

Intolerance of Uncertainty as a Mediator between Psychological Flexibility and Future Anxiety among Vocational High School Students

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship between psychological flexibility and future anxiety mediated by intolerance of uncertainty in students of SMK PGRI 3 Malang. The future is an uncertain situation so that it can raise future anxiety if an individual does not have psychological flexibility and perceptual ability and responds to uncertain situations well. The research subjects were students of class XII SMK PGRI 3 Malang with a sample of 170 students (126 boys and 44 girls). The results of this study indicate that there is a significant negative relationship between psychological flexibility with future anxiety, there is a positive and significant relationship between psychological flexibility with intolerance of uncertainty, there is a positive relationship between intolerance of uncertainty and future anxiety, and there is a negative relationship indirectly between psychological flexibility and future anxiety through intolerance of uncertainty.

Keywords: *Psychological Flexibility, Intolerance of Uncertainty, Future Anxiety, Vocational High School Students*

Anxiety is one of the highest prevalence of disorders in mental health in children and adolescents (Hess, 2014). This shows that anxiety does not only occur in adults, but this psychological disorder or problem also occurs in various age ranges. There are many factors that cause individuals vulnerable to anxiety, especially in adolescents. One of them is anxiety about the future.

The majority of teenagers spend their time with school activities related to academics. They get various kinds of tasks that must be carried out. The level of complexity of roles and responsibilities will increase, especially when approaching school graduation. Students at the final level face various types of school examinations and after that they still have to consider working or continuing further education. One of them will be related to the frame of reference from parents (Monks, Knoers, and Haditono, 2009). Students who will continue

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their studies will certainly have their own pressure because they will face many competitors to enter the lecture bench, as well as students who decide to work. At this age, there is a definitive choice and a process of considering based on the direction of attention, skills and various possibilities that will occur (Monks, Knoers, Haditono, 2006).

But in reality, not all students are able to deal with challenges, social and academic pressures that impact the emergence of feelings of anxiety and worry. Therefore, anxiety becomes the most common disorder that arises as part of the response to the complexity of roles and various kinds of responsibilities that are evident from fear and anxiety about life in the future (Schmid, Phelps, & Lerner, 2011). As expressed by Zaleski (1996) that when individuals face an uncertainty and unwanted changes occur in the future, the individual will experience a condition called future anxiety.

Furthermore, individual anxiety in the face of this future can be understood through cognitive theory proposed by Lazarus, where individual interpretation involving cognitive processes will influence one's emotions as a result of an assessment of a situation (Glassman & Hadad, 2009). Therefore, one's interpretation and misperception can increase anxiety if the individual sees the situation as something that threatens him (Hess, 2014).

There are several factors that cause an individual to experience FA, namely external and internal factors. As previously explained that the emergence of anxiety can be seen through individual cognitive processes because it will affect the way a person interprets a situation. Lack of ability or personal competence can also increase a person's tendency to experience FA (Hammad, 2016). In addition to internal factors within the individual, other external factors can also increase one's FA. The existence of ambiguity and unclear future also directs individuals to experience a sense of helplessness and excessive anxiety. This happens especially when individuals feel confused so that the thinking process is hampered in planning for the future which can later develop into an FA (Hammad, 2016).

An individual will experience pathological symptoms in the form of anxiety if he is less flexible in dealing with a situation that makes him feel anxious. This is indicated by the inability of these individuals to regulate behavior (thought that is suppressed and avoided) and sensitive behavior and bad behavior (Masuda & Tully, 2012). Therefore, it can be said that individuals who experience future anxiety (one of them) are caused by lack of adequate psychological flexibility.

Psychological flexibility is the ability to focus on current events and continue or change one behavior depending on the situation to achieve goals and values. Kashdan (2011) explains that psychology flexibility is a dynamic process that is shown through how individuals adapt to fluctuating situations, configure mental resources, change the way of view and balance the wants, needs, and aspects of life.

