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CONFLICT AMONG THE ID, EGO, AND SUPEREGO IN WEDNESDAY ADDAMS: A FREUDIAN ANALYSIS OF NETFLIX'S WEDNESDAY

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Abstract

This article examines the psychological construction of Wednesday Addams in the Netflix series *Wednesday* (2022) through Sigmund Freud's structural model of the psyche. Using a qualitative, text-based design, the study analyses key scenes, dialogue, and decisions across the eight episodes of the first season and classifies them as expressions of the id, ego, or superego, with attention to defence mechanisms. Two questions guide the inquiry: how these psychic agencies shape the choices of fictional characters, and whether Wednesday's balance of id-driven truth-seeking and superego-driven ethics defines her character. The findings indicate that her id surfaces in retaliatory violence, reckless challenge, and compulsive curiosity; her superego in loyalty, protectiveness, and a demand for justice; and her ego in systematic investigation, puzzle-solving, and negotiated cooperation. Rather than occupying separate episodes, the three agencies recur in every instalment, and the series charts a gradual shift from impulsive retaliation towards reasoned, morally anchored action. Repression, dark humour, sublimation, and dissociation further explain her guarded emotional presentation. The article argues that Freudian categories remain productive heuristics for reading complex fictional characters in contemporary streaming television, provided the interpretive, non-clinical nature of such analysis is acknowledged.

Keywords: *Character Analysis, Defence Mechanisms, Freudian Psychoanalysis, Id, Ego, and Superego, Netflix Television, Psychoanalytic Film Theory, Wednesday Addams*

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1. Introduction

The television became one of the most powerful places that contemporary viewers are exposed to psychological complexity. The business model of streaming platforms, so to speak, has changed from DVD rental to on-demand global distribution and can now distribute serialised narratives to audiences around the world within a few days of their release (Sun, 2022). This is where the psychology of a story's central figure is often the main draw. Scriptwriters build up figures whose inner lives reveal themselves in words, in deeds, in a struggle; these build ups are open for the interpretative gaze a psychological gaze that has been applied to literature and cinema over the years (Herdayanti & Satria, 2021).

Comedy-horror show based on the Addams Family characters released Wednesday, 16 November 2022 and will be available on Netflix on 23 November. It was highly publicized for Jenna Ortega's acting and, three weeks after its launch, became the second most-watched English language series on the platform (POP, 2022). The series traces along the path of Wednesday Addams as she starts at Nevermore Academy and comes across a series of murders in the town of Jericho. Her no-nonsense approach, morbid fascinations and unwillingness to fit in make her a familiar figure in our culture, but also a very unusual object for psychological investigation. Previous studies have used psychoanalytical analysis of Addams's characters (Obeso, 2019), and this series is one new set of characters to explore in that vein.

Psychoanalysis, a psychological therapy developed by Sigmund Freud in Vienna in the 1890s, focused on the unconscious influences on behavior, first in the treatment of hysteria and neurosis (Psychoanalysis Psychology Sigmund Freud, 2022). Later, Freud theorises that the psyche consists of two contrasting agencies, the id which wants to indulge in its desires right now, and the superego which embodies moral values. The third is the ego, which acts as a mediator between the two. The model is a description of conflict, compromise, and prudence and self-regulation, and gives characters the useful language for describing characters who must choose between desire, duty, and prudence.

In this article, the result of a qualitative thesis study on first season of Wednesday is presented and two research questions are discussed. First, how do psychological concepts like the id, the ego and the superego influence the action of fictional characters

in stories like Wednesday Addams? Second, does the balance between id and truth seeking and superego and ethics that occurs on Wednesday influence her character throughout the series? The article offers a scene-by-scene mapping of her behaviour to Freudian categories, a consideration of the different ways her behaviour changes throughout the season, and a methodological consideration of the extent to which clinical theory can be applied to fictional minds. The rest of the article is a literature review, a description of the method, a presentation of the results, their discussion, and their conclusion.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1. The Structural Model of the Psyche

According to the structural model, the id is the most basic agency of personality. It exists from birth, is largely unconscious and is driven by the pleasure principle (the need for tension to be discharged as soon as possible). Its concerns are biological and instinctive, including hunger, sleep, thirst, and sexual desire, and its satisfaction, can be achieved through reflex actions or by being imagined (Koswara, 1991 as quoted by Herdayanti & Satria, 2021). The ego arises from the id as the channel through which one becomes conscious of the outside world. It takes decisions based on the reality principle on when and how much the impulse can be expressed, prioritizes competing instincts, and attempts to reduce risk while fulfilling the id's wishes. The superego represents the moral standards and social norms acquired from the environment. It produces conscience (guilt for wrongdoing) and the ideal ego (self-assessment of one's adherence to the standards of society). It can be as strict as the id because it is in opposition to the desire of the id for gratification.

