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Navigating Complexity:

Hate Crime Victims with Multiple Minority Identities and the Challenges of Reporting and Recording the victimisation

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Contents

Overview

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The main objective of this research is to improve police handing of victims with multiple identities of hate crime at reporting stage, thereby supporting the mental health recovery of these victims. The project considered the specific nuances which are experienced by hate crime victims with multiple identities and thereby the challenges they face when reporting their victimisation. Hence, the project had considered two main research questions:

1. The types and impact of hate crime victimisation endured by victims with multiple identities.
2. The experiences of victims of hate crime with multiple identities at reporting stage.

Context

Hate crime victims falling under the five protected groups - race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, and transgender identity - are safeguarded by UK Hate Crime Legislation. Challenges arise when a victim occupies two or more minority identities simultaneously, creating complications in understanding and addressing their unique experiences. This phenomenon is best understood through the lens of intersectionality - a concept introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989[1] - which examines how overlapping social identities intersect to create unique modes of hostility and prejudice. For instance, an individual identifying as LGBTQ and an ethnic minority may experience hate crimes differently than someone identifying with only one of these identities.

Research has established that hate crimes inflict greater psychological impact on victims compared to ordinary crimes without the hate component (Iganski and Lagou, 2015[2]). The intersections of multiple identities elevate the health risks faced by these individuals. While the UK has a basic legislative framework for hate crimes, police officers often prioritise one category, lacking understanding in investigating the intersectionality of hate crimes. This practice stems from a single-axis framework of discrimination that rigidly delineates the five protected groups, causing a disservice to these multiple marginalised identities.

The current Home Office hate crime recording facilities acknowledges multiple motivating factors but does so in a limited manner. Incidents with more than one motivating factor are recorded as a single offence with multiple motivations, which may oversimplify the complexities of victims' experiences. For instance, statistics from 2022/2023 reveal that out of 145,214 hate crime offences, there were 153,904 motivating factors, indicating approximately 8,000 hate crime offences with more than one motivating factor, which very little is known about and the victims with multiple identities are seen as one homogenous group (see Appendix A). This approach can obscure the nuanced realities faced by individuals with multiple marginalised identities. For example, a victim who is targeted for their race and disability may not be adequately captured by the current system. Essentially, hate crime legislation has functioned by clearly delineated five separate entities – and has not encouraged an understanding of identities that intersect. Consequently, the unique challenges may be underrepresented in official statistics and policy responses. 'Policy is often reduced to one axis of oppression, meaning that intersections and diversity are rendered invisible' (Mason-Bish, 2014, p.31[3]).

Moreover, the linear nature of the recording system is often mirrored in police practices, where officers may not

[1] Crenshaw K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989(1), 139–167. https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8

[2] Iganski P and Lagou S (2015) Hate crimes hurt some more than others: Implications for the just sentencing of offenders. Journal of Interpersonal Violence 30(10): 1696–1718.

[3] Mason-Bish, Hannah (2014). Beyond the silo: hate crime and intersectionality. University of Sussex. Chapter. https://hdl.handle.net/10779/uos.23421689.v1

fully appreciate or address the intersecting identities of victims. This can perpetuate a linear handling approach and its simplification in conceiving just one single identity, ignores the heterogeneity within the group. The impact of this is to potentially 'undercategorise' people who might then suffer from a lack of support and face difficulty in negotiating social and cultural spaces.

In summary, while the Home Office hate crime recording system acknowledges multiple motivating factors, it does so in a manner that may not fully capture the complexities of victims' experiences, particularly those with intersecting marginalised identities. This underscores the need for a more nuanced and intersectional approach to both data collection and victim support in the context of hate crimes.

Given that police forces are contractually committed to their current data systems for the next five years, making changes at the data collection stage is not feasible. Consequently, this project concentrated on enhancing support for victims during the reporting process. By improving the handling of victims at police stage, it will ensure that hate crime victims with multiple minority identities are supported. The expected long-term impact is improved mental health of hate crime victims, fostered by a sense of protection through the Criminal Justice System.

Findings of this study are based on 30 semi-structured interviews with individuals who have experienced hate crime and possess multiple identities. Additionally, a focus group was conducted with the National Independent Advisory Group on Hate Crime to enhance the research design and inform policy implementation. A description of the sample and its participants can be found in Appendix B on page 15.

