



Personality Traits

Instructor Manual

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In this module, *Personality Traits*, the authors explain what personality traits are, as well as offering an overview on the most popular model of personality, the Five-Factor Model. The author then provides students with other approaches to understanding personality, as well as a discussion on the person-situation debate.

Learning Objectives

- Relevant APA Learning Objectives (Version 2.0)
 - Describe key concepts, principles, and overarching themes in psychology (1.1)
 - Develop a working knowledge of psychology's content domains (1.2)
 - Describe applications of psychology (1.3)
 - Demonstrate psychology information Literacy (2.2)
 - Engage in innovative and integrative thinking and problem solving (2.3)
 - Build and enhance interpersonal relationships (3.3)
 - Interact effectively with others (4.3)
 - Apply psychological content and skills to career goals (5.1)
 - Exhibit self-efficacy and self-regulation (5.2)
- Content Specific Learning Objectives: Personality Traits
 - List and describe the "Big Five" ("OCEAN") personality traits that comprise the Five-Factor

Model of personality.

- Describe how the facet approach extends broad personality traits.
- Explain a critique of the personality-trait concept.
- Describe in what ways personality traits may be manifested in everyday behavior.
- Describe each of the Big Five personality traits, and the low and high end of the dimension.
- Give examples of each of the Big Five personality traits, including both a low and high example.
- Describe how traits and social learning combine to predict your social activities.
- Describe your theory of how personality traits get refined by social learning.

Abstract

Personality traits reflect people's characteristic patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Personality traits imply consistency and stability—someone who scores high on a specific trait like Extraversion is expected to be sociable in different situations and over time. Thus, trait psychology rests on the idea that people differ from one another in terms of where they stand on a set of basic trait dimensions that persist over time and across situations. The most widely used system of traits is called the Five-Factor Model. This system includes five broad traits that can be remembered with the acronym OCEAN: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. Each of the major traits from the Big Five can be divided into facets to give a more fine-grained analysis of someone's personality. In addition, some trait theorists argue that there are other traits that cannot be completely captured by the Five-Factor Model. Critics of the trait concept argue that people do not act consistently from one situation to the next and that people are very influenced by situational forces. Thus, one major debate in the field concerns the relative power of people's traits versus the situations in which they find themselves as predictors of their behavior.

Class Design Recommendations

This module can be taught in a single class period or less, with the unit as a whole taking 1-2 class periods. Please also refer to the Noba PowerPoint slides that complement this outline.

1st class period (25 min – 40 min):

- Overview
 - What is personality?
 - What do we mean by personality traits?
- The Big 5
 - OCEAN
- Other Approaches
- Person v. situation debate

Module Outline

Introduction

- Personality is the characteristic ways that people differ from one another. Personality psychologists try to describe and understand these differences. We can best understand the differences between individuals by understanding their personality traits. Personality traits reflect basic dimensions on which people differ. An important feature of personality traits is that they reflect continuous distributions rather than distinct personality types.
- There are three criteria that characterize personality traits: (1) consistency, (2) stability, and (3) individual differences.

The Five-Factor Model of Personality

- If we want to understand the fundamental ways in which people differ from one another, we can turn to the words that people use to describe one another (lexical hypothesis). Research that used the lexical approach showed that many of the personality descriptors found in the dictionary overlap. Statistical methods (specifically, a technique called factor analysis) helped to determine whether a small number of dimensions underlie the diversity of words identified. The most widely accepted system to emerge from this approach was

“The Big Five” or “Five-Factor Model”

- Scores on the Big Five traits are mostly independent.
- Traits are important and interesting because they describe stable patterns of behavior that persist for long periods of time. These stable patterns can have broad-ranging consequences for many areas of our life.

Facets of Traits (Subtraits)

- There is value in considering lower-level units of personality that are more specific than the Big Five traits (i.e., facets). Although personality researchers generally agree about the value of the Big Five traits as a way to summarize one’s personality, there is no widely accepted list of facets that should be studied.