Furthermore, to be flexible, one needs to open up to personal experiences and external events (Kashdan, 2011). When someone is able to be open, accept and always find out, then they will get a new experience. They will tend to position themselves on positive or negative feelings that may arise when facing complex situations, uncertain events, and unpredictable. Conversely, an individual who is less flexible will tend to avoid an event that is considered as a difficult stimuli.

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Some research shows that individuals who have a high score in openness also show tolerance. Individuals who are open and always curious are associated with flexible thoughts and behaviors that are contrary to the inability to tolerate uncertainty and the desire to avoid or be closed. Characteristics of anxiety arise when an individual has an intolerance of uncertainty that directly directs him to feel worried (Williams, 2013). Intolerance of uncertainty is defined as an individual's tendency to perceive and respond to uncertain situations at cognitive, emotional and behavioral levels. Individuals who are less able to be tolerant of certainty believe that an uncertain situation is a threat and better avoid the situation.

Some research shows that psychological flexibility can lead to the FA where when a person has high psychological flexibility, the FA will be low. Like research conducted by Tirch, Leahy, Silberstein, Melwani (2012) that psychological flexibility is negatively correlated with individual anxiety. Someone who is less flexible shows more about the level of problem than the symptoms of anxiety itself. Meanwhile, the research conducted by Simoon and Verboon showed that individuals who lacked psychological flexibility correlated with significant anxiety symptoms even though the correlation was weak (0.27) (Simon & Verboon, 2016). On the other hand, intolerance of uncertainty also correlates with anxiety. Like other studies also shows that there is a strong relationship between intolerance of uncertainty and anxiety and concern for young people (Osmanağaoğlu, Creswell, & Dodd, 2017).

By looking at the theoretical assumptions and findings from the literature reviewed, this study aims to see how future anxiety variables, psychological flexibility, and intolerance of uncertainty affect each other. In addition, this research will also be useful for stakeholders or schools, where when they know how the relationship between the three variables, will be able to provide a related picture of the three and can be done preventive and promotive efforts to improve students' abilities so that they can face challenges that lead to future anxiety.

Future Anxiety

Future anxiety are conceptualized as a state of comprehension, uncertainty, fear, concern and focused on unpopular changes in a further personal future. In extreme cases, this will be a threat so that individuals can panic (Zaleski, 1996). This anxiety about the future has various variations regarding anticipated threats including physical threats such as illness or accident, or emotional threats such as losing family members. In addition, fear of failure to achieve goals and aspirations is also included in the anxiety of the future. (Hammad, 2016).

Furthermore, Hammad (2016) also explained that future anxiety clearly appears in individuals approaching the age of 20 where at that age is the age at which to start having a job or family. Zaleski (1996) explains that the source of future anxiety can be seen through personality predispositions to react to fear, personal experiences accumulated in aspects of individual life and history.

The influence of a psychological flexibility to future anxiety

Psychological flexibility is indirectly interpreted as the ability of individuals to be able to undergo the current situation without feeling and thinking that is not necessary and depends on the situation at hand so that he can survive or change in behavior according to the goals and values he wants. Responses that are not flexible to the experiences obtained can be manifested by experience avoiding situations. Therefore, when an individual does not have psychological flexibility, it will be related to psychopathological symptoms, one of which is anxiety symptoms (Borjali, Bahramizadeh, Eskandai, & Farrokhi, 2016).

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Flexible individuals will see every internal experience without trying to control or judge it. The consequence is that people who are psychologically flexible will be able to face and express their emotions and be able to use effective coping in accordance with the stressors faced so that the individual will be able to balance their needs even though the situation at hand is unclear (Tirch, Leahy, Silberstein, & Melwani, 2012).

In addition, Alqaisy & Thawabieh (2016) also explained that individuals who are less flexible and neurotic will have negative attitudes towards their lives, inability to respect themselves, and negative psychological traits such as doubts and doubts, pessimism, inability to adjust to life, stress, and poor coping skills will lead to symptoms of future anxiety. On the contrary, if individuals have psychological flexibility, they will be better able to experience and express their emotions precisely in accordance with the situation at hand, showing coping mechanisms that can balance the stressor with their experiences in difficult situations such as when facing the future (Tirch et al., 2012)

The relationship between psychological flexibility and intolerance of uncertainty

When faced with an ambiguous situation, individuals who have psychological flexibility will be able to use various coping mechanisms to better manage their emotional and psychological needs (Tirch et al., 2012). Psychological flexibility is very dependent on the relationship of personality traits to individuals. One of them is openness to experience (Kashdan, 2011).

