

THE KNEE

ANZA D.

THE OXBOW SCHOOL



My installation is about anxiety and how personal relationships are helpful for reducing it. I found these anxiety reducing relationships in my family. I am exploring the metaphorical separation we have between life and death. Anxiety ignites feelings and emotions for us that might feel similar to what we would imagine death to be. Many people are scared of death, so it is something I could easily connect anxiety to. I explore the idea of how personal relationships can have positive impacts on us, for instance relieving stress. I connect this to the idea of heaven and an open door, something that is reassuring and comforting. While delving into my research, I discovered that because of the increase of anxiety, our society is beginning to acknowledge and explore its advancement more. I believe it is a large part of our developing society, which is why I chose to express its presence in my artwork.

In my artwork, I created a coffin in which I collaged papers of things I believe cause anxiety in society—tax papers, college majors, mortgage payments, retirement funds, tests, graduation, and more. Inside of the coffin is a mannequin dressed as myself lying in sand. The mannequin is a representation of me, but not a replica, because when an individual experiences anxiety, they are not truly themselves. The sand represents various feelings of sinking, confinement, and being pulled down, similar to what one might feel when anxious. Above the coffin, I chose to hang a door with a painting of memories and items that remind me of my family. This represents an open door of love, support, and the things that help me through my anxiety.

As I think about our society and the pressures and stress my generation is put under, I only hope it gets better for future generations. In the meantime, I believe it is important for us to be educated on the matter. I believe it is important for us, in a world of technology, standards, and expectations, to connect with the things that are non artificial; for instance, our relationships. It is important to find people who help distract us and shield us from being pulled into the sinking hole created by our anxiety. The intention of my work is to inspire others to see the open door that welcomes love, happiness, and support.

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The Knee

My paper touches upon how anxiety is rapidly growing and how I see anxiety as a large part of my identity. This paper will explore how I believe healthy relationships with our families can be one of the biggest support systems we can get, especially in current times, of expanding teen angst. I explain some of the research behind anxiety, identity, and family, as well as how they play major roles in my life. As a community who is becoming inevitably less communal due to factors such as technology and societal pressure, we need to obtain greater values for family, and explore the depths of our personal relationships with our families.

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Oxbow School
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I. Intro

Setting: June of 2012, Eldred Soccer Field in Jamestown. I remember being 10 and thinking that soccer was the greatest sport in the world. Every practice, I sprinted down the field like I was going to be in the next summer Olympics. Scoring a goal and having my entire family cheer for me was the greatest feeling. I was on the field rain or shine. I can vividly remember the feeling of sweat dripping down my head and the uncomfortable scratching of my shin guards that shifted around in my socks. Running in my brand new, stiff, cleats made my feet cramp and gave me blisters, but it was worth it to have the most glamorous footwear on the field. I complained about it, of course, any ten-year-old would. But I loved it. Soccer was my hobby and my teammates were my best friends. In my opinion, that is truly all a ten-year old needs to be happy.

I was almost 11 when I tore my meniscus¹ playing soccer. I had never broken a bone, torn a muscle, or even gotten stitches. I grew up watching my friends break a leg or arm and their entire cast would be covered in signatures and drawings. So when I tore my meniscus, I was ecstatic to get attention from my injury. How was I - a young, fervent, and ambitious child - supposed to know that this injury would cause me a lifetime of pain and anxiety? During my first surgery, they discovered I had a genetic disorder called a discoid meniscus². Essentially, this made me prone to tearing my meniscus. They were able to reshape my meniscus to look like a normal one. I had an excessive amount of surgeries after that diagnosis--from repairs to implants to transplants. Today, my surgery count is 6³. Throughout this journey, I have experienced a great amount of anxiety. After my first surgery in 2012, I was laid up all summer and out of the three months I was at home, I had a total of three visits from my friends. It is hard for active kids to spend their summer sitting with their laid up friend, which is understandable, but the absence of social interactions created a great amount of stress for me and it only got worse from there. At the end of the summer, I was told that I would be switching schools. I had received a merit scholarship, and my parents believed a change in environment would be better for me academically and socially. I was an anxious mess and I began experiencing a lot of social anxiety. During my first year at the new school, I got hives all over my body and the only cause we could trace them to was anxiety. I was out of school for a month because of the severity of the hives. I was insecure of how I looked because of them, and I didn't want to show my face anywhere, out of fear of being judged and made fun of. Throughout middle school, I experienced many other types of anxiety, such as agoraphobia, social anxiety, and OCD. I began avoiding interactions with people; my insecurities increased and I started developing routines that would cause me anxiety if I didn't complete them. For instance, every night I had (and still have) to have my water bottle filled and in the fridge, my backpack packed, and my ipad (now computer)

¹ A thin fibrous cartilage between the surfaces of some joints, e.g., the knee.