Complementary model defence mechanisms. These are unconscious psychological mechanisms that allow the person to shield him- or herself from emotions of fear and anguish when the three agencies are active. Important concepts here are repression, humour, sublimation and dissociation, all of which refer to a method of the character hiding, changing or distancing oneself from unpleasant feelings whilst still being able to function.

There is a need for a clear understanding of character in order to be able to write fiction using such a model. Major characters have an important role in the story and take up a lot of the story space (Sayuti, 2000 as cited in Herdayanti & Satria, 2021), while characters can be identified by their role in the story, their physical features and what they actually say (Nurgiyantoro, 2007 as cited in Herdayanti & Satria, 2021). These criteria make it appropriate to regard Wednesday Addams as the focus and protagonist of the series.

2.2. Psychoanalysis and Film Theory

Film theorists have long resorted to psychoanalysis because cinema seems to have many traits in common with irrational thought: the images resemble dreams, and the

stories often repeat desire, fear and repression (Allen, 1999; MM, 2008). Psychoanalysis itself is used to uncover the hidden thoughts and feelings by following the present moment emotion to earlier experiences (MM, 2008). In the early 1970s, Jean-Louis Baudry suggested that the cinema apparatus resembles Plato's cave, it imposes passivity and a regression to the womb-like state to all spectators who have been influenced by it and accept the image as reality (Zumalde-Arregi, 2011). Pinker's contrast of cognitive theories of artworks as technologies of pleasure, and his audience's willingness to suspend beliefs to enjoy fiction is also reported by Zumalde-Arregi (2011).

In Freudian film theory, Krzewski (2016) separates four agents of the unconscious: filmmaker, character, audience, and cinematic discourse. The concept of reading films as the unconscious expression of the director, as in dreams or as a neurotic symptom is now considered to be an antiquated notion. The character-centred approach, which reads actions and speaking words as signals of unconscious motives, was attacked on the grounds that fictional characters have no minds of their own, but found credence in a shift of focus to audiences who identify with characters and cast their own fantasies and anxieties on them. The discourse approach, lastly, interprets the form of film, including editing that leaves out an emotionally charged moment, as a metaphor for repression. It is the character-centred approach that the present study takes, arguing on the audience-oriented principle that the audience is interested in Wednesday's psychology because it is a possible model of human psychology.

This is a tradition that has continued for a long time and is sustained by book-length surveys. Psychoanalytic ideas have influenced the interpretation of film, as Kaplan (2013), Gabbard (2018), and Sabbadini (2014) demonstrate, and the theories of multiple psychoanalytic thinkers, apart from Freud, can be used to analyse film texts as Indick (2004) demonstrates. As a collective, these works are deserving of a Freudian approach and a reminder for researchers that there are other options.

2.3. Feminist, Cultural, and Audience Perspectives

Feminist scholarship has honed psychoanalytical film criticism. Mulvey (2001) rethought the gaze and its gendered organisation of cinematic pleasure, and Gaines (1988) and Kaplan (2012) continued the discussion of the gaze, extending it to race, empire, and the politics of looking. Gledhill (1999) talked about the negotiations audiences go through to enjoy texts which are "returning to" and Walkerdine (1999) studied the intersection of family, film, and fantasy in the process of subjectivity. These contributions warn of not being able to analyze a female protagonist like Wednesday as a neutral psyche—because she's actively challenging expected behaviour of femininity, she's part of a meaning in her behavior. This focus is also echoed in related work: Backes (1990) explores feminine coming of age in modern American literature, and Roeder (1996) is a study in the assessment of authority figures in the lives of women leaders, as he did repeatedly in

Nevermore. Audience research fills in the rest. Such accounts as those of Stokes and Maltby (1999) document the history of the movie audience, Stephenson (1978) looks at the immediate experience of seeing a movie, Fecteau (n.d.) shows the role of the femme fatale as a powerful mother figure in film noir, and Rehak (2013) brings psychoanalysis into the world of the video game avatar. The results from these studies suggest that psychological interpretation of figures in the screen is a collective, culturally mediated process rather than a singular act of diagnosis.