A person's openness to experience is related to flexible thinking and behavior in contrast to tendencies such as intolerance of uncertainty and the need for closure. Someone with intolerance of uncertainty prefers tasks that are very easy or difficult, because they will feel safe and confident that they cannot change. Tasks that are quite difficult and require higher competence or knowledge will be considered as something unpleasant so that it is avoided by individuals with high intolerance of uncertainty (Kashdan, 2011).

The Relationship between intolerance of uncertainty and future anxiety

Intolerance of uncertainty (IU) is defined as the inability of individuals to endure unpleasant conditions triggered by the absence of sufficient and important information and supported by perceptions of uncertainty. Basically, IU is a feeling of fear with an unknown or uncertain thing. Furthermore, Williams (2013) explained that IU is a dispositional characteristic that affects how a person perceives and responds to uncertain situations at the cognitive, emotional and behavioral levels.

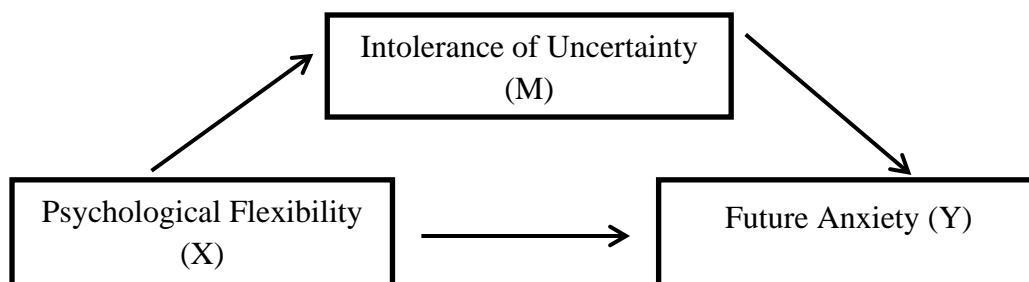
People who have high IU will be more susceptible to anxiety because IU directs individuals to negative problems and cognitive avoidance. Meanwhile, individuals will never know what will happen to their future. Therefore, the future is something that can be feared for individuals who have high IU. They will perceive uncertainty as stressful, believing that a situation that is uncertain is better avoided, and decreases in its functioning (Williams, 2013). This ultimately leads individuals to experience anxiety related to an uncertain thing for example related to individual careers.

Framework for Thinking and Hypotheses

According to some previous studies, the mindset can be shown through the chart as follows:

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Image No. 1 Research Framework



The hypothesis in this study are:

1. Hypothesis 1 : There is a negative relationship between psychological flexibility and future anxiety
2. Hypothesis 2: There is a negative relationship between psychological flexibility and intolerance of uncertainty
3. Hypothesis 3: There is a positive relationship between intolerance of uncertainty and future anxiety
4. Hypothesis 4: There is a negative relationship between psychological flexibility and future anxiety mediated by intolerance of uncertainty

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The subjects used in this study were students of class XII SMK PGRI 3 Malang. Sampling uses incidental techniques where researchers search for subjects at certain times in school. The number of samples used in this study was 170 students, consisting of 126 males (74.1%) and 44 females (25.9%) with an age range of 17-20 years.