Key findings

1. The current legislation and hate crime recording system inadequately address the complexities of multiple minority identities.

2. Intersectional minority identities increase feelings of vulnerability. Victims often find themselves defending multiple aspects of their identity simultaneously, which can be mentally exhausting and emotionally taxing.

3. Victims with multiple marginalised identities often face compounded difficulties in reporting hate crimes due to a lack of understanding by police officers of their intersecting identities with many victims feeling that their multifaceted identities are overlooked or reduced to a single characteristic.

Summary

Victims of hate crime with multiple identities experience hate crime differently to victims who occupy a single identity. The need for tailored support and recognition that victims with multiple identities require is often not acknowledged by police forces. This results in victims with multiple marginalised identities facing compounded difficulties in reporting hate crimes. This discourages individuals from coming forward, thereby perpetuating cycles of abuse and neglect.

Findings

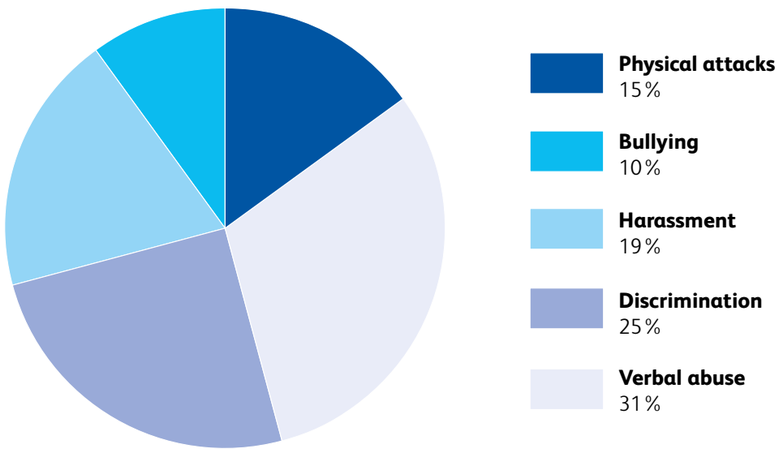
1. Experiences and Impact of Victimisation

Experiences

The high prevalence of victimisation among victims of hate crime with multiple identities was evident among the data. The 30 participants endured 53 hate crime incidents in total. Eighteen participants experienced one hate crime incident, and 12 participants experienced more than one incident, with some experiencing up to six hate crime incidents within the last couple of years. Hate crime targeting ranged in severity. Starting with the most severe, respondents were subjected to hate crimes which fall into several categories: physical abuse, verbal abuse, discrimination, harassment, and bullying.

Some of the incidents described by participants highlight the severe and targeted victimisation faced by individuals. One lesbian woman with disabilities (R26) endured persistent harassment from a male neighbour. He would attempt to force entry into her flat, bang on her doors and windows, and monitor her movements to manipulate her utility meter, causing her to pay for his electricity usage. R2, while walking with his same-sex partner on their estate, faced regular verbal abuse. He was filmed and falsely accused of being a paedophile, with threats to post the footage online.
R17, a mixed-race Muslim woman, frequently encountered abuse on public transport, particularly targeting her religious attire. In one alarming incident, a man attempted to remove her hijab and threatened to throw acid in her face. R5, a visibly disabled Muslim woman, experienced multiple instances of targeted abuse. In one severe incident, a petrol bomb was thrown at her property, damaging both her house and car.

Hate Crime incidents endured by Interview Participants:



Impact of Victimisation

The following accounts illustrate the profound and lasting impact of hate crimes on individuals, highlighting the severe psychological and emotional impact such experiences can have.
R17, a mixed-race Muslim woman, developed anxiety following repeated abuse on the underground. To protect herself, she withdrew from society. She shared, “Once you experience hate crime - even if you experienced it once - that’s it, it stays with you forever.” Before the incident, R17 was more outgoing; since then, she avoids smiling or greeting strangers for fear of being attacked. She keeps her head down, counting the minutes during her hour-and-a-half commute, focused solely on reaching her destination safely. Fearing for her safety, she stopped wearing the hijab. As a previously outgoing person, R17 has had to keep her head down and felt she had to withdraw from society to protect herself. Similar to R17 and other participants, R18 had withdrawn from society.