2.4. Psychoanalytic Studies of Screen Characters

Specific screen characters are studied to show how the three agencies are assigned. The Joker's characterization as an almost wholly id driven, with no superego or conscience, and a point of view that ridicules and mocks society as a whole, and that his descriptions of fathers' abuse are the reason he rejects social norms has been analysed in The Dark Knight (Eassay, 2016). The agencies are distributed among a trio of characters—Harry is the superego, Hermione is the ego, and Ron is the id (H, n.d.). In World of Tomorrow, Emily Prime has been understood as an "ego" entity that's only just come into its innocent existence, signifying that her other psychic agencies are still somewhat undeveloped (Psychoanalysis Psychology Sigmund Freud, 2022). In the TV series You, analysis of Joe Goldberg reveals that all three agencies are residing within one person's protagonist, with the ego coming up with solutions that won't lead to more deaths, and the superego reminding him of his vows to his family (Stillistika, 2022). These precedents vary in the way that they distribute the agencies: some give each one to a distinct character, some place them in a single. The model of the present study, as well as Freud's, assumes that the agencies are parts of the same personality.

2.5. Defence Mechanisms in Wednesday Addams

Defence mechanisms offer an additional perspective on Wednesday's bizarre behaviour. There are four, identified by the thesis on which this article is based: repression, humour, sublimation, dissociation. The following are some of the ways in which these mechanisms attempt to explain her emotional restraint and are compared to the three agencies where relevant.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The study is interpretive design with a qualitative approach based on freudian psychoanalytic theory. Rather than measure or generalize, the goal is to gain insight into Wednesday Addams' motivation for her actions through the id, the ego, and the superego as well as defence mechanisms. The main data are 8 episodes from the first season of Wednesday, considered as a text corpus.

3.2. Data Selection and Analytical Procedure

The scenes were chosen purposively as they highlight important character development, family dynamics or plot developments. Transcriptions were made of key conversations, situations and interactions in the same way, allowing for the examination of behaviour, speech and emotional response to be considered together. Each unit was then identified as having a primary motive for each of the units in the list. Impulsive, immediate, and indifferent to consequences was assigned to the id; moral obligation, justice, social norms, and protection of others was assigned to the superego; deliberation, planning, and mediation between competing demands was assigned to the ego. Defence mechanisms were identified when there was emotional distancing or concealment. The classifications were summarised in a thematic mapping matrix, a tool of qualitative nature that does not make any statistical inference. To enhance credibility, the classification of each scene was compared with the dialogue and surrounding contextual elements, and the analysis was done in an iterative theoretical to textual manner, which is typical in interpretive research. The study is of one character in a bounded corpus and has analytical depth and theoretical illustration as its goal, not statistical generalisation; the thematic matrix given later should be read accordingly.

3.3. Ethical Considerations and Limitations

The study is based on a fictional character in a publicly available series, so there are no specific ethical concerns. The main drawback is the use of psychological theory in a fictional narrative, a subjectivity that involves interpretation of character. Classifications were based on one interpretation and were not independently coded and the corpus is limited to one season. This caution should be kept in mind when interpreting findings, as it is a theoretically informed interpretation, not a clinical conclusion.

4. Findings and Analysis

The first season of Wednesday's main character unfolds in the settings of Jericho, Nevermore Academy, and, for a short time, Nancy Reagan High School. The id, the ego and the superego are portrayed fully and repeatedly within her actions, reactions and interactions. Below each agency is discussed and then the representative events are thematically mapped and defence mechanisms are discussed.