Instruments

Three measures were used in this study,

1. **Psychological Flexibility.** In this variable X, the researcher used the Psychological Flexibility Questionnaire (PFQ) which consisted of 20 items (Ben-Itzhak, Bluvstein, & Maor, 2014). This scale measures 5 aspects of psychological flexibility, namely: (1) positive perceptions of change, (2) flexible self-characteristics, (3) self-characteristics as an open and innovative person, (4) perception of dynamic and changing reality (5) perception of multifaceted reality. This scale uses a Likert scale that moves from 1 to 5, where the number 1 represents strongly disagree until the number 5 represents strongly agree. The highest score means that individuals have good psychological flexibility. The PFQ scale contains 20 valid items. The reliability coefficient of the scale of psychological flexibility is 0.869.
2. **Future Anxiety.** The researcher used the future anxiety scale developed by Zaleski (1996). The total items used amounted to 28 items. This scale uses a Likert model scale that moves from numbers 0 to 6. Scoring for favorable items moves from numbers 0 to 6 (very inappropriate - very appropriate), while unfavorable items move from numbers 6 to 0 (very suitable - very inappropriate)) The reliability coefficient of this scale is 0.801.
3. **Intolerance of Uncertainty.** In the mediation variable, researchers used the Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale (IUS) developed by Buhr & Dugas (2002). This scale measures aspects of the belief that uncertainty is less acceptable, has a negative impact on individuals, and leads to frustration, stress and inability to act. Subjects responded to a 5-

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point Likert scale that moved from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The number of items used is 26 items. The reliability coefficient is obtained at 0.741.

Procedure

In general, procedures and data analysis are as follows: First, determine the research variables, explore the theory, and determine the right instrument. Secondly, conducting research permits at SMK PGRI 3 Malang. Third, data collected through field surveys using structured questionnaires that have been adapted into Indonesian. Data was collected in the form of paper-pencil surveys. Fourth, data analysis uses mediation regression analysis from Hayes with the IBM SPSS Statistics 23 application for Windows.

RESULTS

Here's an overview of the subject or respondents in this study:

Table No. 1 *General description of research subjects*

Characteristics	Category	Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	126	74,1%
	Female	44	25,9%
Age	17	49	28,8%
	18	100	58,8%
	19	19	11,2%
	20	2	1,18%

Statistical test results show the mean value, standard deviation, and intercorrelation of each variable. The variable Psychological Flexibility has an average value ($M = 3.54$; $SD = 0.66$), future anxiety ($M = 2.50$; $SD = 0.88$), and intolerance of uncertainty ($M = 3.09$; $SD = 0.49$). The results of the inter-correlation intercorrelation test showed that the psychological flexibility variable has a negative relationship with future anxiety ($r = -0.049$), psychological flexibility with intolerance of uncertainty has a negative relationship ($r = -0.430$), and intolerance of uncertainty has a positive relationship with future anxiety ($r = 0.383$).

Table No. 2 *Mean, standar deviation, and correlation matrix of psychological flexibility, intolerance of uncertainty, and future anxiety*

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3
Psychological Flexibility (X)	3,54	0,66	1	-0,430	-0,049
Intolerance of Uncertainty (M)	2,50	0,49		1	0,383
Future Anxiety (Y)	3,09	0,88			1

The results of data analysis using Hayes model show that in the first hypothesis (H1), there is a negative relationship between psychological flexibility with future anxiety ($\beta = -0.50$; $p < 0.05$), meaning that H1 is accepted which means that there is a significant relationship between psychology flexibility and future anxiety in students at SMK PGRI 3 Malang.

Table 3. *Psychological Flexibility and Future Anxiety is mediated by Intolerance of Uncertainty*

The Relationship	B	P
Psychological Flexibility and Future Anxiety	-0,50	0,00
Psychological Flexibility and Intolerance of Uncertainty	0,43	0,00
Intolerance of Uncertainty and Future Anxiety	0,95	0,00
Psychological Flexibility and Future Anxiety is mediated by Intolerance of Uncertainty	-0,09	0,53

Note: X = Psychological Flexibility; M = Intolerance of Uncertainty; Y = Future Anxiety

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Hypothesis 2 is that there is a negative relationship between psychological flexibility and intolerance of uncertainty. The results of hypothesis testing showed that there was a positive and significant relationship between psychological flexibility and intolerance of uncertainty ($\beta = 0.43$; $p < 0.05$), meaning that the H2 hypothesis was accepted.