R2, a homosexual disabled man, developed PTSD from these events. He found it difficult to go outside, has self-harmed, and developed an eating disorder. He described his experience, saying, *“I was living in the dark all day. My curtains were closed for three months.”*
R5, a visibly disabled Muslim woman, also developed PTSD, suffered from low confidence, and began isolating following these events.
These experiences offer valuable insight into the profound impact hate crimes can have on victims. They reveal the often long-lasting and devastating psychological effects that extend well beyond the initial incident. Hate crimes can heighten a victim’s sense of vulnerability, leading to a state of hyper-awareness and an intensified fear of being targeted again.

Experiences and impact specific to intersectionality

The targeting was often not only aggressive but complex. Hate crimes against individuals with multiple marginalised identities often involve violence that targets specific aspects of their identity. For instance, a transgender woman of colour may face violence that is both racially and transphobically motivated, leading to a compounded experience of victimisation. This dual-targeting can result not only in more severe physical harm, but also in greater psychological distress.

Victims with multiple marginalised identities often experience hate crimes in ways that are psychologically complex and uniquely distressing. Beyond the immediate physical harm, these individuals engage in a mental process of deconstructing the attack to discern which facets of their identity were targeted - be it race, gender, sexuality etc. or a combination thereof.

As one participant reflected: *“I couldn’t tell if they were coming at me because I’m Black, because I’m gay, or both. It’s like I had to split myself into pieces to figure out why it was happening.” (R12).*

This internal fragmentation is not merely a cognitive exercise but a coping mechanism in response to compounded victimisation. The experience of being targeted on multiple fronts can lead to heightened anxiety, rumination, and a pervasive sense of vulnerability, with victims often feeling that they need to defend multiple aspects of their identity.

Another participant (R10) shared: *“I kept replaying it in my head - was it my accent, my clothes, my skin? Every part of me felt like a target.”*

This reflects the internalised stress and confusion that often accompany intersectional victimisation. The mental burden of navigating these intersecting forms of oppression can also lead to questions about identity concealment. Victims may contemplate whether downplaying one aspect of their identity could reduce the likelihood of being targeted. However, this internal conflict can exacerbate feelings of alienation and distress, as it forces individuals to negotiate their authenticity against the threat of victimisation.

In essence, hate crimes against individuals with multiple marginalised identities carry an additional layer of harm, functioning not only as acts of physical violence but also as profound psychological assaults. The process of unpacking the attack to understand which parts of one’s identity were targeted adds layers to the trauma, highlighting the need for nuanced support.

Summary

This section reveals that intersectional minority identities increase feelings of vulnerability, with victims often feeling that they need to defend multiple aspects of their identity. The mental burden of navigating these intersecting forms of oppression highlights that victims with multiple marginalised identities often experience hate crimes in ways that are complex and uniquely distressing.

2. Challenges faced at reporting and recording stages

i. Victims of hate crime dismissed:

The data revealed that victims with multiple marginalised identities often encountered compounded challenges when reporting hate crimes, particularly due to perceived indifference or lack of understanding from law enforcement. These individuals frequently felt that their experiences were minimised or dismissed, leading to a profound sense of isolation and distrust. For instance, R17 expressed a deep sense of neglect following her ordeal: *"I was very distressed and emotional. But there was no compassion, no empathy, no consoling me during that difficult time." She further noted the absence of guidance or support: "I wasn't signposted to any support groups or anything. I could have reached out to these support groups by myself."*

Similarly, R2 recounted a dismissive encounter with the police: *"They told me the situation didn't sound serious."* This response led to a sense of abandonment: *"I had nowhere to turn, especially as the perpetrators lived on my estate."* The lack of action was evident when the police did not question the perpetrators, and the case was subsequently closed. When asked about his trust in the police, R2 stated: *"Zero. I've completely lost faith in them. I don't feel I can approach them and be taken seriously."*R5's experience further underscores the systemic issues: *"They didn't record the petrol bomb thrown at a visible disabled Muslim woman as a hate crime."* This oversight led to diminished confidence in law enforcement: *"No point reporting to the police because they don't see it as a hate crime."*