4.1. The Id: Impulse, Retaliation, and Curiosity

The id shows itself best on Wednesday when it is ready to act in retaliation. In the first episode, she lets carnivorous piranhas into the school pool after the water polo team harasss her brother Pugsley and pushes him into one of the lockers, injuring the team's captain. The act is unfair and unconventional; it shows a preference for instant gratification over the norm of normal conflict resolution; shows a need to protect her family and exert power over those that harm her family. Later that episode she challenges the champion fencer Bianca Barclay to a duel without masks or tips, where the first time they get blooded

wins the duel. Her lack of safety gear has sacrificed consequences for a quick race, which is typical of id-driven actions.

In episode two, she attacks Bianca during the Poe Cup race, and in episode three her desire to get revenge on Joseph Crackstone is voiced as a belief in revenge as opposed to heaven or hell. In addition, the id is curious. She was a treasure hunter, a quest for knowledge and a fearless explorer of the hidden library and the missing page of the Nightshade Society book. In episode five, her curiosity sparks a confrontation with her father Gomez over the murder allegations; in episode six, she digs up Garrett Gates's body to uncover any clues to his murder; in episode seven, she faces off with Xavier over Rowan's inhaler and Eugene's glasses; and in the final episode, she interrogates Tyler via what she refers to as light torture. Her comment in the fourth episode that the dance prank involved paint and not real pig's blood is also a sign that she is into extreme experience, matching with her macabre sensibility.

4.2. The Superego: Loyalty, Justice, and Moral Standards

On Wednesday's superego is present whenever her behaviour is regulated by duty, justice or an internalised ethical system. Episode 1 she goes on a quest for the safety of Rowan after he sees himself in trouble and she instructs him to mind his own business but in a way that shows that she cares about what happens to people. In the second episode, she challenges Sheriff Donovan Galpin and Principal Larissa Weems over Rowan's death, demanding their honesty and accountability as a result of the scrubbed crime scene. The third episode is concerned with history as well: her research into Crackstone is an attempt to bring justice to the outcasts, and her interactions with Weems is a dramatization of the conflict between her rebellious id and institutional superego (the principal).

Here she rejects the school dance as a ritual of passage, one that does not validate its adherents' conformity, revealing a unique superego, one that measures conformity by an ideal of fidelity to oneself. In episode five, she feels a moral obligation to discover the truth about Garrett Gates's death, which is also a form of love for her father, and she devises a plan to get him out of prison without her parents going to jail. She treats Tyler's wound and never leaves him in episode six, showing that she cares. In episode seven, she allows herself to go out on a date with Tyler, and accepts his attempt at kissing her, a rare act of conformity with common adolescent norms that pushes the superego to conform to the expectations of her environment. In the last episode, when she visits Xavier in prison, she admits that she should have trusted him and pleads with him for peacefully and ethically providing her with some information.

4.3. The Ego: Method, Mediation, and Self-Determination

The ego comes out when Wednesday takes the place of impulse. The second episode, she systematically searches through Rowan and Xavier's room, just as she does in the first episode, to find out what has happened to Rowan, but she doesn't do it emotionally.

At the end, she uses reasoning to solve the riddles on the Edgar Allan Poe monument by figuring out each riddle and its answer is a line, thus finding the hidden library. The ego is also a vehicle for self-definition: In the first episode she says that she does not want to follow in her parents' footsteps, that she wants to have a separate identity. She demonstrates confidence with authority in the third episode when she inquires of Principal Weems why she is involved in the secret of what has happened to Crackstone.

In the fourth episode, she decides to go running to the woods after visualizing an attack on Eugene, but this is a balance of instinct and reality, in that she does not rush in blindly, but rather according to what is required. In episode five she looks at her father's confession from an objective perspective and realizes it makes sense, but doesn't believe it. In episode six she decides to go back for the injured Tyler, a brave but responsible choice. In episode seven she seeks counsel from Uncle Fester on Nathaniel Faulkner's diary, and decides to venture into the Nightshades library, along with curiosity (id) and moral purpose (superego), with disciplined research. In the last episode it is not through violence that she reasons with Xavier but through reason and at the end finds out that Tyler is Hyde.

4.4. Thematic Mapping of Key Events

Table 1 organises representative events from all eight episodes into a thematic mapping matrix. It condenses the preceding analysis and shows how the three agencies are distributed across the season.

