



**The Early Origins of the #MeToo Movement:
Black and Racialized Experiences
Learning Network & Knowledge Hub Webinar**

by Kharoll-Ann Souffrant

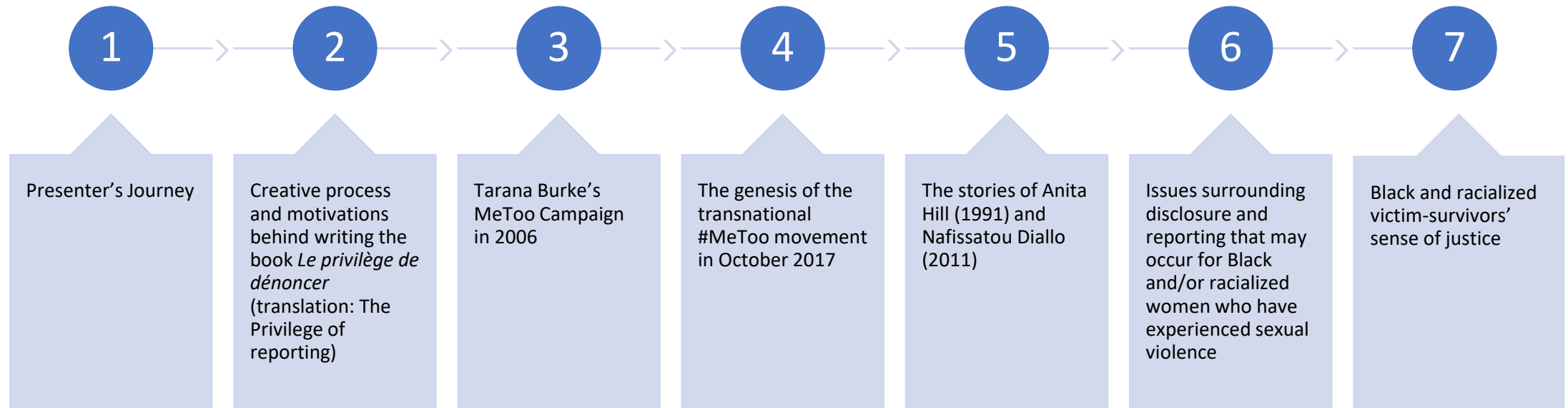
October 17, 2023

This presentation covers topics that may be difficult for some of you to hear.

- Feel free to take care of yourself during the presentation.



Presentation outline



Disclosure and Reporting

- **Disclosure (dévoilement)**: I use the term “disclosure” to refer to a person revealing the sexual violence they experienced or “telling their story” to anyone, whether it be friends, family or a dating partner, without necessarily engaging in a complaint process.
- **Reporting (dénonciation)**: The term “reporting” is used to refer to victim-survivors who report their experiences to authorities such as police, or institutions such as universities, and who engage in a formal complaint process.

The Sexual Violence Continuum (Kelly, 1987)

- “Sexual violence” refers to a series of acts of a sexual nature that violate the physical, psychological and sexual integrity of those targeted. It may occur with or without physical contact and may leave no visible or apparent injuries. In Canada, the legal term used is “sexual assault”. The *Criminal Code* contains a myriad of sexual offences, including sexual assault, which has been classified in three levels of ascending seriousness since 1983.
- Many feminists view sexual violence on a continuum to emphasize that **sexual violence includes a broad spectrum of violent acts and actions, some of which are not recognized as criminal.**
- Sexual violence has little to do with sexuality, but everything to do with **power, control and domination.**

The (false) Victim/Survivor Dichotomy

- Victim: considered more pejorative; on the other hand, allows us to recognize that we were not responsible for the violence suffered. Honours victims who have not survived the violence.
- Survivor: refers to the notion of “resilience”.
- ‘Experiencers of sexual violence’ or ‘personnes ayant vécu des violences sexuelles’ (Kalimah Johnson from SASHA Center)
- The process is more complex and non-linear
- Ultimately, it is up to each individual to self-define as she sees fit.