R5 also described the psychological toll of such dismissive attitudes: *"They knock your confidence. They knock your self-esteem. They make you feel like you're the problem. And you know deep down that you are not."*

Disabled victims, especially those with intersecting identities, often felt particularly marginalised by law enforcement. R18 highlighted the additional barriers faced: *"We've just got no voices as disabled people, you know, at all whatsoever."*

This sentiment was echoed in other participants indicating that disabled victims frequently felt "infantilised" and "patronised" by police responses that did not accommodate their needs, leading to high levels of dissatisfaction.

R18 also emphasised the necessity for reasonable adjustments to support disabled individuals during reporting: *"You need reasonable adjustments. You need a face-to-face... But when you talk on a telephone or even through an e-mail, I've got hands disability, so I don't always come across precisely because of my disability."* Despite these needs, R18 was often refused face-to-face appointments, making communication challenging.

R26's experience further illustrated the minimisation of disability-related concerns: *"They clearly thought I was making a mountain out of a molehill. And that was the biggest for me, that was the biggest barrier."* She perceived a hierarchy within protected characteristics, with disability hate crimes receiving the least recognition: *"Disability hate crime is lower down on the system to the law."*

R26 advocated for legal reforms to address this disparity: *"We need a change in law; we need that law strengthening."* These narratives collectively highlighted the systemic issues faced by victims with multiple marginalised identities when engaging with law enforcement. The lack of understanding, dismissive attitudes, and failure to provide appropriate support mechanisms contributed to a cycle of distrust and underreporting.

ii. Systemic Issues in Law Enforcement: Failure to Recognise the Multiple Identities

The main concern which participants highlighted in contributing to their negative experiences was not being recognised for their multiple identities. Many victims felt that their multifaceted identities were overlooked or reduced to a single characteristic and that in essence, a part of them is being ignored and overlooked.
Victims often felt that police officers operated on a single-axis model even though they have facilities to flag up multiple identities. This simplification or even miscategorisation resulted in their experiences either being denied or minimised.
For instance, one participant (R22) noted: *"It's like they put you into a box the moment you walk in. And once you're in that box, it's hard to convince them there's more to your story."*

R8, who faced regular abuse due to his disability and sexual orientation, felt that his narrative about the victimisation was dismissed. He expressed: *"You do feel like you are being sort of put into a particular category, a particular box around something which is all sort of encompassing, and that is what makes you."* He further noted: *"They were very much kind of pigeonholing things into one category... very focused on the sort of the one, the one identity in a utopian sort of universe, but I would like both my identities to be represented and recorded."* Ultimately, the incident was recorded as a disability hate crime, with sexual orientation not flagged.

R11, a 52-year-old man, faced systematic harassment and intimidation over a period of six years because of his race and religion. He recounted: *"You know, the officers that dealt with me, first of all, didn't know how to, didn't know what to log. In terms of, I kept saying, look at that comment, it's racially inclined. Look at that comment. It's anti-Muslim. Oh, how is it anti-Muslim? Well it says you 'effing Muslim'. How is it not anti-Muslim? I mean, I had to sit there and literally say to the police officer, just that it says effing Muslim. Isn't that part of my identity that you need to log down? I had to explain that to them. I mean literally…So, it was a painful experience where I found that police officers not fully able to understand the dynamic, not fully able to describe it."*

Participants generally felt that response officers failed to recognise the complexity of their intersecting identities, often prioritising one aspect over another.

They expressed concerns that officers did not engage in meaningful conversations or ask the right questions to understand how they identified themselves.
R30 described: *"And you feel like sometimes you're battling the police, and you don't want to be. You want to be saying look you need to be listening to me, but you end up battling them going, but that's not right. Police forces and the CPS, had an enormous amount of learning to do around dealing with both racial and religiously aggravated incidences. When they're dealing with both, they get totally confused… they just want to put it in a box and then get it up into the court system. But that really is not good enough. So, the system is not particularly good at understanding, addressing and documenting the specificity of the crimes involved."*

