

The In/Visibility of Nurses in Cyberspace

By June Kaminski

Introduction

Cyberspace has emerged as a unique phenomenon of the late 20th century, one that has offered a virtual space for dyads, groups, and communities of people to interact, share and dialogue through networks of computers. Scholars of various disciplines have coined the term cyberspace to describe, probe and examine the interactions, impact and outcomes of dialogue and identity in the 'new frontier' of cyberspace.

"In the 1960s and 1970s the vanguard of the computer revolution consisted of young men and women imbued with counter - culture values...they saw computers as tools that might both aid the fight for social justice and trigger a spiritual renaissance that would sweep away the technocratic state" (Wise 2000, 27). There are many scholars, writers, and other professionals who work hard at shaping at least some of cyberspace into a milieu for activism; to inform about crucial social issues, and act as advocates to help people use their mind and voice to shape their world. Nursing supports all of these proactive endeavors, but are nurses part of this online activity?

According to Lun, Loke, Lee, Tan and Chan, "Healthcare professionals have been quick to ride the wave of the Internet revolution by learning to use various kinds of Internet tools that allow them to interact with each other, unrestrained by national and geographical boundaries, time, and distance. They develop collaborative research ideas and exchange information through the use of electronic mails, subscribe to electronic newsgroups and participate in discussion lists." Bell

summarized Jordan's 1999 description of the social characteristics of the people who populate cyberspace as "white, have professional or managerial occupations, higher than average incomes and are likely to be located in the developed world" (Bell, 2001, p. 17). This description does seem to fit the people who make up a large portion of nursing yet I question if there are many nurses actually contributing to online development and cyberspace shaping.

Bell further described cyberspace as hyperreal estate, becoming denser yet more expansive with each passing year. It has become many things to many people. A repository for approximately ten per cent of the world's knowledge; (Hamilton, 2002) an actively growing commercial smorgasbord; a rich interactive social scene; a venue for activism and advocacy; an educational milieu and a sounding board and creative venue for countless groups and individuals wishing to dialogue or create in virtual space.

Within this project, I wish to look at the non/presence of nurses within cyberculture: as interactive participants, web site designers, educators, columnists, and writers within an online environment. I have personally noticed a dearth of all of these - nurses do not appear to be particularly visible within cyberculture. I would like to explore this subjective observation in more depth and present my discovery within a web site environment.

I intend to research the presence of nurses within a number of contexts. The first will be interactive forums, bulletin boards, and email mailing lists. An eye for the type of dialogue that is created, the issues addressed, the timber of the voices that emerge will be witnessed and described to help frame the dynamics that nurses use to form a particular cyberculture for nursing related topics. As well, stories and writing by nurses will be sought, read and digested with the intent to both reveal, link and analyze the contribution made to cyberculture by nurses as storyteller. A unique aspect of cyberspace that begs for input from experienced and knowledgeable nurses is health-related sites. I wish to examine authorship of several high traffic health sites to investigate the frequency, presence and scope of nurses as writers, experts and online teachers of reliable health care information. Other expressions of presence will also be searched for, including self employed nurse sites, personal sites, schools of nursing, nursing organizations, theory related sites and so on.

Cyberculture is an important topic to nurses who are being encouraged to become proficient in various aspects of nursing informatics. The knowledge gained from this project will assist me to ground myself in the current culture of nursing that exists in the online environment.

Stories

What is a Story?

A story can be defined as a narrative account of a real or imagined event. In this context, a story has a definite structure of narrative which includes a sense of completeness. Through a sharing of experience, people use stories to pass on accumulated wisdom, beliefs, and values. Through stories the teller has the opportunity to explain how things are, why they are, and describe their own role and purpose. Stories can be viewed as the building blocks of knowledge and the foundation of memory and learning. Stories connect people with their humanness and link past, present, and future by teaching them to anticipate the possible consequences of their actions. Within nursing, stories function to express experiences, feelings, thoughts and solutions to issues, communications and relationships within the nurse-client and multidisciplinary team contexts. Storytelling reveals the essence of who the teller is. They are a prime vehicle for assessing and interpreting events, experiences, and concepts from minute day to day activity to the deeper

meaning of the human condition. Story telling is an intrinsic and basic form of human communication. More than any other form of communication, the telling of stories is an integral and essential part of the human condition.