Table 1. Thematic Mapping of Key Narrative Events to Freudian Components in Wednesday (Season 1)

Episode	Narrative Event / Action	Psychoanalytic Component	Psychological Manifestation
Episode 1	Releasing piranhas into the school pool to punish the bullies of her brother Pugsley	**Id**	Instinctive, immediate retaliation without regard for consequences; assertion of power on behalf of family.
Episode 1	Pursuing Rowan into the woods to warn him of danger	**Superego**	Sense of duty and responsibility for the welfare of others.
Episode 2	Attacking Bianca during the Poe Cup race	**Id**	Aggression and the drive to prove superiority.
Episode 2	Questioning Sheriff Galpin and Principal Weems about the Rowan cover-up	**Superego**	Commitment to honesty, accountability, and justice.

Episode 2	Decoding the Poe monument riddles and searching Rowan's room with Thing	**Ego**	Rational, methodical problem-solving in place of impulse.
Episode 3	Confronting Principal Weems about the concealed history of Crackstone and outcasts	**Superego (with Ego)**	Moral stand against historical injustice, delivered with self-assurance before authority.
Episode 4	Dismissing the school dance as an unnecessary rite of validation	**Superego**	Ideal of fidelity to the self, used to judge social conformity.
Episode 4	Running into the woods after a vision of Eugene in danger	**Ego**	Instinct to protect balanced against a realistic assessment of what is required.
Episode 5	Digging up Garrett Gates's body and confronting Gomez	**Id**	Persistent, instinctive pursuit of truth despite family distress.
Episode 5	Doubting her father's confession and weighing it objectively	**Ego**	Independent reasoning and a sense of fairness.
Episode	Narrative Event / Action	**Psychoanalytic Component**	Psychological Manifestation
Episode 6	Treating Tyler's wound and returning for him	**Superego**	Empathy and loyalty toward a friend in need.
Episode 7	Researching Hyde with Uncle Fester and planning to enter the Nightshades library	**Ego**	Curiosity (id) joined to moral purpose (superego) through disciplined research.
Episode 8	Interrogating Tyler through so-called light torture	**Id**	Harsh, impulsive tactics driven by strong emotion and need for answers.
Episode 8	Reasoning with Xavier in prison and identifying Tyler as Hyde	**Ego**	Dialogue replaces violence; mediation between impulse and morality.

Note. Classifications reflect the dominant motive of each event and are interpretive.

The matrix indicates that all episodes have at least one id-driven, superego-driven or ego-driven event, and some episodes have all three. The id dominates in provocation/danger situations, the superego dominates in injustices/vulnerability situations, and the ego dominates in investigative situations. Notably, the one event coded as Superego (with Ego) shows how in practice, the agencies overlap: Wednesday's challenge to authority is at once moral and a display of good self-assurance. This overlapping of events isn't an analytical shortcoming; it's evidence that the model represents interacting forces in one personality.

4.5. Defence Mechanisms

In addition to the three agencies, the series features Wednesday through defence mechanisms. Repression is seen in her emotional lack with family and peers, she hides her own emotions. Dark humour, irony and sarcasm, such as expressing a complaint about the use of paint for blood instead of blood, erect a psychological barrier between her and the events that upset her. Her fixation on death and the supernatural could be interpreted as a manifestation of sublimation, whereby she has transformed her overwhelming emotions into constructive activities and projects. Her coldness is also like dissociation, where she is detached from her emotions and environment so she doesn't get overwhelmed as she interacts with the strange world of the Addams household.

5. Discussion

The results address the first research question by demonstrating that the id, ego and superego do not function in a sequential manner or a hierarchy of stages. Wednesday's decisions are seldom just the doing of one agency. First, the piranha attack is an id-driven action, but is motivated by loyalty to her brother (superego value); second, the investigation of the hidden library starts in curiosity but then proceeds in puzzle-solving by the use of the ego. This interpenetration is in line with the structural model, which conceives personality as a result of a conflict and compromise, rather than isolated impulses.

A methodological point is also revealed by the analysis. The same search for truth was deemed id-driven if it was reckless, and superego-driven if it was toward justice and Wednesday's standoff with Principal Weems in episode three can be interpreted as a voice of conscience or as an ego-based sense of self-assurance. Classification therefore is dependent on the intention that the analyst assigns to an act; the division between agencies is therefore fuzzy. This should not be interpreted as undermining the cautious stance of film theorists, who are less inclined to advocate a psychoanalytical interpretation of film than to argue that such an interpretation is an interpretation open to the audience's justification, but not a diagnosis (Krzewski, 2016; Allen, 1999).

