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Keywords: athletes; youth sports; students; schools; academic performance.

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Sports and School Involvement and Performance: Perception of Student-Athletes

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Abstract- The aim of this study was to identify the level of influence of the engagement and personal support of social agents in sports and in the study, perceived by athletes from training categories in the city of Florianopolis (SC/Brazil). The study included 396 athletes of both sexes, aged between 13 and 18 years.[1] In data collection, two instruments were applied: Perceived Influences in Sport and Study Scale (EIPE); and Identification form for athletes in sports modalities. In the statistical analysis, descriptive (simple and percentage frequency) and inferential (Spearman correlation, chi-square) tests were used. The results showed positive levels of influence of personal engagement and support from social agents in sport and in the study. In turn, there were slightly higher levels of positive influence for the sport, especially in relation to personal and coach influences. Family members had slightly higher levels of positive influences for the study compared to other social actors, while teammates had lower levels of positive influences and higher levels of indifferent (neutral) influence on the study. It is concluded that the sport-study relationship is positive, as in addition to providing support to student-athletes, family members, coaches and teammates share similar beliefs and expectations regarding sports practice and study, to guide and support this double journey, especially during youth.

Keywords: athletes; youth sports; students; schools; academic performance.

I. Introduction

The acquisition of personal and social skills depends on the active involvement of the student-athlete in the pursuit of their goals and on the positive relationship established between sport and school education (Soares, Antunes, & Aguiar, 2015). Personal engagement has been investigated as a one-dimensional construct determined by the youth's pleasure in performing a certain activity, while social support, more recently complemented, as a multidimensional and fundamental determinant of athlete engagement (Scanlan, Russell, Wilson, & Scanlan, 2003), both in sport and in study.

Scientific literature on the subject has advanced over the years (Ress & Sabia, 2010). However, despite the studies developed, there is still incipient research focusing on the perception of student-athletes about the involvement and sports and school performance, jointly, using specific instruments that can provide greater coherence in the discussion of the results in the different contexts investigated. Studies have predominantly focused on the athlete's career (Dunn, Dorsch, King, & Rothlisberger, 2016; Knight, Hadwood, & Sellars, 2018), or even looking at personal engagement and the influence of social agents only in sport (Sheridan, Coffee, & Lavallee, 2014; Coutinho, Mesquita, & Fonseca, 2018), without considering academic training.

Personal engagement and social support represent distinct but interrelated experiences, which together have the potential to impact the athletes' perception of their well-being and their continuity in the sport (Defrese & Smith, 2014) and study. Negative social experiences and interactions, marked by undesirable, intrusive, and insensitive behavior (Newsom, Rook, Nishishiba, Sorkin, & Mahan, 2005) represent a negative experience for the student-athlete, which may lead to the abandonment of sports and, possibly, of school activities.

The dedication and effort to sports practice often make academic training compromised, as student-athletes cannot keep pace with other students. However, measures to support student-athletes should not only be economic or infrastructure, but also academic and orientation, enabling the adaptation of the training process to the peculiar conditions and situations of these young people with specific educational needs. Without proper help, counseling, and appropriate support, many of them can be subjected to situations of stress and failure, which can lead to dropouts that will mark their personal and professional future (Pérez, Álvarez, & Aguilar, 2014).

In contrast, some studies have shown that the best school performances have been obtained by students who have more frequent and intense involvement with sport (Lindner, 1999; Peserico, Kravchychyn, & Oliveira, 2015, Dobersek & Arellano, 2017), noting that failure school is slightly higher for students who are not athletes (Soares, Antunes, & Aguiar, 2015). In addition, university student-athletes have higher graduation rates when compared to

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students who do not play sports (Lumpkin & Favor, 2015; Scott, Paskus, Miranda, Petr, & McArdle., 2008). Such findings may mean that difficulties exist, but when there is support and support for these young people to deal with both backgrounds, career development tends to be positive and favorable.