Nurses are visible story tellers in a number of different contexts. There are stories about providing care in a resource - taxed health care environment. There are heroic war nurse stories, and ghost stories from nurses working hospital graveyard shifts. Nurses share their tales about learning about nursing informatics, and about why they became a nurse in the first place. There are interesting stories written in response to films and documentaries about nursing's unique essence, responsibilities and heartbreaks. There are even a call for stories regarding September 11th, 2001 and the effect it had on nurses.



Vermont Nursing Stories. Read stories about real Vermont nurses and their careers. The jobs these nurses have represent a small fraction of the choices available to nurses when picking a career. Find out what inspired them to become a nurse, what kinds of responsibilities they have on the job and what they love most about being a nurse! <http://www.choosenursingvermont.org/enter/stories.html>



Nurses Tell Their Stories. Ball State University presents a very interesting Flash layout and stories from various nurses e.g. School Nurse, Community Nurse, OR Nurse, Women's Centre Nurse. <http://www.bsu.edu/web/nursing/stories/>



Choose Nursing: Real Stories. Various nurses describe their unique roles and responsibilities with recruitment in mind. http://www.choosenursing.com/real_stories/index.html



Stories in the Nursing Classroom: Writing and Learning through Stories. Jeanne Sorrell from George Mason University presents an excellent paper on using stories to teach nursing students. <http://wac.colostate.edu/llad/v5n1/sorrell.pdf>



Nurses at War. A collection of nurses who served during various wars. Veterans are encouraged to participate. http://nursing.byu.edu/Nursesatwar/archive_story.asp

Dialogue

Why is Dialogue Important?

"From the beginning until almost the present, all human cultures have developed fundamentally in the form of monologues, that is, people talked only with those who thought as they themselves did--or should! Now humanity is beginning to move out of that "Age of Monologue" into the dawning "Age of Dialogue" wherein people are beginning truly to encounter the Other -- in dialogue, in Deep-Dialogue."

(Global Dialogue Institute, 1999).

Online dialogue is a discursive practice that is comprised of using text as a communicative vehicle. To analyze or even witness dialogue in cyberspace, one must view the text within the social context it springs from. Dialogue includes the usual back and forth exchange of ideas and views common in any two way (or multiple way) communication. But the use of text also allows the

participant to engage in reflective writing since "the electronic medium allows opportunities for reflection and refining thought before making words public" (Dudfield, 1999). Regular participation in a dialogue environment also enhances a sense of community, a feeling that one belongs to an online social group, in whatever context the group sees fit, whether social, personal, professional, and so on.

According to French sociologist, Pierre Levy, four vital characteristics exist within cyberculture. These include:

- Mutual interconnection of users in real time
- The emergence of virtual communities
- Individuals roaming the landscape of knowledge
- Collective intelligence (Havell, 1999).

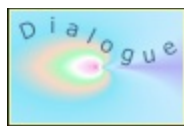
Havell went on to distinguish differences between oral and written dialogue.

"In face-to-face oral communication the interlocutors share their spatio-temporal environment, live in the same historical time, and usually belong to the same culture. They may use the advantage of direct dialogue for clarification and even for the generation of new ideas. On the other hand, written messages are detached from the situation in which they were written and may be received in different time, different place and read by recipients entirely unknown to the sender. This requires much more clarity and stability of meaning in written texts. At the same time, writing enables communication across space and time and allows large-scale storing and sharing of knowledge. Cyberculture combines the advantages of oral and written communication. Its impact on society may be comparable to the impact caused by the advent of writing several millennia ago."

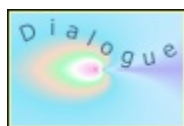
Online dialogue affords an opportunity to find a common ground, and to find ways to work collaboratively for both action and change. "Dialogue leaders speak often about 'moving from talk to action,' but this phrase is deceptive, since dialogue is a quite significant action in itself, and since action, if it is to be impactful and sustainable, needs to include dialogue" (Heierbacher & Fluke, 2001).

Quantum physicist, David Bohm, along with Donald Factor and Peter Garrett wrote extensively about the use of dialogue to address the many crises of our times. "It creates the opportunity for each participant to examine the preconceptions, prejudices and the characteristic patterns that lie behind his or her thoughts, opinions, beliefs and feelings, along with the roles he or she tends habitually to play. And it offers an opportunity to share these insights. The word "dialogue" derives from two roots: "dia" which means "through" and "logos" which means "the word", or more particularly, "the meaning of the word." The image it gives is of a river of meaning flowing around and through the participants (Bohm, Factor & Garrett, 1991).

