarding the financial expectations placed upon them by their families. Participants reported that they often felt overwhelmed by the responsibility to provide for their extended family. One participant opined;

*"...I'm constantly stressed because there is always someone in the family who needs financial help, and I feel obligated to provide..." (P. 32)*

The emotional toll of identity conflict was also evident in the narratives. Many participants struggled to reconcile their new socioeconomic identity with the values and norms instilled in them during their upbringing. As highlighted by Sennett and Cobb (1973), the transition from a lower economic background to a higher status can create inner conflicts about belonging and self-worth. One participant remarked,

*"...I don't feel like I belong anywhere. I'm too rich for my old friends, but I'm not entirely comfortable in the circles of the wealthy..." (P. 32)*

### Social Dynamics and Relationship Changes with Family Members

Another significant theme that emerged from the data was the change in family dynamics following the participants' economic success. Many participants indicated that their relationships with family members had become strained due to their new financial status. Participants often experienced alienation or envy from their family members, leading to feelings of isolation. This aligns with findings from Ncube and Mpofu (2021), who reported that economically successful individuals often face alienation from family members who have not achieved similar success. Moreover, participants also pointed to the increased expectations from family members. As described by Giddens and Sutton (2017), cultural expectations in many African societies place a burden on economically successful individuals to provide for their entire family. One participant shared,

*"...The expectations are so high. I'm expected to take care of everyone, from my nucleus family to my distant cousins. It is a lot of pressure, and sometimes it is not easy to say no..." (P.33)*

These dynamics often resulted in tensions and conflicts within families, with participants feeling emotionally torn between their personal aspirations and their family obligations. One participant explained,

*..."I want to build my own life, but there's always this guilt if I don't help my family. It's like I'm stuck between two worlds...." (P.33)*

### Cultural Expectations and Familial Obligations

The theme of cultural expectations and familial obligations was central to the experiences of participants, particularly in the context of Zimbabwean societal values. Many participants expressed that cultural norms dictated that they must share their wealth with their extended family, a practice deeply rooted in Zimbabwean

traditions (Mupfurutsa & Dube, 2019). For many participants, this cultural expectation created a sense of financial strain. While some were willing to support their families, others felt that the demands were excessive and unsustainable. One participant stated,

*"... I want to assist, but at some point, it becomes too much. It feels like I'm the family's bank, and it's not easy to set boundaries...." (P.34)*

Participants also discussed the psychological conflict between individualism and collectivism. As noted by Triandis (2001), the tension between personal success and communal obligations was a significant source of stress for economically mobile individuals in collectivist societies. One participant remarked,

*"...It's hard because, on one hand, I want to be independent and focus on my own life, but on the other hand, I cannot ignore the needs of my family. It is a constant struggle..." (P.34)*

### **Coping Mechanisms for Managing Psychosocial Challenges**

Despite the psychosocial challenges they faced, participants employed various coping mechanisms to manage their stress and emotional burden. The most common coping strategy reported was problem-solving and setting boundaries with family members regarding financial support.

Another coping mechanism involved seeking social support from peers who had experienced similar challenges. Participants found solace in discussing their issues with friends or colleagues who understood their situation. One participant shared,

*"...Talking to other individuals who've gone through the same issues has been really helpful. It makes me realise that I'm not alone..." (P.35)*

In addition to social support, many participants turned to spiritual and cultural counselling as a way to cope with the emotional and psychological challenges. As Muchena (2018) found in her study, spiritual guidance can help individuals reconcile their success with their family's expectations. One participant noted,

*"...My faith has been a big source of strength. I've prayed a lot about how to balance everything, and that's helped me find peace..."(P.35)*

### **Interpretation of Findings in Relation to Research Objectives**

The findings of this study provide important insights into the emotional, psychological, and social dynamics faced by economically well-to-do siblings raised in middle-class families. In relation to the first research objective, the study shows that emotional and psychological challenges, including guilt, stress, and identity conflict, are significant issues for these individuals. The social dynamics within families, as discussed in relation to the second objective, are often strained by financial disparities, leading to alienation and conflict. The third objective highlights the cultural expectations and familial obligations that place a heavy burden on economically successful individuals, and the final objective reveals the various coping mechanisms they use to manage these pressures.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented and analysed the data collected from interviews with 20 economically well to do individuals raised from middle-class families in Mt Pleasant Heights. The findings revealed that these individuals face complex emotional, psychological, and social challenges, largely driven by family expectations and cultural values. Coping mechanisms such as setting boundaries, seeking social support, and spiritual counselling play a critical role in managing these challenges. The next chapter will discuss the study's conclusions and provide recommendations for counselling psychology practices and future research.