In this context, young people maintain multiple social relationships (Ullrich-French & Smith, 2006), among which, family members, coaches, and teammates stand out as the three most influential social relationships for the athlete's engagement in the sport (Sheridan, Coffee, & Lavallee, 2014; Côté, Turnnidge, & Vierimaa, 2016) and in the study. The multidimensional aspect of social support is presented in different ways and one of them is the way student-athletes perceive it. That is, while one young person may understand support as acceptable and even positive, another may have the same type of support, but perceive it as a source of stress and see it as negative (Wuerth, Lee, & Alfermann, 2004).

From this perspective, considering that the impact of personal and social influences is totally dependent on the perception of the young person, as well as their positive and/or negative perceptions are contextually relevant and have a unique potential to impact sports and school involvement and performance, the objective of this study was to identify the level of influence of the personal engagement and support of social agents in sports and in study, perceived by athletes from training categories in the city of Florianopolis (SC).

That said, the following hypotheses were formulated for this study: (a) the perception of influences of personal engagement and social agents, both in sport and in the study, are predominantly positive; (b) the influences of personal engagement are mainly positive for sport; (c) the influences of family members are more positively directed towards the study; (d) the influences of coaches and teammates are mostly positive for the sport and indifferent to the study.

II. Methods

a) Design

This study is characterized as descriptive, cross-sectional, and quantitative approach to data (Ato, López, & Benavente, 2013).

b) Participants

The study included 396 student-athletes, aged between 13 and 18 years, practitioners of team sports (basketball, soccer, futsal, handball, volleyball) and individual sports (artistic gymnastics, judo, karate, swimming, taekwondo, tennis, tennis table, chess), linked to the Municipal Sports Foundation of Florianopolis, Santa Catarina (Brazil). The inclusion criteria for the study were: athletes of both sexes; from 13 to 18 years old; of collective and individual sports modalities; of training categories; and who were students of Basic Education.

c) Measuring Instruments

To collect the information, two instruments were used: (a) Perceived Influences in Sports and Study Scale (EIPE); and (b) Identification form for athletes of sports modalities.

(a) The EIPE is composed of 49 items, divided into two factors (involvement with sports training and performance in sports competitions and involvement with studies and school performance) and four dimensions (personal engagement, family influences, coaches, and teammates influences), measured from an ordinal scale from one to five (1 = very negative; 2 = negative; 3 = no influence; 4 = positive; 5 = very positive) to classify the perception of influences. The Scale went through the steps of content validation (0.90), clarity of language (0.95), construct validity ($\chi 2/gl=1.751$; GFI=0.85; AGFI=0.82; CFI=0, 90; SRMR=0.059; RMR=0.046; RMSEA=0.042; CFI=0.90; TLI=0.89), internal consistency ($\alpha<0.70$) and temporal validity (0.61-0.80), in which reached validity indices that conferred satisfactory scientific quality and validity. The classification of athletes was performed by grouping perceptions into three categories (negative, indifferent, positive) about the level of influence of family members, coaches, and teammates in the sport and in the study.

(b) The identification form was used to collect the characteristics of the student-athletes, consisting of 30 closed items distributed in four topics: (1) Personal data (03 items); (2) Study data (10 items); (3) Sports data (16 items); and (4) Frequency of study, sport and leisure (20 sub-items). In the present study, the variables (gender and date of birth) of topic 1, (year and school period) of topic 2 and (modality, training period and level of competitions) of topic 3 were analyzed.

d) Data Collection Procedures

To carry out the study, preliminarily, contact was made with the Secretary of Sports of Florianopolis to clarify the objectives and procedures of the research, as well as to request data regarding the sports teams. Soon after acceptance of participation in the research, the project was submitted and approved by the Ethics Committee for Research with Human Beings (CEPSH) of the State University of Santa Catarina (UDESC), under opinion nº 2667.499/2018.