² A discoid meniscus is thicker than normal, and often oval or disc-shaped. It is more prone to injury than a normally shaped meniscus

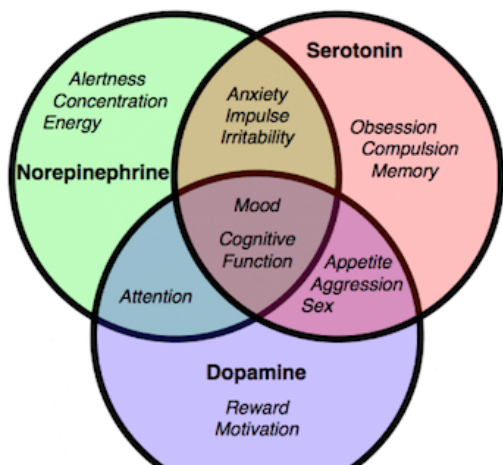
³ I have had 6 different knee surgeries in my life: 6/22/12 Repair, 5/8/13 Repair, 9/11/14 Preventative, 3/7/16 Bovine Collagen Implant, 10/31/16 Implant Failure and Removal, 5/2/17 Cadaver Transplant.

plugged in. I developed intense stomach aches that lasted throughout high school. There were days when I was so anxious that I couldn't even make it out the door, or I would get to school and have to turn around. My anxiety began taking over my life. I was anxious when I had to get blood taken, when I had a test, and even when I had to talk on the phone with someone. All of these little things that made me anxious built me up to be one big apprehensive mess.

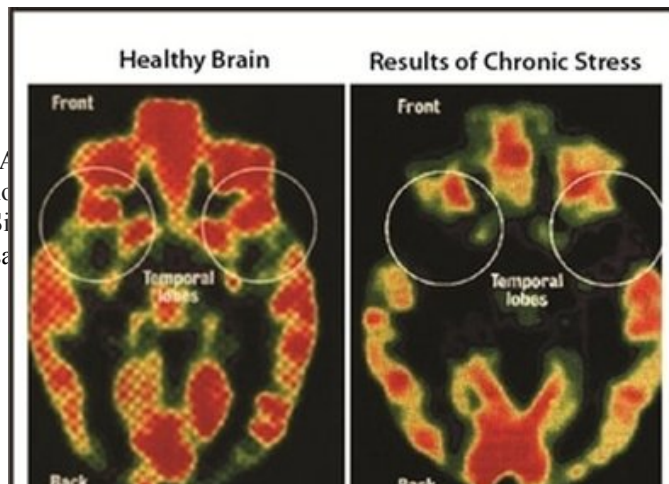
II. *The Facts*

There are three prominent aspects of my life: anxiety, identity, and family. These are the factors that have shaped my life and created the person I am today, both good and bad. These three categories can be view separately, but personally, I believe all three connect more than most aspects of one's life. Many people believe that their anxiety defines them or makes up a large part of their identity, but with a family and personal social interaction, feelings of tension, fear, and unease can be suppressed.