Many victims reported that police officers operated on a single-axis model, addressing only the most obvious or easily categorised aspect of a person's identity.
This approach often led to feelings of being partially understood or boxed in based on stereotypes or surface-level assessments. Victims felt that officers were more focused on categorising the incident rather than understanding the full scope of their experiences. One participant (R21) noted: *"It felt like they were ticking a box: 'racist incident, sorted.' But I knew it wasn't just about my race. It was deeper, more layered than that."*
Another shared (R24): *"I didn't fit neatly into one category, and because of that, I felt like I didn't fit anywhere in the system. The officer kept bringing up my disability, but the slurs were about my sexuality. I felt like they were ignoring what really happened."*

R16 describes: *"They wanted to help, I think, but they couldn't see me fully. It was like they were trying to choose which version of me mattered most. I don't blame them personally, but I could feel they weren't equipped to deal with someone like me - someone who doesn't just fall under one neat label. It's like the system hasn't caught up with reality."*

These quotes evidence that support was often based on the most obvious characteristic - or the one that feeds into the stereotypical views of the officer. These accounts highlight the limitations of a singular focus in addressing hate crimes and the necessity for a more nuanced understanding of victims' identities.

iii. Consequences Resulting from Failure to Recognise the Multiple Identities

Through the frequent failure of police responses to acknowledge the complexity of their intersecting identities, nor them being seen through a holistic lens, a range of negative outcomes ensued:

Feelings of being misunderstood:	**Reporting Barriers:**	**Erosion of Trust in Authorities:**
The initial victimisation was exacerbated with certain aspects of their identity being overlooked. For individuals whose part of their identity has been overlooked, participants described feelings of emotional distress and a prolonged sense of marginalisation. Victims felt that their experiences were not fully understood or acknowledged by the initial response officer, and led to a sense of being invisible and unimportant.	A significant number of participants chose not to disclose certain aspects of their identity when reporting future hate crimes. This reluctance was often rooted in fears of double victimisation, judgment, or having their experiences minimised. Previous encounters with institutions had reinforced the idea that disclosing multiple identities might complicate their cases, leading to incomplete support and perpetuating a cycle of invisibility and mistrust.	Victims of hate crimes often experience a profound lack of confidence in authorities, stemming from previous negative interactions and a perceived indifference towards their cases. Many victims report that their prior complaints went unaddressed, leading to feelings of neglect and disbelief in the system's efficacy. One participant (R13) shared, *"I've reported stuff before, and nothing happened. Not even a callback. So when this latest incident happened, I thought, 'What's the point?' You start to feel like your experiences aren't serious enough, or that they just don't care. After a while, you stop expecting anything from them."*

Interestingly, when victims were asked about their perceptions of the Criminal Justice System, they emphasised that, on balance, they were less concerned with whether the offender was prosecuted or the length of the sentence. What mattered most to them was how the response officer treated them - specifically, whether they were treated fairly and respectfully.

R19 described: *"Looking back at this incident, I was not bothered that they did not apprehend the offender and that he was never prosecuted. What effected me most is the lack of understanding by the response officer. I could feel they weren't equipped to deal with someone like me - someone who doesn't just fall under one neat label. It's like the system hasn't caught up with reality."*

Conclusion

In answering the first research question regarding the types and impact of hate crime victimisation endured by victims with multiple identities, the data has highlighted the severe and targeted victimisation, as well as the profound and lasting psychological impact of hate crimes on individuals. More specifically, it has shown that occupying intersectional minority identities increases feelings of vulnerability, with victims often feeling that they need to defend multiple aspects of their identity.

Responding to the second research question concerning victims' experiences during the reporting stage, several key themes emerged. Primarily, victims reported encountering a lack of understanding and dismissive attitudes by response officers, particularly regarding the classification of their case as a hate crime. This issue was notably more pronounced among disabled victims, who often felt their experiences were not taken seriously.

Second, and most notably, the data showed that in their interaction with the response officers, victims were not being recognised for their multiple identities – meaning a part of them is being ignored. Instead of being seen as whole individuals, they felt reduced to the most apparent or easily categorised aspects of their identity.

Through the frequent failure of police responses to acknowledge the complexity of their intersecting identities, nor them being seen through a holistic lens, a range of negative outcomes ensued such as feelings of being misunderstood and a part of them being invisible, reluctance to report future targeting and erosion of trust in the police.