The distinctiveness of Wednesday is illustrated when compared with previous

studies. The Joker is an id-dominated character with no conscience (Eassay, 2016), while Wednesday has a robust superego which constantly confronts institutional corruption. In the present series, the distribution of the agencies is focused in one protagonist, as in the analysis of Joe Goldberg (Stilistika, 2022), while Harry Potter does it in three friends (H, n.d.). The Goldberg comparison is relevant: his ego comes up with answers to uphold promises he made, whereas Wednesday's ego is directed at gathering evidence and expressing her moral outrage. Her case is also an interesting complement to Obeso's (2019) study over the Addams Family, in which he says that the characters of the franchise can be psychoanalyzed in adaptations.

The second research question is whether a balance of id-driven truth-seeking and superego-driven moralizing is the primary determinant of her character. The evidence indicates that it does. In the earlier ones, the emphasis is placed on impulsive responses to events, such as the piranhas and the unmasked duel, while the latter emphasize careful probing of events, sympathy for Tyler, explicit calling out of morals on Xavier, evaluation of her father's confession. There doesn't seem to be a straight path there as the last episode has some pretty brutal questioning yet the ego's presence grows stronger. Finally, this can be seen as a negotiation between a defiant adolescent identity and the demands of institutions and peers, as found in investigations of feminine coming of age (Backes, 1990).

The study also plays a role in the discussion of the possibility of a legitimate psychoanalysis of fictional characters. According to critics, such numbers lack their own unconscious (Krzewski, 2016) and this is correct provided analysis is interpreted as clinical diagnosis. It has less weight when analysis is not meant as an explanation of what motives, conflicts, and compromises a character is called upon to embody when he is called upon by the text to be viewed as embodying some of them. On this interpretation, Wednesday is psychologically readable because it contains the elements (speech, action, consequence) from which a Freudian reading can be constructed; and because the viewers' interpretive schemas are added to those elements to make a whole (Sabbadini, 2014; Gabbard, 2018).

In practice, the study gives teachers an easily accessible example of the abstract psychoanalytical ideas, writers a blueprint on how different psychic powers make believable characters, and interdisciplinary discussions between the fields of psychology and media studies. The analysis could be extended to later seasons, with the use of more than one independent coder, and comparison with other adolescent protagonists, as well as empirical study of viewers' reception experiences (following research on the experience of the viewer, e.g. Stephenson, 1978; Stokes & Maltby, 1999).

6. Conclusion

This article has applied Freud’s structural model to Wednesday Addams in the first season of Netflix’s Wednesday. Analysis reveals that her id is expressed in vengeful

actions and inquisitive curiosity, her superego in loyalty, justice, and moralizing and her ego in systematic inquiry, objective reasoning and the assertion of independent identity. Physical and psychological defenses, like repression, dark humor, sublimation and dissociation, help explain the guarded facades which mask these processes. Throughout the season the id's truth-seeking influence versus the superego's ethical influence guide her development as the ego becomes more of a moderator. The study's main conclusion is that it seemed there was a change from retaliation to reasoned action.

The results confirm the idea that psychoanalytic theory can also be used as a fruitful method of examining complex fictional characters, as long as its interpretative nature and the limitations of clinical concepts in fiction are recognized. The study brings together psychological theories and present day TV storytelling, providing a contribution to literary and media studies, teaching resources for psychology and literature, and a better understanding for the creators and viewers of how personality can be portrayed and interpreted on the screen.

These conclusions are subject to several qualifications. The analysis is on a fictional character and one season of a fictional series, based on one interpretive approach, and not based on audience data. Further research could then be conducted on later seasons, with other adolescent protagonists, and with textual analysis and viewer research. However, the repetition of the three agencies in eight episodes indicates that Freud's notions remain relevant as they continue to explain the experience of television as a representation of the conflict between impulse, conscience, and reason in the present. Wednesday Addams is not only an entertaining figure, in this sense, she is also a case study in the timeless nature of psychoanalysis in the understanding of human nature, in fictional story and in the world of fiction.

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