From personal experience, anxiety is one of the worst feelings in the entire world. An individual can calm it and work towards decreasing it, but there is truly no way to control the beast that consumes so many lives. Anxiety is something that can be inherited or can emerge out of the blue. Before the term "anxiety" was coined, the first phobia meeting was held in 1978 in White Plains, New York. At the time, anxiety disorders were called "phobias." At the meeting, "clinicians and patients discussed the need for a national organization to promote awareness of treatments for phobias (contextual or exposure therapies)." In 1980, a small dedicated group founded the Phobia Society of America, which later "became the Anxiety Disorders Association of America in 1990 [and then Anxiety and Depression Association of America] to reflect the changing and growing field." According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America⁴, nearly 18.1% of the American population suffers from anxiety disorder, and only 36.9% of those suffering receive treatment. Whether it be a generalized anxiety disorder, social anxiety disorder, depressive disorder, or post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety is a spreading mental illness that is plaguing generation after generation. Essentially, the brain responds directly to neurotransmitters⁵ like serotonin, GABA, or norepinephrine, and people who have anxiety may have a chemical imbalance in their bodies due to multiple sources of stress that are prolonged.



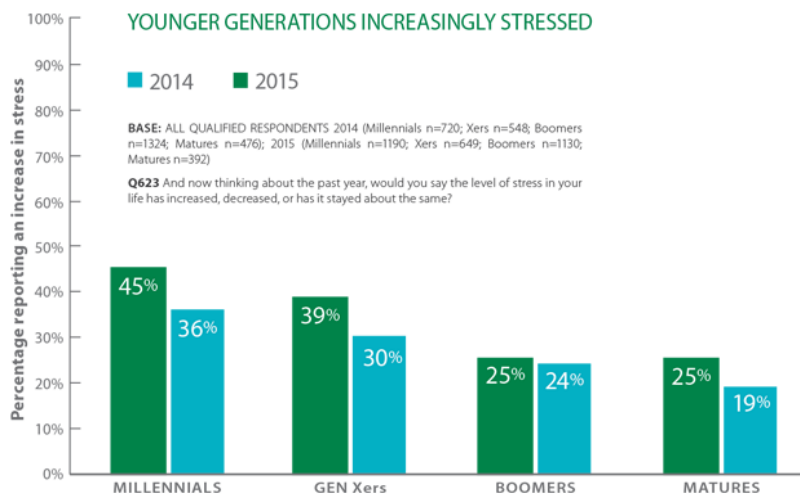
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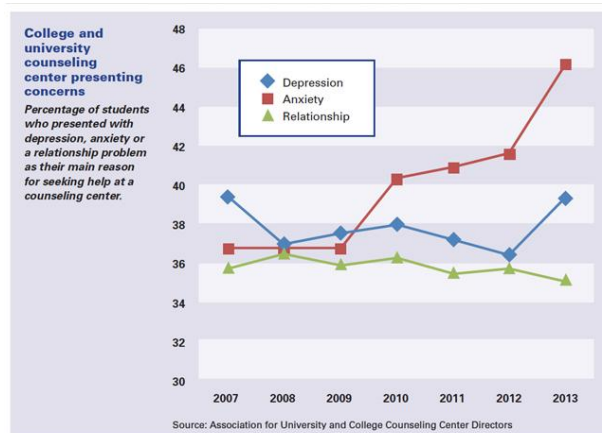
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ults.

Many people believe that anxiety is stress when really stress is a response to a threat in a situation and anxiety is a reaction to the stress. The belief that anxiety is just stress, is a common misconception in society, which contributes to the rapid growth of anxiety.⁷



With the increase of stress in younger generations (charts above⁸),



⁷ Images above illustrate the increase of anxiety

anxiety has more access to our lives, which can eventually cause serious problems including extreme fatigue, inhibitions to social interactions, weak immune systems, respiratory illnesses, and increased risk of high blood pressure and heart disease. Kids with insomnia have a higher chance of getting sick, which could lead to missing school or work, which could theoretically cause even more anxiety. Anxiety has also proven to be one of highest causes of social isolation. People with social anxiety avoid going out in public or going certain places out of fear of being embarrassed, panicked, or helpless. This avoidance is commonly due to a traumatic experience or the feeling that everyone is criticizing you when they are not. These days, anxiety rarely occurs alone⁹. Almost one half of people diagnosed with anxiety experience some sort of depression. There is not a designated list of symptoms for anxiety, everyone experiences it differently. Some people have a constant feeling of being worried, “tense, and jumpy”. Others have feelings of “apprehension or dread”¹⁰. Some people merely experience a feeling of their mind going blank. The list is never-ending. This makes anxiety a particularly difficult disorder to diagnose.