Author's Journey and Biography

Born in 1992 in Montreal to Haitian parents

Social worker by training and profession

What brought me to a helping profession

BSW and MSW (McGill University)

Master's Thesis on Sexual Assault

Doctoral student in Social Work (uOttawa)

Thesis project focuses on #MeToo from the perspective of Afrofemist activists

Teenage survivor



Photo credit: Chloé Charbonnier for Éditions du remue-ménage

RESPECT FOR THE DIGNITY OF
WOMEN DISCLOSING SEXUAL
ASSAULT: PERSPECTIVES OF
MONTRÉAL SOCIAL AND
COMMUNITY WORKERS
(master's thesis)

Under the supervision of Delphine Collin-Vézina,
Ph.D. (McGill University)

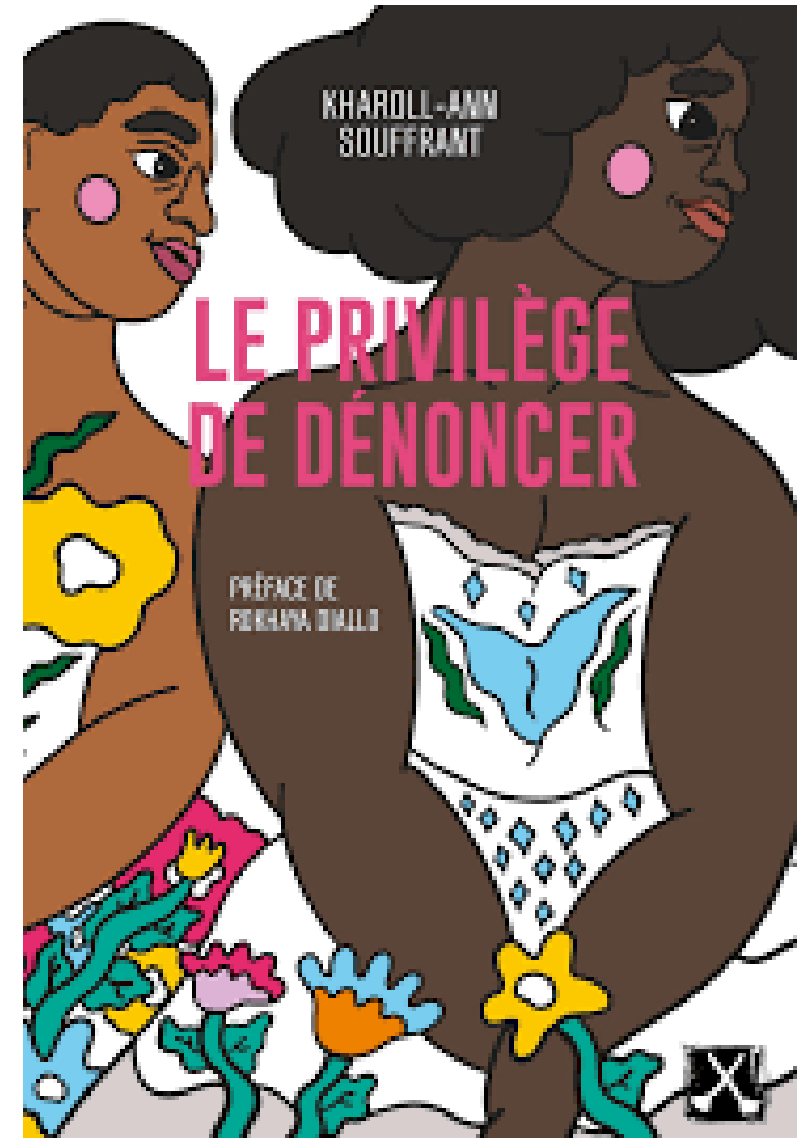


Interviews with a dozen social and community
workers living in Montreal

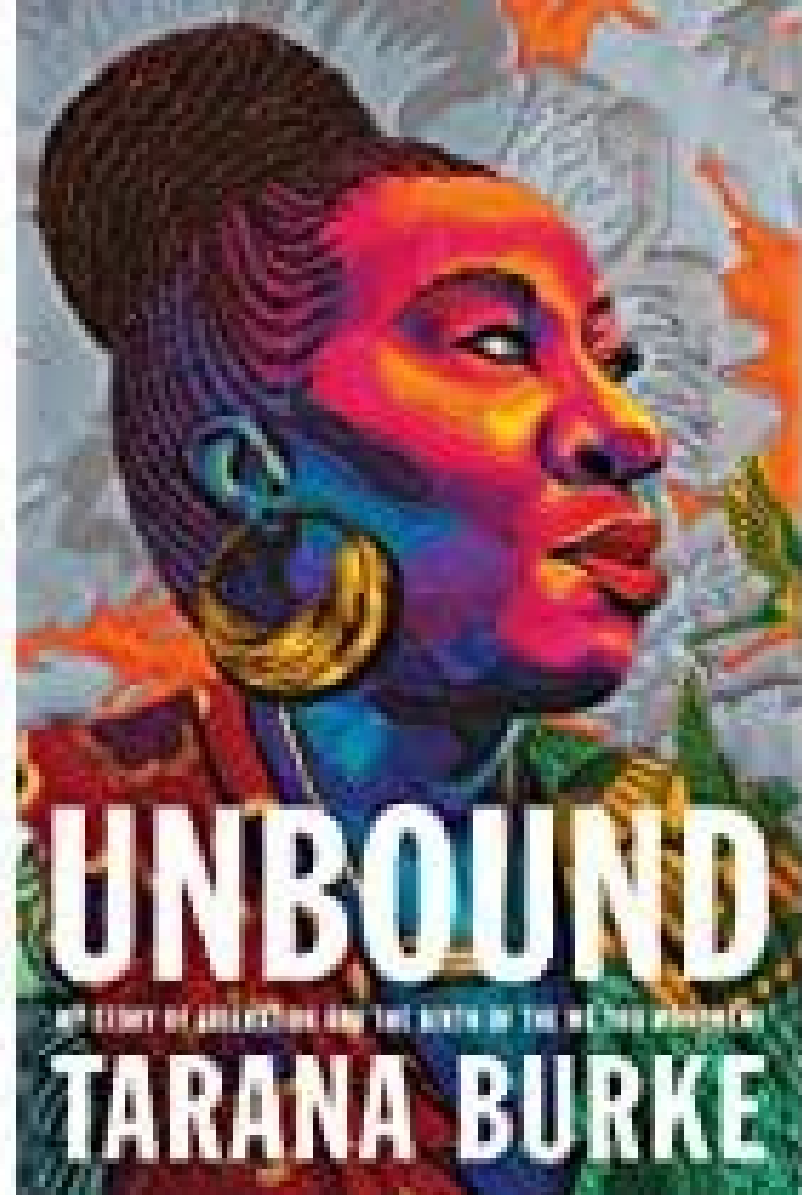
Results address how the dignity of victims/survivors
can be respected and the ways that dignity is not
respected, in a wide variety of settings and
contexts.

creative process and motivation behind the writing of the book

- Teenage Survivor, feminist engagement for several years, process changed in June 2020
- L'entonnoir (translation: The funnel), published in La Presse in July 2020
- Publishing contract signed with Éditions du remue-ménage in August 2020
- Why this book and title?
- Lack of identification with the discourse on the #MeToo movement and sexual violence in Quebec
- Media portrayal of the diversity of survivors' journeys
- Wanting to highlight blind spots in the current debate on sexual violence and the #MeToo movement



- “Sexual violence doesn’t discriminate, but the response to it does. In some ways, it is the great equalizer—no demographic or group is exempt—but the reactions to different people telling their stories are far from equal. That is largely why my work has always centered Black and Brown folks—particularly women and girls. The response to our trauma and our truths is wildly different than the response to white women’s.”