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## DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Overview

This part presents an in-depth discussion of the findings from Chapter 4 in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. It also provides a summary of key findings, draws conclusions, and offers recommendations for both practice and future research. The chapter aims to link the challenges faced by economically successful siblings from middle-class families to the theoretical frameworks and empirical studies presented earlier in the study.

### Discussion of Findings

#### Emotional and Psychological Challenges

The study found that economically successful siblings experience substantial emotional and psychological challenges, including feelings of guilt, stress, and identity conflict. This aligns with previous studies by Chigudu (2020) and Muchena (2018), who highlighted survivor guilt and stress among individuals who achieve economic success while their families remain in poverty. This survivor guilt often presents as a persistent feeling of unease or unworthiness due to the disparity between their success and their family's struggles. The stress is frequently tied to the pressure of meeting increased family expectations and managing complex family relationships.

Participants in this study also described identity conflicts, where they felt torn between their humble origins and their new socioeconomic status. These experiences resonate with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), which suggests that individuals struggle to reconcile their self-concept when they transition between social groups. When individuals move between social groups with very different norms and values, as with economically mobile siblings, they may struggle to reconcile their self-concept and experience internal conflict as they navigate their changing social environment. This struggle can lead to feelings of alienation, confusion, and a lack of belonging, with the dissonance between their past and present selves causing significant psychological distress.

#### Social Dynamics and Family Relationships

The study revealed that changes in socioeconomic status strained relationships between participants and their families. Participants experienced feelings of isolation and were subject to envy from relatives, resulting in fractured family ties. This finding supports Ncube and Mpofu's (2021) work, which noted that economically mobile individuals often face alienation within their family circles. This alienation can manifest in various ways, from subtle passive-aggressive behaviour to open resentment, all stemming from the perceived imbalance in financial success. The research further confirmed that family obligations, grounded in cultural expectations, exacerbate these strains. Giddens and Sutton (2017) argued that cultural obligations often compel well-to-do individuals to support their families, even when this leads to emotional strain, a finding echoed in this study. This expectation often forces well-to-do individuals to support their families, even at personal cost, leading to emotional strain, financial hardship, or delayed personal goals. Participants in this study consistently echoed this dynamic, describing feeling obligated to provide for family members, even when it created difficulties for them. The pressure to meet these cultural expectations can create a complex mix of emotions, including guilt, resentment, and a feeling of being trapped between personal aspirations and family duties.

#### Cultural Expectations and Familial Obligations

The study emphasized the strong cultural expectations in Zimbabwe for successful individuals to support their families financially. Many participants felt obligated to provide for extended family members, despite the emotional and financial toll this support imposed. Mupfurutsa and Dube (2019) similarly found that these cultural pressures are deeply rooted in Zimbabwean society. This obligation was often described as deeply ingrained and obligatory, despite the significant emotional and financial toll that this support imposed on them. Triandis' (2001) analysis of the tension between individualism and collectivism provides a useful framework for understanding how these pressures manifest, with participants caught between their own goals and the collective needs of their families. This tension results in a difficult balancing act, forcing individuals to constantly navigate the competing demands of their personal ambitions and their family's needs. The pressure to adhere to collectivist

cultural norms can cause guilt and anxiety when individuals prioritize their own goals, while the burden of meeting extensive family obligations can impede their personal and professional growth. This ongoing negotiation between individual desires and collective expectations is a key challenge for economically successful siblings in Zimbabwe.

### **Coping Mechanisms**

Participants employed various coping mechanisms to manage the psychosocial stress resulting from their economic success. The findings revealed that individuals relied on problem-solving strategies, emotional regulation, and social support systems, as outlined by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). Emotional regulation involved consciously managing feelings of guilt, stress, and resentment through mindfulness, exercise, and counselling. Strong social support systems, such as close friends, mentors, and support groups, offered a vital space to share experiences and receive emotional support.