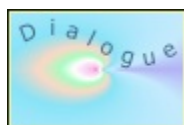
For nursing professionals, the Internet provides a mechanism where the world's 5.5 million nurses can communicate and share knowledge with the goals of dialoguing about the provision of quality patient care worldwide and uniting as a strong political force. Through resources such as forums and chat rooms, nurses can actualize these goals and more. Through communication modalities such as bulletin boards, chat rooms, and email discussion groups as well as speedy access to clinical, education, political, legal, and ethical information pertaining to nursing and healthcare, nurses around the world use the Internet to educate one another, conduct research, and form personal relationships. This not only results in the personal and professional growth of individuals utilizing such services, but also promotes the growth of the nursing profession itself.

BULLETIN BOARDS or DISCUSSION FORUMS

[Virtual Nurse Discussion Forums](http://www.virtualnurse.com/forums/) - This site offers a variety of forums for nurses but only one showed any sort of traffic (18 messages). Possible topics for discussion include: a) General Nursing Discussion b) Retention/Recruitment: Do You Have Answers? c) Are We Prepared: Terrorism and Nursing? d) The Nurse Activist: Politics at the Bedside e) LPN vs RN: Do We Need This War? f) Nursing News.
<http://www.virtualnurse.com/forums/>



[Minority Nurse Discussion Forum](http://www.minoritynurse.com/discus/) - This forum, intended to provide an online voice and dialogue between nurses from various minority groups could use a few members. Only a small amount of posts have been entered despite several interesting and crucial topics. The voices shared on this forum tend to be frank, concrete and troubled - with an issue that needs addressing and/or support related to discrimination, employability, language, and so on. <http://www.minoritynurse.com/discus/>



[Center for Nursing Advocacy](http://www.nursingadvocacy.org/cgi-bin/yabb/YaBB.cgi?board=news) . This excellent site offers several nursing forums for dialogue related to nursing image, work life, roles, and other issues. <http://www.nursingadvocacy.org/cgi-bin/yabb/YaBB.cgi?board=news>

CHAT ROOMS

[Nursing Spectrum Career Chat](http://www.careerfitness.com) - Career Fitness Online site. is open all the time, every single day. We also feature "Guest Chats", with nurse authors, lecturers and other nurse leaders. Here are the details for our upcoming Guest Chats: April 30, 2003 - Writing for Publication; May 28, 2003 - Inserting IV Catheters Painlessly; June 11, 2003 - The Psychological Impact of Infertility; June 25, 2003 - Legal Nurse Consulting; August 20, 2003 - Women in Prison and Infectious Diseases in Prison; September 17, 2003 - Brent's Law.



[Student Nurse Chat Room](http://kcsun3.tripod.com/id49.htm) - This chat room, specifically for nursing students is provided by continuing education specialists, Medi-Smart. Scheduled chats focus on career topics such as Homework Help/Tutoring, Career Advising, Nursing School Q&A and Student Connections. <http://kcsun3.tripod.com/id49.htm>

Design

Web design and nursing are not often thought of in the same context. Very few nurses have applied their carefully honed ingenuity, knowledge, professional expertise to the task of creating content for the web. Which, in my humble opinion, is a shame. Nurses on the whole, possess great insight and ability to hone into the critical aspects of health information, to create learning tools and models for explaining care concerns with their patients, and use both sides of their brains routinely in their day to day work. All of these characteristics are "gold" when it comes to designing and writing web site content.

Now that the general population is more or less comfortable with the web, most designers realize that we are entering a new wave of website standards and evaluation. Viewers demand that

website content, especially on sites that promote self-directed information, is reliable and valid. Designers need to be aware of these emerging standards of web evaluation. They need to incorporate standards in their design scheme right from the beginning. When nurses take the time to learn effective and aesthetic web design skills and combine these with their existing nursing expertise, amazing things can happen. A whole new sector could emerge onto the cyber landscape. A few nurses have taken up the torch. But many more are needed!