Tarana Burke dans Unbound: My Story of Liberation and the Birth of the Me Too Movement (2021, p. 242)

- In an interview with freelance journalist Christelle Murhula, in *Le Monde* magazine in France, Tarana Burke, the founder of the #MeToo movement, said that “[if] #metoo has become viral, it is because the victims were very privileged women. Rich, famous, and above all, white. Even Black celebrities were not included in the movement” (Tarana Burke quoted in Murhula, 2022, at para 3).



- A view also shared by Paris-based Cameroonian columnist Axelle Jah Njiké (2022), author of *Journal intime d'une féministe (noire)*: “[s]he has been rendered invisible, and this raises the question of the legitimacy of the stories. It was complicated to imagine that a black woman in her forties was behind one of the most important social movements of the century, universal to all women.”
- (Jah Njiké quoted in Murhula, 2022).



The “little” story of the great #MeToo movement

“This is a story that began in 1997 in Alabama. Tarana Burke is a day camp supervisor for mostly racialized and low-income girls. Heaven, 13, attends this day camp. She is known for her strong, or even difficult, temperament.

One day, Heaven asks to speak to Tarana Burke privately. The teenager then reveals that she was sexually assaulted by her mother’s boyfriend.

Tarana Burke is also a survivor of sexual violence. Yet she rejects the teenager after five minutes, unable to accept her confidence. Heaven then leaves the day camp, and never returns. Tarana Burke says to this day that she does not know what happened to her. In 2006, Tarana Burke launched the Me Too campaign, by and for racialized girls who have experienced sexual assault. This initiative was born of regret at not being able to respond “Me too” to Heaven.”

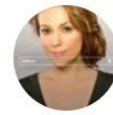
(Source: Souffrant, K-A-. (2020, April 17). Les origines premières du mouvement MoiAussi, published in La Gazette des femmes



Tarana Burke at the Women Deliver Conference, in Vancouver, in 2019

The October 2017 Transnational MeToo Movement

- Two investigations into Harvey Weinstein:
The New York Times (Oct. 5)
and *The New Yorker* (Oct. 10)
- Alyssa Milano's tweet
(October 15).



Alyssa Milano

@Alyssa_Milano

Follow



If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet.

Me too.

Suggested by a friend: "If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote 'Me too.' as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem."

1:21 PM - 15 Oct 2017

24,725 Retweets 53,346 Likes





The hashtag #MeToo goes viral in several countries including...

- France (#BalanceTonPorc), Quebec (#MoiAussi), Italy (#QuellaVoltaChe), Spain (#YoTambién), China (#我也是), Norway (#Stilleføropptak), Vietnam (#TôiCũngVậy), Tunisia (#EnaZeda), Iran (#همینطور_هم_من) and Russia (#МеняТоже), just to name a few.



Before and after #MeToo:
A look at police-reported sexual assaults in Canada

#MeToo

#MeToo

#MeToo's impact in Canada

Police-reported sexual assaults peaked after #MeToo



9 in 10 victims were female



Average daily number of police-reported sexual assaults



Increases after #MeToo

(Percentages reflect the increase in victims reported per average quarter)

Female victims under 25: +27%

Perpetrators aged 12 to 17: +25%

Victims who had a business relationship with perpetrator: +65%

On school grounds (Mostly elementary and high schools): +59%

(Percent increase between the last quarter [Oct-Dec] of 2016 and 2017)

Change in rate after #MeToo by province:



For more information, see the full *Justistat* article: Police-reported sexual assaults in Canada before and after #MeToo, 2016 and 2017.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey. Catalogue number: 13-627-X | BBI number: 978-0-660-28219-0

After the movement had reached its peak on social media...