Other Traits beyond the Five-Factor Model

- Despite the popularity of the Five-Factor Model, it is certainly not the only model that exists. Some suggest that there are more than five major traits, or perhaps even fewer.
- Hans Eysenck suggested that Extraversion and Neuroticism are most important. Eysenck believed that by combining people’s standing on these two major traits, we could account for many of the differences in personality that we see in people.
- Another revision of the Big Five is the HEXACO model of traits. This model is similar to the Big Five, but it posits slightly different versions of some of the traits and adds Honesty-Humility as a sixth dimension of personality.
- Researchers have suggested other traits that capture interesting aspects of our behavior (e.g., need for achievement, need for cognition, narcissism, etc.)

The Person-Situation Debate and Alternatives to the Trait Perspective

- If one looks closely at people’s behavior across many different situations, the consistency is really not that impressive. The person-situation debate pitted the power of personality against the power of situational factors as determinants of behavior that people exhibit. Therefore, instead of studying broad, context-free descriptions, like the trait terms we’ve described so far, Mischel thought that psychologists should focus on people’s distinctive reactions to specific situations (e.g., when are students more likely to cheat on a test? When

no one is proctoring it? When they know there are limited consequences?). Thus, Mischel thought that specific behaviors were driven by the interaction between very specific, psychologically meaningful features of the situation in which people found themselves, the person's unique way of perceiving that situation, and his or her abilities for dealing with it.

- As is often the case, it turns out that a more moderate middle ground than what the situationists proposed could be reached. It is certainly true, as Mischel pointed out, that a person's behavior in one specific situation is not a good guide to how that person will behave in a very different specific situation. Research conducted after the person-situation debate shows that on average, the effect of the "situation" is about as large as that of personality traits. However, it is also true that if psychologists assess a broad range of behaviors across many different situations, there are general tendencies that emerge.
- Personality traits give an indication about how people will act on average, but frequently they are not so good at predicting how a person will act in a specific situation at a certain moment in time. Thus, to best capture broad traits, one must assess aggregate behaviors, averaged over time and across many different types of situations.

Difficult Terms

- Continuous distributions
- Factor analysis
- Person-situation debate
- Facets
- Lexical hypothesis
- Openness
- Conscientiousness
- Neuroticism
- Extraversion
- Agreeableness
- Personality trait

Lecture Frameworks

Overview

As with many of the topics we cover in Intro, personality is fun to teach because it's so relatable for students. When you think about it, your students are constantly meeting new people (e.g., in the dorms, in their classes each semester, in student groups, etc.), and they often need to describe and understand what these people are like (e.g., my roommate is messy/tidy/responsible, etc.). As a result of a lifetime of experience, students have an implicit understanding of personality. That means your job is to formalize that knowledge and let them know what research says about personality!

- Discussion/Warm-Up
 - You could start this section off by asking students to describe themselves – give them a minute or so to jot down five words that describe their personality. Note: make sure you ask them to describe their personality, not their roles (sister, teammate) or other attributes (tall, brunette). Consider having them share descriptions in small groups or with the class as a whole. You can use the debriefing to this warm-up activity to formally introduce main concepts: traits, trait stability, etc.
 - An alternative approach to the above suggestion is to assign your students to take a quick Big 5 assessment out of class and to bring their results to class (see activities/demonstrations, below). Then, once you have introduced the concept of personality and personality traits, you can use the assignment to segue into discussing the Big 5.
- Lecture – Refer to slides for the following:
 - Begin by introducing the idea of traits, a defining feature of which is some degree of stability. Refer to the slide for a more in-depth discussion of the concepts of consistency and stability.
 - To introduce The Big 5—Five Factor Model
 - Compared to many concepts students will learn throughout the semester, the five factor model of personality is relatively easy to comprehend. This means you can spend less time lecturing and more time applying and discussing the concepts.
 - One fun way to present the personalities is using characters from popular media to illustrate each of the Big 5 (e.g., you could use the cast of popular TV shows, public

figures or widely known stories such as Harry Potter, etc.). Of course, not all students will be familiar with such references, so make sure to explain *how* that character exemplifies that personality characteristic. Even better, show a clip.