[Nurses Help Figure Skating Champion Scott Hamilton Launch Chemocare.com](#) -

To get the project off the ground, Hamilton joined forces with Ruth Fritskey, RN, MSN, and Josette Snyder, RN, MSN, clinical nurse specialists at The Cleveland Clinic Taussig Cancer Center, where Hamilton was treated, to establish Chemocare.com.

"It was our vision that Chemocare.com would address real patient needs and be a resource that newly diagnosed cancer patients could turn to for support," said Fritskey, who is also the director of the Patient and Public Cancer Education Program at The Cleveland Clinic. "We worked with cancer survivors in designing the site—finding out what was important and valuable to them in terms of information—so we could make Chemocare.com a comprehensive resource."

<http://chemocare.com/>

Story at: <http://www.nursezone.com/stories/SpotlightOnNurses.asp?articleID=10254>



[Nursing Net](#) - Nurse Mark Calloway's site: "For 8 1/2 years we have been one of the most accessed and trusted websites on the World Wide Web dedicated to the Nursing Profession. Our reasons have in no way been influenced by usage, or accesses, or "hits", in fact, NursingNet is actually enjoying more than 20% more usage than at any time in our long history.



[Nursing Informatics.com](#) - One of the author's web sites that focuses on nursing informatics. Articles, papers, courses, ezine, discussions, and other resources including web and curriculum design services. <http://www.nursing-informatics.com/>

Authors

One look at any health related book catalog will reveal that there are many nurse authors who publish books including text books, hard copy journals, course syllabi and the like. This section is intended to look at the world of online nurse authors, published contributors to the foundation of cyberspace and avid participants of cyberculture. .

Writing for the web often requires a different approach to working with words, page layout, headlines and illustrations. Readers to a site can range from interested health consumers to peer professionals - the writing style should be usable to all visitors. "Writing for the Web is very different from writing for print:

- 79% of users scan the page instead of reading word-for-word
- Reading from computer screens is 25% slower than from paper
- Web content should have 50% of the word count of its paper equivalent" (Nielsen, 1994).

"Writing everyday documents that are destined to be read on-screen and not printed out means different words and organization than the same ideas written to be printed out on paper. You can't take what you wrote for paper, paste it into an HTML editor, mark it up with a few tags and call it an on-screen document. You need to write specifically for the screen if you want to take best advantage of the medium. Early television was a camera pointed at a radio announcer reading the same news as on radio. We don't do that anymore. Early web was taking word processing and putting it up as a long scrolling page. We won't be doing that in the future, either" (Bricklin,

1998).



RnCeus Interactive LLC - More nurse authors wanted for online course development. "It is the goal of RnCeus Interactive to advance the practice of nursing by presenting clinically relevant learning modules enriched by multimedia and interactivity. Submissions must relate to the scientific knowledge or technical skills required to provide direct or indirect patient care. We encourage the publication of innovations and trends in patient care. The submissions must provide educational content above that which is required for licensure." http://www.rnceus.com/info/author_guideline.htm



Pat Carroll.net - Pat Carroll is both a registered nurse and registered respiratory therapist. She has twenty-five years of clinical experience as an RRT and RN in adult, pediatric, and neonatal critical care; med-surg; general and high-tech home care; and emergency care. She has most recently spent 12 years as an ER nurse; now she is shifting her focus to starting a free health clinic in the homeless shelter in her community. Pat has published more than 100 articles in the professional literature. She has won ten writing awards for her work. Her first book, the Surgical Nurse's Managed Care Manual won the prestigious AJN Book of the Year award in 1999. She has been a respected columnist at www.nurses.com. She has also written for the consumer press and is a lead writer for the innovative, self-care focused consumer web site [LifeMasters Online](http://www.lifemasters.com). She is currently a columnist for [Best Practices in Emergency Services](http://www.patcarroll.net/) <http://www.patcarroll.net/>



WWriters - The author's writing and curriculum design site, featuring portfolio, writing fees for academic, business, research, web site, and general writing projects. <http://wwwwriters.org>

Community

Communities are a rich outgrowth of the current state of the world wide web. Cyberculture thrives on community, and a huge variety of diverse groups have formed on the internet, representing various subcultures. Online nursing communities can offer a wide range of useful opportunities - for communion, support, dialogue, collaboration, activism and innovation.