Hypothesis 3 is that there is a positive relationship between intolerance of uncertainty and future anxiety. Hypothesis test results obtained that the relationship of intolerance of uncertainty with future anxiety is positive and significant ($\beta = 0.95$; $p < 0.05$), meaning that H3 is accepted. This means that the higher the intolerance of uncertainty in individuals, the higher the anxiety of the future.

Hypothesis 4 results show that there is no negative relationship between psychological flexibility and future anxiety (c') ($\beta = -0.09$; $p > 0.05$) and there is a significant indirect intolerance of uncertainty relationship, so it is proven that variables intolerance of uncertainty becomes a mediator of the relationship between psychological flexibility and future anxiety. That is, there is a relationship between psychological flexibility and psychological flexibility mediated by intolerance of uncertainty.

From the test results using PROCESS Macro for SPSS, there is an indirect relationship between psychological flexibility and future anxiety through intolerance of uncertainty. This value is also significant based on the test score ($z = 4.48$; $p = 0.00$). These results indicate that intolerance of uncertainty is a mediator in the relationship between psychological flexibility and future anxiety.

Image No. 2 Direct effect of X and Y

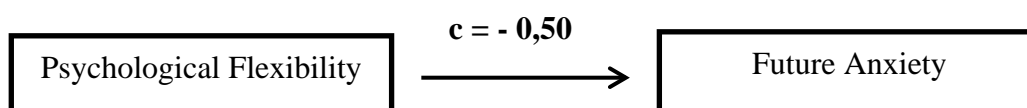
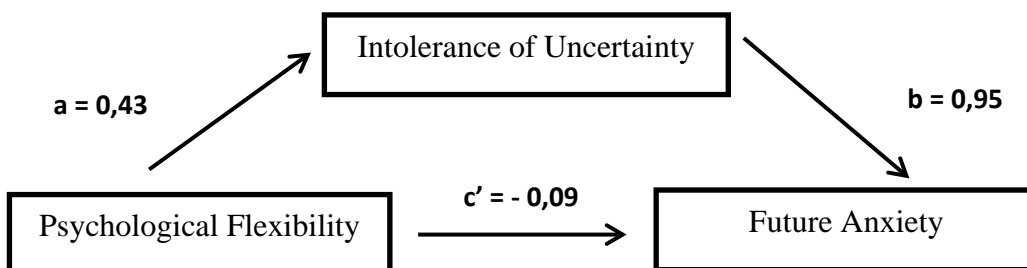


Image No. 3 Indirect Effect



DISCUSSION

Hypothesis test results in this study indicate that (1) There is a relationship between psychological flexibility with future anxiety, (2) There is a positive and significant relationship between psychological flexibility with intolerance of uncertainty, (3) There is a positive and significant relationship between intolerance of uncertainty with future anxiety, (4) Intolerance of uncertainty is indirectly positively related to future anxiety in students of SMK 3 Malang. Based on the results of this hypothesis test shows that the higher the intolerance of uncertainty in students, the higher the level of anxiety in the face of the future.

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Conversely, the lower the intolerance of uncertainty in students, the lower the level of future anxiety experienced by students.

Based on the results of the study, psychological flexibility has a direct relationship with future anxiety students of SMK PGRI 3 Malang. The results of this study are in line with other studies which show that there is a relationship between psychological flexibility and anxiety experienced by individuals. Like the study conducted by Tirsch et al., (2012) that psychological flexibility and negative beliefs about emotions are significant predictors of anxiety.

Psychological flexibility is related to intolerance of uncertainty in an individual. The second hypothesis shows that there is a significant relationship between the two variables. Kashdan (2010) explains that there are three critical factors that affect an individual's psychological flexibility, namely: executive function, one's mental state and configuration of personality. Psychological flexibility depends on individual personal traits, one of which is open to experience (openness to experience). Openness and curiosity of individuals are related to dynamic thinking and this is the source of a peaceful behavior with negative tendencies such as intolerance of uncertainty and a sense of closeness (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). This is also in line with other studies which show that there is a relationship between psychological flexibility and intolerance of uncertainty in individuals (Corti et al., 2012).