- To add to your discussion of the Big 5, you can also talk about life outcomes associated with each trait (e.g., neuroticism is related to relationship quality, perceptions of life satisfaction, physical well-being, etc.).
- Class Activity: The Big 5
 - Now is also a good time to include the activity from the beginning of class (whichever one you picked). If you had students describe themselves, have them go back and match each of their descriptors with one of the Big 5 traits (e.g., if they described themselves as organized, that would be describing conscientiousness; if they described themselves as social or outgoing, that would be extraversion; adventurous might be openness). If you had them take a Big 5 assessment, ask them to do a short mini-writing describing their personality according to the Big 5 (see activities/demonstrations, below).
 - Next, introduce the facets of the Big 5 traits. It is here, in the facets that students will get a more nuanced understanding of these traits. Again, the material is relatively straightforward to understand which will leave more time for discussion.
 - Lecture – Refer to slides for the following:
 - To look beyond the Big 5: If you have time and are interested, you can also teach students about other approaches and personality traits (e.g., Eysenck, see slides). This should help students to understand that describing behavior can be complex and that there isn't a single way that perfectly captures personality. If you want to talk about some of the traits, here are some ideas for examples you could use:
 - Machiavelli: Little Finger from Game of Thrones, Francis from House of Cards, Tony Soprano from the Sopranos, President Snow from the Hunger Games, Vee from Orange is the New Black
 - Narcissism: Gilderoy Lockhart from Harry Potter, Ron Burgandy from Anchorman, Dr. House from House, Barney from How I Met Your Mother, Gaston from Beauty and the Beast, Michael Scott from The Office.
 - Optimism: Kenneth from 30 Rock, Olaf from Frozen, Michael J. Fox (you could read a few excerpts from his interviews or book), J.D. from Scrubs, Marshal from How I Met Your Mother

- To talk about the Person-Situation debate. It's important that remind students that personality isn't destiny – that is, just because someone is an “introvert” doesn't mean he/she will behave that way all of the time. To really demonstrate this concept, you can talk about the differences in behavior that occur in a library vs. a concert. In a library, almost all people are quiet (including extraverts); in a concert, most people are outgoing, yelling, and dancing (including introverts). This helps students understand that while personality may predict a lot of behavior over time (i.e., the consistency and stability you mentioned at the beginning of lecture), that the situation is also useful in understanding and predicting behavior.

Activities & Demonstrations

Personality Profile (Part I): In and Out of Class Activity

This in-class mini-writing is designed to help students apply the information on the Five Factor Model of personality.

- Time: Out of class: 15 minutes; In class: 5-10 minutes
- Materials: Link to personality assessment, students need to print their results and bring to class, pen and paper.
- Directions:
 - First, you will need to assign the survey ahead of time. Students should complete the survey outside of class and bring the results with them to class (so they can use the results for their mini-writing).
 - Once you have gone over the Big 5 in class, have students write about their personality based on their results and what they learned. Make sure you explain that you want them to *apply* the information, not just state whether they were high or low on certain traits. That is, have them explain the behaviors associated with each trait (e.g., I scored very highly on conscientiousness, which means that I am more likely to be on time, organized, and follow through with my commitments).
- Links to Big 5 Assessments (choose one)

- <http://www.utpsyc.org/Big5/>
- <http://www.outofservice.com/bigfive/>

Observing Personality: In-Class Demonstration

This demonstration is designed to help students observe personality in an applied setting. This activity can take quite a bit of time, but is a fun way to get students up and out of their seats.

- Time: 25 minutes for demo and writing
- Materials: only pen and paper for writing
- Directions:
 - Have students get into medium or large groups (8-15 students depending on your class size). Once they are in groups, let them know that they will be making a human obstacle course – where most of the students are the obstacles and one group member goes “through” the obstacle. Depending on your classroom, you may need to do this in a hallway, common area, or outside. Also, make sure to emphasize safety while giving instructions.
 - Give them about 10 minutes to build their course – it will take a few minutes for them to stop feeling awkward and to brainstorm ideas. Once they start to feel comfortable, they will put their idea into action. If you want, you can give a point or two of extra credit to the team that comes up with the best obstacle course (you will be amazed at how creative some groups get).
 - Once all obstacle courses have been completed, students return to their seats and complete a mini-writing on their experience. For example, you can ask students to describe their group members in terms of their Big 5 traits (no names necessary). Because this activity is a little extreme, students tend to notice the spectrum of traits. For example, some students are open to the idea from the get go and jump right in, others need a little time to observe and warm-up to the idea (openness). Some students happily go along with the group’s ideas, others may be aggressive in asserting their own vision (agreeableness). Some students clearly feel comfortable with their new group members and engage them in discussion (extraversion).
 - Note: this activity takes a few minutes for students to warm-up to (there is a lot of personal contact and group dynamics). Your job is to keep encouraging them – they will eventually get into it and you will be blown away by how creative they can become. It

creates a rich experience from which they can draw-upon for their mini-writing.