Communities can amplify innovation - when groups get turned on by what they can do online, they go beyond problem-solving and start inventing together. "Groups of people can use online social networks to think together in new ways. When the affinity or common goal shared by the group is strong enough, mastery of group communication media leads people to invent things together in new ways." (H. Rheingold, 2000)

Communities provide an ongoing context for knowledge exchange that can be far more effective than memos, emails and telephone conversations. It is not only important for nurses to focus on building their knowledge assets, but also to make sure that this knowledge is effectively identified, distributed, and shared with peers. "Everyone talks about how knowledge is the important asset. But it has to be applied to be useful. It gets applied via the processes associated with social capital. In order to realize the benefits of working as an aligned, interdependent, system everyone needs to have conversations that are diverse, complex, and deal with everything from key routines to major strategies. Collaboration can be thought of as a network of different conversations" (H. Rheingold, 2000)



[Self Organizing Communities as Educational Structures](http://www.nursing-informatics.com/educcommunities.html) - The author's online presentation on the use of communities in educational collaboration among scholars, professors, instructors and teachers. Self Organized communities potentiate the development of a group identity and even, a group consciousness. A community memory and awareness can be created which facilitates decision making, brain storming, sharing and dialogue. <http://www.nursing-informatics.com/educcommunities.html>



[Nurse Zone](http://www.nursezone.com) - We know how important a nurse's job is. But we also know that there is a whole person who exists away from work. On this site, you'll find information and resources that will help you enhance your career and your life. Earn Continuing Education contact hours, plus get information on fitness, exercise, nutrition, and discounted services and products important to nurses. NurseZone.com also maintains the largest nursing career center on the Internet. That way, if you want to find the perfect nursing job, you'll never need to look at another Web site. If you want to empower your life and your career, you're in the right place. Everything a nurse could want is here!"



[Nursing.week.com](http://www.nurseweek.com/) - News, newsletter, discussions, CE, tools, features, store, student links, search, my page, free reg, support, peer groups, webmasters section, expert contributors, newsletter authoring service, free web space for nurses. <http://www.nurseweek.com/>

Image

Nursing image is closely tied to the concepts of roles and identity - in this context, the image and identities of nurses online are being considered. Cyberculture theory is rich with references to identity formation in the cyberspace environment. In professional contexts, nursing tends to convey a professional image, one that motivates trust and expectations for accountability.

The word nursing is derived from the Latin word "nutrire" which means "to nourish." From its earliest beginnings, the nursing profession has evolved in response to human need. I believe that it is this responsiveness to the needs of others that has allowed the diversity within nursing to flourish. Among the nursing profession's greatest strengths are the tremendous breadth and variation of opportunities it offers. Levels of nursing practice range from licensed practical nurses to advanced practice nurses such as nurse practitioners, nurse midwives and nurse anesthetists. Registered nurses can pursue degrees at the associates, baccalaureate, masters, and doctoral levels.

There have been many images of nurses purported in the media, in movies and books, and in the news. Common images include: "ministering angel," "physician's handmaiden," "oppressive battle ax a la Nurse Ratched," and sexually related stereotypes ranging from rigid prude to sex kitten. Even though these multiple misconcieved images abound, nurses continue to be quite invisible in the media, compared to other cultural groups."The 1997 Woodhull Study on Nursing and the Media, conducted by Sigma Theta Tau International, found that nurses were severely under-represented in print media, including in comprehensive coverage of health care. Of 1,153 health care stories in 16 major newspapers, only 11 carried references to nurses, the study found" (Sussman, 2000, p. 1). Nurses are in the background, seen only by the people who have first hand experiences with them - the patients they provide care for. Operating in the media shadow, nurses function as a very real but transparent infrastructure that keeps the health care system from literally falling apart. Rarely do people hear about their fine intellects, their on-the-spot critical, "life or death" thinking, or their heroic efforts to provide accountable, complex, quality

health interventions in a time of chaos and crisis.



Scholars who have studied the historical context of nursing's image trace it back to the time of Florence Nightingale, often lauded as the "founder of nursing". In the United Kingdom, nurses have petitioned to have present day nursing disassociated with Nightingale. Her image and her writing have held back the image of nursing in the subservient and invisible shadows of the health care system and the social eye at large. "Florence Nightingale believed nurses should be subordinate to doctors, was against registration of nurses, opposed the three-year formal training of nurses, did not see mental health as a field for nurses and had "questionable success" at her hospital in the Crimea. She added that Ms Nightingale was against lay women healers and opposed women speaking in public" (BBC Health, 1999, p. 1).