The third hypothesis results in intolerance of uncertainty having a relationship with future anxiety. Anxiety involves a perception of a person's lack of ability to deal with future events and this is associated with different situations. The general response to the anxiety situation is to avoid threats or situations where it might appear. Individuals who show intolerance of uncertainty will face uncertainty as a stressful situation, believing that uncertain situations are better avoided so that they tend to be difficult to function properly (Williams, 2013). The findings in this study support the results of previous studies which do show that there is a relationship between intolerance of uncertainty and individual pathology, one of which is anxiety.

The fourth hypothesis shows that psychological flexibility is indirectly negatively related to future anxiety through intolerance of uncertainty. There is no relationship between psychological flexibility which has insignificant negative direction, while when presented indirectly the intolerance of uncertainty becomes significant. Therefore, it is proven that intolerance of uncertainty becomes a mediator of the relationship between psychological flexibility and anxiety in facing the future. The results of the coefficient c' in this study show partial mediation because c' is statistically significant and there is also significant mediation (MacKinnon, Fairchild & Fritz, 2007). In conducting a mediation analysis, it is possible that mediation is complete or partial. Partial correlation occurs when four stages are fulfilled, then the data is consistent with the hypothesis that the variable M mediates the relationship between X and Y in full, and when the 3 initial stages are fulfilled but in the fourth stage it does not fulfill the preconditions, it is called partial mediation (Kenny, 2018). The results of the double test show that there is an indirect effect of psychological flexibility with future anxiety through intolerance of uncertainty. This is in line with previous research that intolerance of uncertainty relates to all things related to anxiety because this will affect how individuals perceive and respond to uncertain situations on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects (Williams, 2013). High intolerance of uncertainty will make individuals tend to have difficulty responding to more specific situations, namely uncertainty.

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Meanwhile the psychological flexibility model refers to six processes, namely acceptance so that individuals dare to be open to any event even though it is less desirable without attempts to avoid it, see something with more positive thinking using symbols and more realistic (cognitive defusion), be careful with the present and aim and not directly give judgment (being present), aware of the ever-dynamic experience and build self-as-context relationships, clarify values that explain an event with values, and build effective action patterns that lead to a committed value (Sabucedo, 2017). From the explanation above, it can be concluded that psychological flexibility is a model that combines cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects so as to form a complete unity in the individual but rather a whole entity which is more common than individual trait, while intolerance of uncertainty more towards ability

Future anxiety leads to the cognitive aspects of the individual. Zaleski (1996) assumes that future anxiety depends on the subjective importance of the value to be hindered, the possibility of occurrence, and the ability to control or self-efficacy. Future anxiety can be influenced by a lack of confidence and negative thinking about the future. But on the other hand, it turns out that in addition to factors within the individual, there are other factors that cause a person to experience future anxiety, namely weak self-competence and the inability of individuals to deal with negative responses about future events thereby increasing feelings of anxiety for the future in individuals (MacLeod, Williams & Bakerian, 1991). So it can be interpreted that future anxiety is not only directly related to individual traits that are psychologically flexible, but also how the individual responds to and perceives an intolerance of uncertainty that has an impact on anxiety in facing the future of students SMK PGRI 3 Malang.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study can be concluded that there is a significant negative relationship between psychological flexibility with future anxiety, there is a positive and significant relationship between psychological flexibility with intolerance of uncertainty, there is a positive relationship between intolerance of uncertainty and future anxiety, and there is a relationship indirectly negative between psychological flexibility with future anxiety through intolerance of uncertainty.

This study has implications for the field of clinical psychology so that it can be seen that psychological flexibility is actually capable of influencing anxiety about the future, but how an individual is able to manage his perceptions and thoughts when facing uncertain situations that indirectly affect anxiety towards the future, especially in student. This study is also useful for the school to be able to control the intolerance of uncertainty in their students so that it can reduce anxiety in the face of the future. In addition, individuals can also reduce intolerance of uncertainty in order to respond and perceive an uncertain event as acceptable and not to be avoided. Suggestions for further research are to try to test other factors that can affect anxiety in the face of the future, such as self-efficacy or career efficacy in students.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors colorfully declare this paper to bear not conflict of interests

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