The participation of athletes in the research was effected after signing the Informed Consent Form (TCLE) by parents and/or guardians and by athletes over 18 years of age and by signing the Consent Term by athletes up to 17 years of age. Data collection was carried out between September and December 2018,

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moments before or immediately after the training and competitions of each modality, as previously agreed with the technician responsible for each team. At that moment, the athletes answered the instruments individually and had the help of the researchers to solve any doubts that arose when filling out the instruments.

e) Statistical Analysis

For data analysis, an electronic spreadsheet was first created in Microsoft Excel program to categorize the variables: gender (female, male); type of school (private, public); school shift (morning, afternoon); teaching stage (Elementary School, High School); sports modalities (collective, individual); sports training shift (morning, afternoon); and level of disputed competitions (regional and/or state, national and/or international), considering the response made by the athletes.

As for the stage of sports development (13 to 15 years - sports specialization and +16 years - sports investment), a grouping was carried out based on the age of the athletes, according to the Developmental Model of Sport Participation (DMSP), suggested by Côté, Baker and Abernethy (2003). Regarding the level of influence of personal engagement and support from family members, coaches, and teammates in the sport and in the study (negative, indifferent, positive), the EIPE weighting calculations were used to transform and classify the scores (<114 – negative, between 115 and 180 – indifferent, >181 – positive). After categorizing the data, descriptive statistical resources (simple frequency and percentage) were used with the help of online MedCalc to analyze the characteristics and perception of personal engagement and influences of social agents from the student-athletes.

III. Results

The analysis of the characteristics of the 396 athletes from teams linked to the FME in Florianopolis showed homogeneity in the distribution of students from public and private schools, as well as a predominance of male athletes, in the sports specialization stage, practitioners of collective sports and with experience sport at the regional and/or state level. In addition, it was revealed that most study in the morning shift and in Elementary School (Table 1).

Table 1: Characterization of student-athletes participating in the study.

Variables	Categories	Total (n%)	p
Gender	Female	123 (31,1)	<0,001
	Male	273 (68,9)	
Development stage	Specialization (13 to 15 years)	237 (59,8)	0,001
	Investment (16 to 18 years)	159 (40,2)	
Type of sport	Collective	309 (78,0)	<0,001
	Individuals	87 (22,0)	
Training shifts	1 shift	278 (70,2)	<0,001
	More than 1 shift	118 (29,8)	
Level of competitions played	Regional and/or State	284 (71,7)	<0,001
	National and/or International	112 (28,3)	
Type of school	Private	211 (53,3)	0,190
	Public	185 (46,7)	
School shift	Morning	278 (70,2)	<0,001
	Evening	118 (29,8)	
Teaching step	Elementary School	229 (57,8)	0,002
	High school	167 (42,2)	

Legend: p≤0,05.
Source: Study data, 2021.

The identification of the perception of the level of influences of personal engagement and the support of social agents of student-athletes showed that athletes perceive, in general, higher levels of positive influences for their involvement and performance, both in sports and in the study. Furthermore, despite the observation of a positive perception in the different dimensions of influences for sport and for the study, there were slightly higher levels of positive influence for sport, compared to the study, especially in relation to the level of influences of personal engagement and the support of coaches. The dimension related to teammates was the one that showed lower levels of positive influences and higher levels of indifferent (neutral) perception of influence in the study, while family members showed slightly higher levels of positive influences for the study, compared to the other agents (Table 2).

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Table 2: Perception of influences of personal engagement and support from social agents of student-athletes.

Personal and social influences	Sport	Study
	n (%)	n (%)
Personal		
Negative	00 (0,0)	04 (1,0)
Indifferent	20 (05,1)	61 (15,4)
Positive	376 (94,9)	331 (83,6)
Family		
Negative	00 (00,0)	04 (1,0)
Indifferent	44 (11,1)	45 (11,4)
Positive	352 (88,9)	347 (87,6)
Coaches		
Negative	00 (00,0)	03 (08,0)
Indifferent	39 (9,8)	90 (22,7)
Positive	357 (90,2)	303 (76,5)
Teammates		
Negative	00 (00,0)	21 (5,3)
Indifferent	43 (10,9)	161 (40,7)
Positive	353 (89,1)	214 (54,0)
General		
Negative	00 (00,0)	03 (8,0)
Indifferent	22 (5,6)	64 (16,2)
Positive	374 (94,4)	329 (83,1)

Source: Study data, 2021.