Unfortunately, the existing legislative framework is not geared to capture that intersectionality. This gap is mirrored into police practice, with the current frameworks often failing to capture the experiences of individuals with multiple marginalised identities. The often-poor handling of victims of hate crime with multiple minority identities by police response officers, leads to the miscategorising of these victims at reporting stages. Recognising and addressing this gap is crucial for ensuring that all victims receive appropriate recognition and support.

Recommendations for future directions aimed at improving mental health for Hate Crime victims:

Clear Protocols:
Instead of potentially overlooking critical aspects of the victim's identity, establish clear protocols for handling cases involving intersecting identities. In handling each case, there is a need move beyond the single-axis approach to provide a more comprehensive understanding of each case.

Enhance training:
Provide training to improve handling by frontline officers. Understanding the nuances of intersectionality and the importance of dealing competently with victims of intersectionality will need to be included in existing police training, with an emphasis on the importance of treating victims with fairness and respect, ensuring they are heard and seen holistically, rather than being reduced to checkboxes.

Revise Data Collection Practices:
In time, consider upgrading the data collection methods to fully capture the various combinations and identities of hate crime victims with multiple minority identities.
This combined effort of improved police training with an improved recording system has the potential to enhance the wellbeing of victims of hate crimes with multiple identities in the long-term, as they would feel protected by the endeavours of the Criminal Justice System.

Appendix A:

Table 1: Hate crimes recorded by monitored strand (March 2018-March 2022):

Numbers and percentages

England and Wales, excluding Devon and Cornwall

Hate crime strand	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	% change 2021/22 to 2022/23
Race	77,850	[x]	90,909	108,476	101,906	-6
Religion	8,460	[x]	6,288	8,602	9,387	9
Sexual orientation	14,161	[x]	18,239	25,639	24,102	-6
Disability	8,052	[x]	9,690	13,905	13,777	-1
Transgender	2,253	[x]	2,728	4,262	4,732	11
Total number of motivating factors	110,776	[x]	127,854	160,884	**153,904**	-4
Total number of offences	104,765	112,633	122,256	153,536	**145,214**	-5

Source: Police recorded crime, Home Office

Appendix B:

The Sample:

	Details of Participant	Minority identities	Specific identifying features
R1	Female, 24	Muslim and Sexual Orientation	No hair covering but darker complexion
R2	Male, 42	Homosexual and disability	
R3	Male, 31	Sexual orientation and race	
R4	Male, 27	Disability and sexual orientation	Wheelchair user
R5	Female, 64	Asian, Muslim, hidden disability	Wears a hair covering
R6	Female 34	Race and Sexual Orientation	Black
R7	Female, 26	Race and transgender	Hindu
R8	Male, 65	Disability, age and sexual orientation	Crutches
R9	Male, 30	Religion and transgender	Jewish
R10	Male, 22	Religion and sexual orientation	Muslim
R11	Male, 52	Race and religion	Muslim, dressed in religious garb
R12	Female, 35	Race and sexual orientation	Black
R13	Female, 40	Sexual orientation and religion	Sikh
R14	Male, 33	Race and disability	Chinese. Hard of hearing.
R15	Female, 36	Religion and disability	Jewish
R16	Male, 23	Race and religion	Chinese and Christian
R17	Woman, 26	Mixed race, religion	Wears a hijab
R18	Woman, 57	Disability and age	
R19	Male, 37	Race and sexual orientation	Mixed race
R20	Woman, 68	Disabled and Misogyny	Low vision
R21	Male, 26	Race and transgender	Black
R22	Male, 53	Homosexual and disabled	Hard of hearing
R23	Male, 45	Race and sexual orientation	Homosexual and Black
R24	Female, 44	Disability and sexual orientation	Speech impediment
R25	Female, 21	Race and religion	Mixed race
R26	Female, 69	Lesbian and disabled	Walking stick
R27	Male, 23	Disability and religion	Sikh
R28	Female, 54	Sexual orientation and race	Lesbian and Black
R29	Female, 43	Religion and sexual orientation	Muslim
R30	Male, 35	Transgender and mixed race	

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