- 24% increase in reporting to police across the country;
- 61% increase in Quebec (highest percentage in Canada for a province)
- For cities: Quebec City (+78%), Sherbrooke (+76%), Saguenay (+69%), Montreal (+67%), Brantford (Ontario) (+76%).

- According to the RQCALACS, requests for assistance increased from 100% to 533% within two weeks of Milano's tweet.
- Important: other waves of reporting occurred in Canada/Quebec prior to October 2017:

e.g. the Nathalie Simard-Guy Cloutier case (2004-2005)

#BeenRapedNeverReported / #AgressionNonDénoncée in 2014

#StopCultureduViol in 2016

July 2020

The anita hill-clarence thomas case (1991)





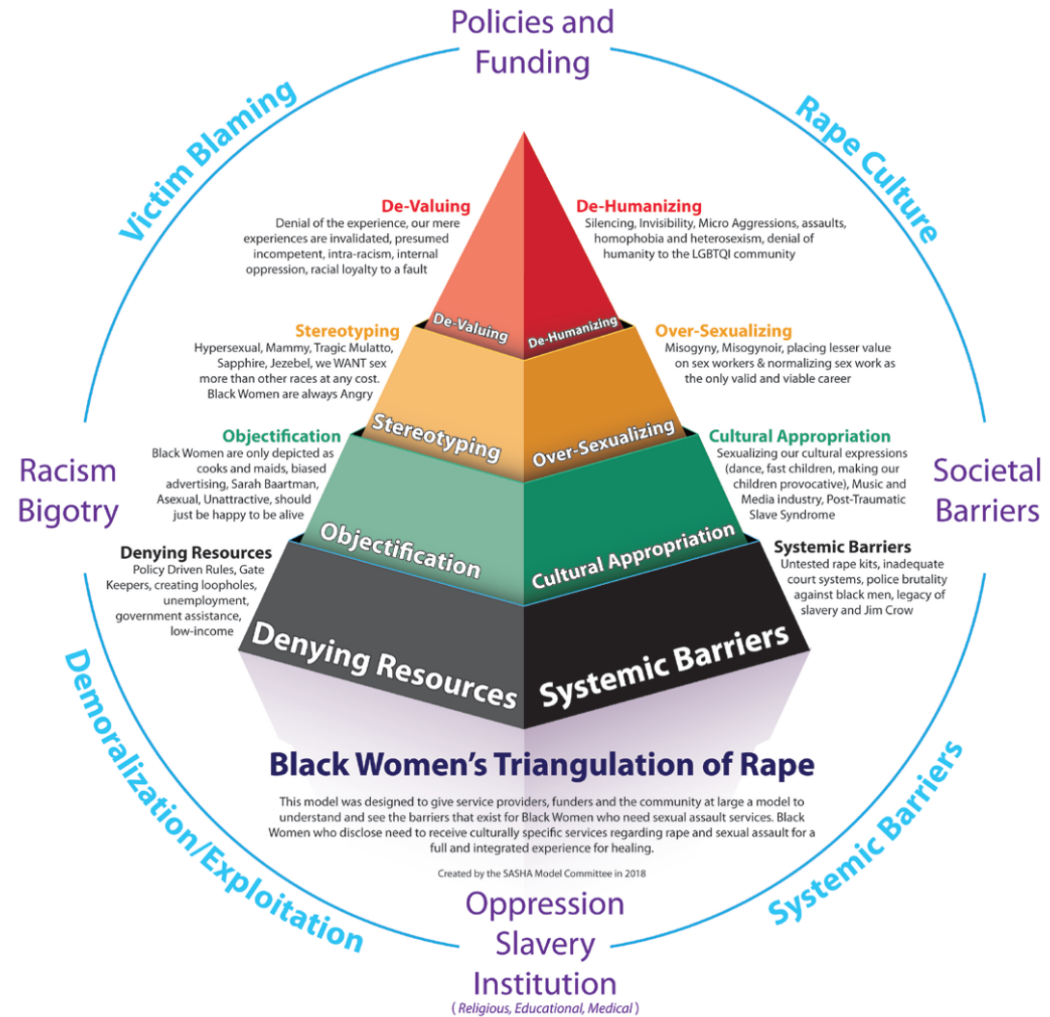
the nafissatou
diallo-dsk case
(2011)