Many participants also turned to spiritual and cultural counselling, as Muchena (2018) noted is common in Zimbabwe. These strategies were critical in helping participants navigate the emotional challenges associated with their upward mobility. This often involved guidance from traditional healers, religious leaders, or respected community elders. These resources provided a way to understand their experiences within a cultural context and offered culturally relevant strategies for navigating complex social dynamics and family obligations. These varied coping strategies were essential in helping participants effectively manage the diverse emotional challenges linked to their upward mobility and maintain well-being despite the pressures they faced.

### **Conclusions - Summary of Findings**

This study explored the challenges faced by economically successful siblings raised in middleclass families in Mt Pleasant Heights. The key findings are as follows: - **Emotional and psychological challenges** - Participants reported feelings of guilt, identity conflict, and emotional stress, aligning with previous research on upward mobility and survivor guilt.

**Social dynamics and family relationships** - The shift in socioeconomic status led to strained family relationships, with participants experiencing feelings of isolation and envy from relatives.

**Cultural expectations and familial obligations** - Participants felt significant pressure to support their extended families, often at the expense of their own well-being, due to strong cultural values around family interdependence.

**Coping mechanisms** - Individuals employed various coping strategies, including problem-solving, emotional regulation, social support, and spiritual counselling, to manage the psychosocial stress associated with their economic success.

The study therefore concludes that indeed economically successful siblings raised in middle-class families in Zimbabwe face significant psychosocial challenges. These challenges are rooted in cultural expectations, family dynamics, and personal identity conflicts. The study highlights the emotional toll of survivor guilt, the strain of family obligations, and the difficulties in balancing personal aspirations with collective family responsibilities. While coping mechanisms, such as problem-solving and social support, provide some relief, the study demonstrates that the psychosocial stress associated with upward mobility remains a significant issue in this context.

### **Recommendations**

#### **For Counselling Practitioners:**

- To be aware of the unique challenges faced by economically well-to-do individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Provide targeted interventions that address survivor guilt, identity conflicts, and the emotional strain of family obligations.

- Recognize the critical role of spiritual and cultural counselling in helping individuals reconcile their achievements with their family responsibilities.

### **For Families and Communities:**

- Increase awareness within families and communities about the pressures that economically successful siblings face.
- Encourage open discussions about financial support and expectations to reduce the emotional burden on the individual.
- Facilitate these conversations through community leaders and organizations to create a more supportive environment for economically mobile individuals.

### **For Policymakers:**

- Develop mental health programs that address the psychosocial challenges associated with economic mobility.
- Offer support services, such as counseling and workshops, that specifically target individuals navigating the complex dynamics of family obligations and personal success.
- Promote economic equity and reduce the gap between socioeconomic classes to help alleviate some of the pressures identified in this study.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Limitations highlight the complexities encountered during the studying experiences of well-to-do siblings from disadvantaged backgrounds. Acknowledging these factors is essential for interpreting findings and developing a more comprehensive understanding of their challenges. Some of the limitations are as follows: Lack of diversity in demographics (for example ethnicity and geography) may not represent the broader population. Differences in cultural backgrounds may have affected how siblings perceive wealth and disadvantage, potentially limiting the applicability of findings across different cultures. Lastly, personal narratives can be subjective, leading to biases in how siblings perceive their upbringing and current challenges. Different siblings may have varying interpretations of their experiences.

### **Future Research**

This study opens up several avenues for future research. First, more research is needed to explore the long-term effects of psychosocial challenges on economically successful individuals and their families. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into how these challenges evolve over time. Additionally, comparative studies across different cultural contexts in Africa would help to understand whether the findings from Zimbabwe are applicable in other countries with similar cultural and socioeconomic dynamics. Further research could also explore how gender influences the psychosocial challenges associated with upward mobility, as this study did not specifically focus on gender differences.

### **Summary**

This chapter discussed the key findings of the study in relation to the existing literature and theoretical frameworks. It provided a summary of findings, drew conclusions about the psychosocial challenges faced by economically successful siblings, and offered practical recommendations for counselling practitioners, families, and policymakers. Finally, it identified areas for future research to further explore the complexities of economic mobility and psychosocial stress. This research contributes valuable insights to the fields of counselling psychology and socioeconomic studies.

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