Two of the biggest contributors to increasing anxiety disorders are the escalation of relentless pressure¹¹ on younger generations and loss of communal connection in society¹². Humans are social people and when society becomes disconnected and distant (whether it be due to politics, economy, class, race, competition, etc.), it puts an internal strain on social connections. With an increase of technology and competition, we are becoming less unified¹³ and more vying. Competition and the desire to win are becoming increasingly more important to us as individuals and that simultaneously causes more anxiety. Kids and teens feel more overwhelmed and anxious than in previous years. High school curriculum, college application processes, tuition, and employment, are becoming increasingly more competitive and straining. A student from Mountain Valley Treatment Center says, “He already spent weeks challenging his own thinking, which often persuaded him that if he failed a single quiz at school, ‘then I’ll get a bad grade in the class, I won’t get into the college I want, I won’t get a good job and I’ll be a total failure.’” Kids have the feeling of never getting to the point where they can say, “I’ve done enough, and now I can stop.” People talk about physical health, but mental health is equally as important. Anxiety is on the rise and people need to be educated about the mental illnesses that are so prominent in our society.



Who are you? What is your purpose? Identity is something typically very important to people. Identity can be defined as “a condition or character as to who a person or what a thing is; the qualities, beliefs, etc., that distinguish or identify a person or thing.” Some people define

⁸ *American Psychological Association*, American Psychological Association, www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2015/snapshot.aspx.

⁹ Anxiety rarely shows up without other health or mental issues/illnesses

¹⁰ “Anxiety Disorders and Anxiety Attacks.” *Anxiety Disorders and Anxiety Attacks: Recognizing the Signs and Symptoms and Getting Help*, www.helpguide.org/articles/anxiety/anxiety-disorders-and-anxiety-attacks.htm.

¹¹ Pressure caused by society- College, employment, money, conforming to societal norms while also being successful

¹² Abrams Carlton Rachel. “Why Are So Many Teens and 20-Somethings Today Anxiety-Ridden?” *Thrive Global*, Thrive Global, 26 Jan. 2017, journal.thriveglobal.com/why-are-so-many-teens-and-20-somethings-today-anxiety-ridden-63180f8a8678.

¹³ We are becoming so invested in our technology and connecting through our devices, that we are not developing emotional and raw relationships

themselves through more obvious categories such as race, age, gender, social class, ethnicity, religion, or disability. Some people identify themselves by feelings or emotions or values. We typically can learn about our own identity through interactions with our family, peers, institutions, organizations, media, and even ourselves. Psychologist Erik Erikson¹⁴ believes that as youth, we must determine who we want to be and how we want to be perceived by others. The media uses different representations such as images, words, and characters to communicate ideas and values related to culture and identity in our society. Through media, we are able to share ideas, preferences and biases about our world. These ideas, preferences, and biases can make up our identities. Typically we are driven by our sense of identity. Our parents' ideas help us develop an outline for our cultural identity at a young age, and as we grow older we connect with new and different people allowing us to construct our own unique identity that can later guide us through life. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, an Indian jurist, economist, politician and social reformer, says, "Unlike a drop of water which loses its identity when it joins the ocean, man does not lose his being in the society in which he lives. Man's life is independent. He is born not for the development of the society alone, but for the development of himself." We are not born to become lost in the sea made my society. Life gives us the opportunity to create a diverse and interesting world; one where we can create ourselves. We are born to say, "who am I?" and "what is my purpose?"



How do we define a family? Traditionally, an immediate family may include spouses, parents, brothers, sisters, sons, and daughters that live in a home¹⁵. Today, one might define a family as a group of people who share similarities and form bonds together. Families and how we define them have developed substantially over the centuries. Early families typically consisted of a husband and wife who married early and stayed married until death, kids, and extended family. Women would stay at home and men would go out and work. Eventually, people began adopting kids into their families, single parents began raising families, same-sex marriages became legal, the invention of the birth control pill in 1960 changed how children were brought into families, and in 1969 states began adopting no-fault divorces¹⁶. The structures of families continue to grow and change along with society. Healthy relationships, such as families, have proven to lessen stress, better your health, and give your life a sense of purpose. With the continuous evolution of families, we can begin crafting ways to utilize families in a way that can benefit us as a society. As our culture changes, the definition of a family continues to become a more personal and close knit representation of the people we love.