Around the world, from the Americas to India, nurses have struggled with a poor image in the general social context. Australian nurses have shared in this misconceived identity: "The public image of Australian nursing has been subject to a plethora of influencing factors since health-care services were first established in this country over two centuries ago, Since its colonial origins, when considered an occupation suitable only for the socially outcast, nursing has evolved through decades of changes and reform. From a position of significant oppression and medical subservience, generations of Australian nurses have fought for public recognition in terms of identity, respect and role acknowledgement" (Bloomfield, 1999, p. 1).

Foskett and Hemsley-Brown found that young people held vague and fragmented views of what nurses were and did in their practice. Misconceptions included:

- Could not visualize where nurses work
- Not aware of career advancement

- Viewed nurse as supportive role to MD
- Most knew at least one nurse
- Idea of "wearing a uniform" was unappealing
- Students of all ages felt nursing "is a girl's job" (1998, p. 1)

A personal survey of thousands of images of nurses on the internet showed that over 80 per cent of the images depicted nurses as white, middle class and often blonde. Most appeared to fall within the age range of 20 to about 35 years old. Images of these young nurses were almost all female and attractive. Many showed nurses with stethoscopes around their necks (not professionally sanctioned), with caps on (rarely worn by contemporary nurses) with a syringe poised in her hand, ready for administration (injections are being phased out in practice in favor of less invasive administration methods). Even the pictures that portrayed nurses as friendly, caring, professional included some of these visible "myths" associated with nursing. Almost any toy - whether a doll, a teddy bear, a wall hanging, what have you,...if it depicted nursing, there was a cap and a cross evident as identifiable icons. The dozen or so images shown on this page were all found on the internet with the key word "nurse" as identifier. Despite an obvious move to try to convey professionalism in images of nurses, we still have a long way to go to make these images realistic and grounded in true nursing practice. Nursing's identity is still being shaped and shifted - this process is fully visible on the internet if one looks for it.



Nurses in the Comics - Nurses have appeared in a number of comic books, mostly as romantic heroines. . Nellie the Nurse began in the mid-forties, and The Romances of Nurse Helen Grant appeared in the late fifties. A flurry of comics were devoted to nurses in the early sixties, including Nurse Betsy Crane; Linda Carter, Student Nurse; Linda Lark; Cynthia Doyle, Nurse in Love; Sue and Sally Smith, Flying Nurses; The Nurses; and Three Nurses. In the seventies, the dramatic Night Nurse appeared briefly on the comic book racks. And, though she gained fame as a reporter for the Daily Planet, the intrepid Lois Lane took time out from chasing Superman to work as a volunteer nurse at Metropolis <http://www.cherryamespage.com/siteindex.html>



Thoughts to Consider when Promoting Nursing - The following are research and national survey findings for your consideration as you design nursing and/or health care promotional materials. To promote Nursing Image and Recruitment Among Youth Focus on: a) The intellectual challenge and high level of knowledge nursing involves b) Variety of work at all levels c) Career progression d) Wide range of career opportunities within nursing e) Nurses as autonomous practitioners f) Idea of "helping people" and ability to "make a difference"
<http://www.nursenc.org/recruitmentandretention/youth/docword/Promoting%20Nursing.doc>



Image of the Nurse - In order to clarify issues relating to the history of nursing it is useful to spend some time considering the image of the nurse. Done thoughtfully this exercise can reveal some of the issues embedded in the cultural stereotypes which are imposed on nursing. <http://www.qmuc.ac.uk/hn/hww/Image.html>



Current Image of Professional Nursing - Dr. L. Andrews presents an insightful Powerpoint synopsis on the current trends and deconstruction of harmful images of nursing. Strategies for moving beyond stereotypical images to a realistic one where nurses are seen as the intelligent, motivated professionals they are offered. Likewise, [Nurseresource.org](http://www.nurseresource.org) provides campaign and media advise and examples of print, web, television, movie theatre and radio information and images to help raise the social

consciousness of the realities of nursing.

<http://www.rsu.edu/faculty/LAndrews/Current%20Image%20of%20Professional%20Nursing.ppt>

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