Additional Activities

Fernald, P. S., & Fernald, L. (2008). The Sentence Completion Test: Assessing personality. In L. R. Benjamin (Ed.), *Favorite activities for the teaching of psychology* (pp. 196-200). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.

- This is an excellent vehicle for discussing the nature and application of personality testing. Students are exposed to a real test in an engaging yet safe and ethical way. Advance preparation is minimal, and no prior knowledge of psychology is necessary. The activity is appropriate for classes of any size.

Kerber, K. W. (2008). What is personality? A personal appraisal. In L. R. Benjamin (Ed.), *Favorite activities for the teaching of psychology* (pp. 193-195). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.

- This activity helps students identify and examine their implicit personality theories and makes personality theories concrete and understandable. Advance preparation is minimal, and the activity is appropriate for classes of all sizes. This can be done in-class or outside of class with a writing assignment.

Leck, K. (2006). Teaching personality theories using popular music. *Teaching of Psychology*, 33(1), 34-36. doi:10.1207/s15328023top3301_8

- Previously, psychology instructors have used popular music to illustrate psychological concepts in the classroom. In this study, students enrolled in a personality theories class heard 13 popular songs that demonstrated various concepts. Students then selected and analyzed their own songs that contained elements of personality theories. Test grades and student evaluations of the demonstration provided support for the use of this activity for teaching personality theories

Miserandino, M. (2007). Heeeeere's Johnny: A case study in the five factor model of personality. *Teaching of Psychology*, 34(1), 37-40. doi:10.1080/00986280709336648

- Students used the Five Factor Model of personality to analyze the personality of entertainer Johnny Carson through his The New York Times obituary. Students evaluated this assignment highly: A majority indicated that the assignment was interesting, enjoyable, and useful in helping them to understand and apply the Five Factor Model, and all agreed that the assignment was thought-provoking.

Russo, N. (2008). Personality tests. In L. R. Benjamin (Ed.), *Favorite activities for the teaching of psychology* (pp. 203-207). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.

- This activity illustrates what is often called the Barnum effect in personality testing, that is, an individual's tendency to believe in the validity of personality descriptions that are vague enough to apply to virtually everyone. This activity can be used in any size class and involves all the students in the class. It requires about 10 minutes in one class period and 20 to 30 minutes in a subsequent class.

Outside Resources

Video 1: Gabriela Cintron's – 5 Factors of Personality (OCEAN Song). This is a student-made video which cleverly describes, through song, common behavioral characteristics of the Big 5 personality traits. It was one of the winning entries in the 2016-17 Noba + Psi Chi Student Video Award.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=youtu.be&v=Rk8CDXMb8_U&app=desktop

Video 2: Michael Harris' – Personality Traits: The Big 5 and More. This is a student-made video that looks at characteristics of the OCEAN traits through a series of funny vignettes. It also presents on the Person vs Situation Debate. It was one of the winning entries in the 2016-17 Noba + Psi Chi Student Video Award.

<https://vimeo.com/218245492>

Video 3: David M. Cole's – Grouchy with a Chance of Stomping. This is a student-made video that makes a very important point about the relationship between personality traits and behavior using a handy weather analogy. It was one of the winning entries in the 2016-17 Noba + Psi Chi Student Video Award.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GnaFMjaItlY>

Web: International Personality Item Pool

<http://ipip.ori.org/>

Web: John Johnson personality scales

<http://www.personal.psu.edu/~j5j/IPIP/ipipneo120.htm>

Web: Personality trait systems compared

<http://www.personalityresearch.org/bigfive/goldberg.html>

Web: Sam Gosling website

<http://homepage.psy.utexas.edu/homepage/faculty/gosling/samgosling.htm>

Evidence-Based Teaching

Dollinger, S. J. (2004). Predicting Personality-Behavior Relations: A Teaching Activity. *Teaching of Psychology*, 31(1), 48-5.