Due to the development of society and the pressures that come along with it, my anxiety has become a large part of my identity. I don't want it to define me, but it does. My reality is that society has made me characterize myself by the characteristics that are wrong with me. My anxiety has connected me with my family more than most teenagers. My family is my main support system. Most of my friends talk about how their families cause them the most stress. I think it is normal for family members to cause each other a healthful little stress from time to

¹⁴ Erik Erikson was a German-American developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst known for his theory on psychological development of human beings. He is famous for coining the phrase identity crisis.

¹⁵ Created in 17th century towns when they decided to separate the workspace and living space.

¹⁶ A no fault divorce refers to a type of divorce in which the spouse that is filing for divorce does not have to prove any fault on the part of the other spouse. All a spouse has to do is give any reason that the state honors for the divorce.

time. It means that you are pushing each other and contributing to each other's lives. For me, I get a sense of consistency and stability from my family. They are the most important people to me. If we did not have families, we would have to learn a lot more things for ourselves and we would be indefinitely stressed. With the increase of anxiety in our society, I believe healthy relationships and personal connections allow individuals to feel happier and healthier. Even though I suffer greatly from anxiety, I believe that without my family, my anxiety would impact me more dramatically and negatively. If there is anything I have learned from anxiety, it is that life is one big soccer game and I will fall and go out of bounds and miss shots, but in the end, there are always goals and cheers from my family to get me through the game.

III. *Me*

I consider my immediate family to be my "family." They are the people that I connect with the most and that provide me with the most love and support. For instance, my mom and dad are my best friends. I argue with them all the time, as I imagine any teenager does with their parents, but they are always the first people I want to tell things to. I can't think of the last time that my mom wasn't the first person I told big news to. Even living 3,053 miles away, I call my mom before any other friend back home. Having a family connection is one of the strongest relations in our lives because it is a natural stress reliever¹⁷. Families allow us to have personal relationships, participate in more activities, and have a sense of inclusion. Family relationships are the connections that motivate us to get through the day and strive to live happier lives, especially, in times of stress and anxiety.

I think it is challenging for people, especially teens, to admit that they have some form of a disorder. These days, mental illnesses are made to sound unhealthy and different. It took me a very long time to admit to having anxiety. To this day, I still find it difficult to talk about anxiety. I always used to try and convince myself that I was just stressed out or having a bad day, but anxiety is something that lingers in the background. Once I finally realized I have anxiety, I didn't like talking about it because I knew people had bigger and more detrimental issues. Today, I realize how much havoc anxiety can cause people and that it isn't something that you should just brush off.

My social anxiety peaked in 9th grade. There were days, when I drove to school with my mom, and my throat would close up. It felt like I was drowning. My head would get dizzy and my eyes clouded with tears. I told my mom that I was not going to school. When she turned around to go home, everything cleared. This happened on days when I had my easiest classes and no quizzes. There was no way for me to control these anxiety attacks. I think many people don't understand that anxiety surprises us when we least expect it. School was always difficult for me. I continued having days where I couldn't make it out of bed, out of sheer fear of social interaction. I often question how I made it without falling into deep depression. My sophomore year of high school was the second most anxiety-ridden year of my life. May 2, 2017, wrecked me. I had flown all the way out to Chicago with my mom to get a meniscal transplant from one of the top knee surgeons in the country. I remember getting there the day before and being

¹⁷ "Friends & Family Could Be The Cure for Your Stress." *True Stress Management*, 16 Oct. 2017, truestressmanagement.com/family-cures-stress/.

extremely anxious. My mom took me out to get famous deep dish pizza¹⁸ to try and calm my nerves; something I wouldn't have been able to accomplish without her. We arrived at the hospital the morning of my surgery. Typically, the stomach aches I get before my surgeries are because I have no food or water in me, but this time I was clenching my stomach because of nerves. They gave me various pills before the surgery, one of which was valium,¹⁹ that calmed me down and made me a little groggy before I went under. Needles have always made me anxious, so before all my surgeries I request to have the nitrous oxide gas before I get an IV. Sometimes it works, and other times it doesn't. This happened to be one of the times that I suffered through being stabbed in the arm with a needle, and witnessed the large amounts of fluids enter my body through a tube. The anesthesia began making me groggy and the nurses wheeled me away, which is always the hardest part for me. There is a 5% chance that an individual will die in surgery due to the complications²⁰. This statistic was the last thing I thought of when I turned down the hall and my mom left my sight.