IV. Discussion

Evidence showed that most of the student-athletes surveyed are male, noting their greater presence in sports practice in clubs and sports training programs (Leite & Sampaio, 2013). This finding reinforces the idea that boys have a higher frequency and level of sports practice than girls (Bastos, Reis, Aranha, & Garrido, 2015). Furthermore, according to Salles (1993), the average practice of physical activity decreases 2.7% with age in boys and 7.4% in girls.

In the literature, it is verified that girls aged up to 16 years have moderate involvement with the practice of sports, but there is a decrease thereafter, while in boys aged 12 to 19 years, there is a balance of levels of sports practice (Vasconcelos & Maia, 2001). From a practical point of view, these findings seem to indicate that sports poles are more attractive and aimed at young male athletes. Perhaps, sports for female athletes need to be better planned, aiming to increase the development of skills that allow girls/women to feel a sense of competence and affiliation, making them more likely to participate and stay in sport (Rottenesteiner, 2013).

In this study, it was possible to notice the predominant existence of athletes in the sports specialization stage (13 to 15 years old), a phase in which there is an increase in commitment to the sport and concentration on improving skills and techniques, with more frequent competitions (Côté et al., 2003; Wuerth et al., 2004). Who knows, as this is an initial period of contact with the competitiveness of the chosen sport, this stage has been more attractive to athletes than the sport investment stage, because in this last stage athletes need to demonstrate greater responsibility and independence, participating of a greater number of competitions (Côté et al., 2003; Wuerth et al., 2004; Côté et al., 2016) and make more time and shifts available for training.

One of the fundamental aspects that deserve to be highlighted in the sports career development model (Côté et al., 2003; Côté et al., 2016) is the transition from one phase to another (Wuerth et al., 2004). That is, whenever athletes are about to progress, for example, from the specialization stage to the investment stage, they are obliged to meet specific sporting demands. Swimmers, for example, need to pass qualifying times to reach higher levels of competition to rise to a competitive level. Therefore, due to the growing demands, athletes must deal with more demands, stress, and time restrictions, leading them to the likely end of their sports career during the transition phases from one stage to another (Wuerth et al., 2004).

Parallel to the sports specialization stage, the student-athletes in this study were in the final years of Elementary School, a school period marked by an increase in school tasks and tests, compared to the initial years. Academic performance is typically assessed through tests, assignments, and exams, which most often contribute to stressful and anxiety-provoking experiences in students. This situation is analogous to what an athlete experiences during the

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competition (Dobersek & Arellano, 2017). Given these similarities, it can be speculated that student-athletes are able to transfer skills learned through sport (emotional control, concentration, resilience) to academic performance.

It is possible, however, that the skills that student-athletes acquire in sport are not transferred or interfere negatively in other areas of life unless they are intentionally taught and promoted through sport (Gould & Carson, 2008). Many studies report that involvement in sports activities has positive effects on student-athletes (Maciel, Folle, Souza, Vaz, & Salles, 2017), such as healthier lifestyle, academic performance (Lipscomb, 2007), and even improvement of behaviors (Davis & Menard, 2013). However, not every researcher supports these findings, as the relationship between athletic and academic success has been a complex issue (Kelley, Soboroff, Katayama, Pfeiffer & Lovaglia, 2018).

Student-athletes have many goals and time limitations that involve academic, social, and sporting demands (Scott & Castles, 2017) and fatigue or difficulty in managing these activities have a negative impact on the motivation of young people who choose to drop out to alleviate the pressure and stress caused by involvement in sport and study (Alahmed, Yusof, & Shah, 2016). Thus, the lack of time to meet the requirements of the two contexts has been the main reason for abandoning sports practice (Macarro, Romero, & Torres, 2010) and studying among young people.