- This article presents an activity using in-class personality inventories and a behavior checklist to generate discussion items for a class activity later in the semester. Specifically, students attempt to predict Personality X Behavior correlations based on the class's self-reports and then learn the outcomes for their predictions. The activity allows instructors (a) to deepen and apply students' understanding of the 5-factor model of personality (or any other traits used); (b) to explain Type I and Type II errors and the contingent nature of research; (c) to clarify the nature of correlation, particularly negative correlations; and (d) to explore students' implicit personality theories. Students seemed to value the activity on the 8 occasions of its use and 2 formal evaluations.

Kaplan, S. A., Stachowski, A. A., & Bradley-Geist, J. C. (2012). A classroom activity to demonstrate self-other agreement in personality judgments. *Teaching of Psychology*, 39(3), 213-216. doi:10.1177/0098628312450441

- This article describes a classroom activity to demonstrate (dis)agreement in personality judgments, using an exercise derived from Watson's research on the accuracy of rating strangers' personalities. On the first day of class, undergraduate students in psychology courses rated their own personality and the personality of a classmate, using items from the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP). Across five samples, self-other correlations were strong for extraversion but varied for the other four traits. Comparisons with control groups on relevant test items provided preliminary evidence that the exercise promotes

learning of relevant material.

Miserandino, M. (2006). I Scream, You Scream: Teaching Validity and Reliability Via the Ice Cream Personality Test. *Teaching of Psychology*, 33(4), 265-268.

- This exercise uses the Internet-based "Ice Cream Personality Test" to help undergraduates understand the principles of personality testing including reliability, validity, Barnum statements, and generalizability. Results indicated that the Ice Cream Personality Test, although great fun, lacked reliability and validity. Students found this exercise enjoyable, useful, thought provoking, and apt to make them skeptical about personality tests they might encounter on the Internet or elsewhere.

Paddock, J. R., Terranova, S., & Giles, L. (2001). SASB goes Hollywood: Teaching personality theories through movies. *Teaching of Psychology*, 28(2), 117-120.

- In this article the authors describe a technique for teaching personality theories to undergraduate psychology students. The method shows students segments from feature films that illustrate key concepts. They present qualitative and quantitative data supporting the utility of this teaching technique.

Suggestions from the Society for Teaching's Introductory Psychology Primer

Leder, S. (2013). Personality. In S.E. Afful, J. J. Good, J. Keeley, S. Leder, & J. J. Stiegler-Balfour (Eds.). *Introductory Psychology teaching primer: A guide for new teachers of Psych 101*. Retrieved from the Society for the Teaching of Psychology web site: <http://teachpsych.org/e-books/intro2013/index.php>

POSSIBLE ACITVITIES (In Class)

Design Your Own Personality Test:

- Students should work together to generate a list of what they deem to be the most important personality variables. Then, ask them to develop items to assess these different

constructs. Students can administer their test to volunteers and then analyze the results of their study. This helps to provide students with hands-on experience related to generating theories, creating assessment items, conducting research, and examining data.

Act Out Your Favorite Defense Mechanism

- After learning about Freud's defense mechanisms, students should be split into small groups and asked to select a defense mechanism to demonstrate to the class. Classmates can use their knowledge to determine what is being acting out. Having students perform should help to break the uniformity of a lecture class and be a fun way to help student distinguish concepts that may otherwise blend together and/or be difficult to distinguish.
- For a variation on this activity, see: Inman, M. L. (2000). Defense Mechanism Miniskits. Published in M. Bolt's Instructor's Manual that accompanies David Myers, Introduction to Psychology, (6th Ed.). New York: Worth Publishers. [http://www.macmillanhighered.com/resources/1429244364/IRM/PDF/Bolt AP TRB10.pdf](http://www.macmillanhighered.com/resources/1429244364/IRM/PDF/Bolt%20AP%20TRB10.pdf)

Uncover Your Unconscious:

- Present students with sample depictions of projective assessments, such as the Rorschach Test and the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT). Have students report their gutlevel feelings. Then, have students assess themselves and their classmates using Freud's model of personality. Learning about these concepts from a personal vantage point should allow for more meaningful acquisition of knowledge, and students tend to find this interesting and fun. The diverse responses should also help to identify some of the flaws with the psychoanalytic theory, including the inability to prove or disprove claims.
- For an ink blot generator and other useful tools see: http://www.makingthemodernworld.org.uk/learning_modules/psychology/02.TU.04/?section=13

Participate in Online Personality Inventory:

- Have students examine their own personality traits by completing an online questionnaire. This activity will allow students first-hand experience with the items that comprise empirically-sound, previously established inventories, as well as allow them to apply relevant findings to their understanding of their own personality. Used in combination with projective measures of personality, this activity should provide a nice contrast between the different forms of assessment.

- Sample online personality inventories can be found at: <http://www.personalitytest.org.uk/> for the Big Five, and for the NEO-FFM see: http://www.class.uidaho.edu/psyc310/lessons/lesson03/lesson03-1_homework.htm

Zodiac Signs and Personality:

- Students are given a list of personality descriptions based on astrology and zodiac signs. They then have to choose which one best describes them. The class discussion focuses on the difference between empirically tested theories of personality and zodiac signs. A discussion of the Barnum effect and illusory correlation help students understand the theoretical basis for personality inventories. http://www.teachpsychscience.org/pdf/316-201165139AM_1.PDF

POSSIBLE ACITVITIES (Out of Class)

Reflection Paper

- Have students apply the concepts presented in class to someone they have experience with outside of the classroom. Ask students to analyze the personality characteristics of a popular television character, a family member, friend, or explain a celebrity's public behavior in terms of their specific traits. This helps to make concepts from class more relevant and relatable to their lives outside of the classroom. For videos of interesting characters to use as subjects for the reflection papers, see <http://www.clipsforclass.com/personality>

Practice Quiz

- Students can test their understanding and comprehension of Freud's psychoanalytic theory of personality by participating in this online quiz. Feedback is immediately administered. This is a quick and easy supplemental review of concepts to assure students are grasping the finer details of Freud's theory and are prepared for upcoming examinations
- <http://webspace.ship.edu/cgboer/persquizfreud.htm>

Links to ToPIX Materials

Activities, demonstrations, handouts, etc.:

<http://topix.teachpsych.org/w/page/19981026/Personality%20in%20the%20Classroom>

Current events/ news:

<http://topix.teachpsych.org/w/page/23137146/Personality%20in%20the%20News>

Video/audio:

<http://topix.teachpsych.org/w/page/19981025/Personality%20Videos>

Teaching Topics

Teaching The Most Important Course

https://nobaproject.com/documents/1_Teaching_The_Most_Important_Course.pdf

Content Coverage

https://nobaproject.com/documents/2_Content_Coverage.pdf

Motivating Students

https://nobaproject.com/documents/3_Motivating_Students_Tips.pdf

Engaging Large Classes

https://nobaproject.com/documents/4_Engaging_Large_Classes.pdf

Assessment Learning

https://nobaproject.com/documents/5_Assessment_Learning.pdf

Teaching Biological Psychology

https://nobaproject.com/documents/6_Teaching_Bio_Psych.pdf

PowerPoint Presentation

This module has an associated PowerPoint presentation. Download it at

https://nobaproject.com//images/shared/supplement_editions/000/000/277/Personality%20Traits.ppt?1416599101.

About Noba

The Diener Education Fund (DEF) is a non-profit organization founded with the mission of re-inventing higher education to serve the changing needs of students and professors. The initial focus of the DEF is on making information, especially of the type found in textbooks, widely available to people of all backgrounds. This mission is embodied in the Noba project.

Noba is an open and free online platform that provides high-quality, flexibly structured textbooks and educational materials. The goals of Noba are three-fold:

- To reduce financial burden on students by providing access to free educational content
- To provide instructors with a platform to customize educational content to better suit their curriculum
- To present material written by a collection of experts and authorities in the field

The Diener Education Fund is co-founded by Drs. Ed and Carol Diener. Ed is the Joseph Smiley Distinguished Professor of Psychology (Emeritus) at the University of Illinois. Carol Diener is the former director of the Mental Health Worker and the Juvenile Justice Programs at the University of Illinois. Both Ed and Carol are award-winning university teachers.

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