Although it can be dangerous and scary, anesthesia has always been my favorite part of surgery. There is something very soothing and peaceful about lying flat on a table with a heated blanket and no worries in the world. Thirty mere seconds of absolute stress-free emotions and complete relaxation. That's what family is for me. They cause me occasional stress, of course, but otherwise, they are what I resort to, to feel stress free and relaxed. My mom spent an entire week after that surgery, cooped up in a little hotel room keeping me happy and in company, listening to me read hundreds of my tweets at one in the morning and running out to the store to get me Chick-fil-a. She was by my side at 10 pm when I had health complications and felt like I was dying and my entire body was shutting down on me. Families are the people who can see when you are getting anxious and need a distraction. In Chicago, my mom could tell I was feeling anxious and worried and wheeled me through the city and Millennium Park, so I could see Cloud Gate. On the plane ride home, she held my leg on her lap and iced my knee for the entire 2.5 hours, even with her fear of flying. When I returned home, my mom spent day and night keeping me comfortable, bringing me food, getting me up and down stairs, helping me shower, and getting me out of the house when I was overanxious and feeling down. I was out of school for over a month. I give my mom 110% credit for getting me through junior year. If it weren't for her, I would not be graduating in 4 years. Family knows when they need to step in. It was my family's love and support that got me through the entirety of the recovery and anxiety that accompanied it.

Mid September 2018: A friend of mine, practically the sister of my best friend, died of a brain aneurysm. I did not know Maddie Potts very well, but we had talked a few times and I heard many amazing stories about her from my best friend, Liz. Her death allowed me to truly understand the importance of family. I consider my closest friends a part of my family. When Maddie died I could feel the stress and pain and mourning that my family was feeling. A traumatic experience like that causes anxiety and fear in a domino reaction. The people closest to them feel, and then the people close to them feel the radiating emotions, and it goes on and on. Personally, this loss has made me experience a new sort of anxiety. I live my life anxious about death and the idea that anyone I care about could die. I am anxious that the people I care about are going through hell and I can't see it or help. I am anxious that the people I care about won't

¹⁸ Chicago-style pizza refers to several different styles of pizza developed in Chicago. Arguably, the most famous of these is known as deep-dish pizza. AKA the most amazing and delicious pizza I have had in my life

¹⁹ Anxiolytic and sedative- It can treat anxiety, muscle spasms, and seizures.

²⁰ My inner hypochondriac coming out

be able to go on. I tried and am still trying to be there for my family as best as I can. I can only hope that my efforts provide even the slightest bit of support. When I saw Maddie's coffin, I realized that I had to be my family's knees. And while I was being the knees for my friends, my family were my knees and held me up for the time being. Having a family is important in times of need because they know when they have a role to play and they know when you might need a shoulder to lean on.

IV. *The Knee*

Similar to my discoid meniscus, too much unnatural stress on something gives it a higher chance of breaking. Too much stress on an individual makes them prone to getting anxiety. Like my transplant, a family can provide structure and support and decrease the odds of further injuries. With so much anxiety in our world, we are searching for new meditation and prescriptions when the most important medicine can be found in our family and relationships. Our relationships are what form us and help us get through the prominent and destructive pressures from society. Families add an extremely personal and intimate aspect to that, that friendships or other relationships might not provide. When I think of how my life would be without my family and relationships, I can only picture a life filled with panic and uncertainty and distrust. I can't imagine how I would be able to get through all of the problems and emotions in my life without the encouragement, loyalty, and support from my family. Without it, my life would be off balance.



Knees are one of the most supportive and important joints in our bodies. Without them, we would be repressed in many ways. They allow us to walk and get places while holding up the entirety of our body. We may take our knees for granted, but without them, we would most likely lead very difficult and different lives. Families are like our knees. They keep us going when the rest of our body wants to stop. Without a family, it would be very easy to fall.

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