Potential issues surrounding disclosure and reporting for Black and racialized women

- Possibility of being perceived as having “betrayed” their community if they disclose/report;
- Fear of reinforcing stereotypes about the sexuality of black women/men;
- Potential language-related issues (e.g. French/English);
- Immigration (e.g. fear of losing immigration status if not a Canadian citizen)
- Fear of not being believed, taken seriously, etc.
- Shame, taboo and modesty, fear of rejection by loved ones, friends and family
- Homophobia, transphobia
- etc.

The SASHA Model: Black Women's Triangulation of Rape

Black Women's
Triangulation of Rape
(Johnson, 2018)



the various functions of silence

Choosing silence: deciding to whom, how and why to share your story and what details you choose to silence or reveal

The Law of Silence: personal and institutional silence around sexual violence perpetuates the culture of rape and allows such violence to occur with impunity

Silencing: defamation lawsuits against survivors speaking out on social media or in the public space

What is justice in such a context?

- It is very important to break down what is meant by “justice”, beyond the punitive and prison systems.
- **Justice is a multi-faceted concept, and it is up to each victim-survivor to define it according to their experience of sexual violence.**
- Thus, in addition to filing a complaint with the police, it is important to know that justice can take the form of a civil remedy (which most often results in financial compensation from the offender to the victim), of a restorative justice process, or of a transformative justice process. For some, speaking out on social media can also be seen as a legitimate way to be heard.
- No victim-survivor is forced to use these avenues to obtain justice. Sharing their experience with family members, professionals or qualified workers in the field, getting involved in the fight against sexual violence or even getting involved in an artistic process are all legitimate, valid and diverse ways of experiencing one’s own healing process.

Some possible interventions...

- It's important to believe the victim. Thank the victim, honour her courage.
- Present the different options available for obtaining justice and reparation for sexual violence. Explore with her the potential positive and negative consequences of each of these options (cost-benefit analysis) while emphasizing that there is never a guarantee and that there is always some unpredictability. What she wants can also change and evolve over time.
- Recognize the role of anti-Black racism and misogyny (e.g. misogynoir) affecting Black women and girls;
- **Let her make her own decision.** Acknowledge that she may have doubts or fears, or feel ambivalent about her decision. All of this is normal.

Some possible interventions...

- Remember that many of the basic needs of Black women and girls who have survived sexual violence can be similar to those of victims of sexual violence in general – **the need to be heard, believed, listened to, recognized, validated, supported especially for day-to-day activities, supported regardless of which steps are taken and the need to be surrounded by a community.**

Some relevant resources...

- The Courage to Act – Resources for Gender Justice Advocates to Challenge Anti-Black Racism :
<https://www.couragetoact.ca/blog/antiblackracismresources>
- Collectif. (2018). *Témoigner de son agression à caractère sexuel sur internet. Fiches pour l'intervention*. Montréal: Services aux collectivités de l'UQAM/Regroupement québécois des CALACS/Je suis indestructible. :
https://sac.uqam.ca/upload/files/Temoigner_ACS_Internet_fiches_intervention.pdf
- Gómez, J. M. (2023). *The Cultural Betrayal of Black Women and Girls—A Black Feminist Approach to Healing From Sexual Abuse*. American Psychological Association.
- The Third Eye Collective : <http://thirdeyemontreal.com/>

Questions?



A decorative graphic on the left side of the slide features several overlapping envelopes in various colors: yellow, white, green, pink, and blue. The envelopes are arranged in a descending staircase pattern from top-left to bottom-right. The background is split into a light blue upper half and an orange lower half, separated by a curved white line.

Contact me

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