The number of students who are unable to complete their studies or who are unable to satisfactorily integrate into the dynamics of academic life is high. And the causes for this situation are numerous: difficulties in meeting the demands of the sports and/or school education process; psychological problems; lack of resources; lack of support and motivation; and difficulties in reconciling time (González, Pérez, Pérez, & Benítez, 2007). Thus, the lack of harmony between the two formations, unfortunately, leads many young student-athletes to failure and abandoning one or another formation (Pérez et al., 2014).

The results showed a greater number of student-athletes participating in team sports, demonstrating greater acceptability for team sports, especially in adolescence (Azevedo Junior, Araújo, & Pereira, 2006). Team sports require players in a group to communicate, collaborate and work as a unit in pursuit of common goals (Dobersek & Arellano, 2017). However, it is thought that individual sports modalities have greater acceptance among girls (Corbin, 2002), perhaps explaining the smaller number of female athletes in the study, as well as practitioners of individual sports modalities. Individual sports athletes tend to be more organized, methodical, and disciplined in their studies compared to athletes who play team sports, who are less self-disciplined and more interested in competition (Lee, Whitehead, & Balchin, 2000; Gonçalves, Silva, & Cruz, 2007).

About the first objective of this study, the information obtained showed that athletes perceive, in general, higher levels of positive influences for their involvement and performance, both sports and school, supporting the first hypothesis proposed for this study. This result brings us to evidence that personal influences and social agents tend to be more favorable and positive for young people than unfavorable.

In this context, it is understood that as they become more and more involved with sport and with the advancement of school years, there is a need for young people to develop skills that can help them in their careers in a positive way (Holt & Dunn, 2004). The personal engagement of student-athletes, characterized by their motivation, commitment, discipline, and resilience when conducting their activities, seems to be governed by relationships that have favored their development, especially in sports.

Possibly, in addition to personal engagement, the main contributors to these perceptions are the behaviors, attitudes, and support of socializing agents (Bhalla & Weiss, 2010), specifically, family members, coaches, and teammates (Côté, 1999; Keegan, Harwood, Spray, & Lavallee, 2009). Family members are a global and ubiquitous influence, while coaches and teammates exert influences both in context (usually in sport, but very little in school or at home) and situational levels (specific instances at a given point in time , such as training and competitions) (Vallerand, 1997).

From this point of view, it is reflected that the student-athletes in this study perceive slightly higher levels of positive influences for the sport, compared to the study. In turn, in addition to the superiority of positive influences in the study, there was a significant number of indifferent perceptions in all dimensions, in addition to negative perceptions arising from coaches and teammates in the study.

The family plays a significant role in shaping the success expectations, task values, and behaviors of young people in areas such as sport (Keegan et al., 2009) and school (Bhalla & Weiss, 2010). Involved, warm, and supportive families are associated with young student-athletes with higher levels of competence, self-esteem, and enjoyment of studying and playing sports (Maniam, 2017).

In this investigation, family members showed slightly higher levels of positive influences for the study, compared to other agents. However, they presented higher levels of influence for the sport, refuting the third hypothesis of this study. Perhaps, family members are exerting a more positive influence on their children's involvement in sports, due to the beginning of sports competitiveness.

The behavior of coaches is also fundamental for the participation of young athletes in the sport, as this

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character provides opportunities for athletes to relate and socialize, in addition to stimulating cooperation among teammates (Rottenesteiner, 2013) and involvement with the studies. However, approximately one-third of all athletes who drop out of youth sports are influenced by the coach (Armentrout & Kamphoff, 2011). Perhaps, this is due to the negative aspects coming from this character, including issues such as excessive control, negative feedback, in addition to the extensive scheduling of the season, which is why young athletes often end their participation (Weinberg & Gould, 2010).

Some coaches believe that the best way to produce athletes is to make them play just one sport practically all year, but this dedication often includes social isolation, overdependence, burnout, increased risk of injury and sport abandonment, and especially, of studies. However, this investigation found evidence that coaches have had a greater positive influence on the sport, which means that they are being effective in their role of encouraging and helping athletes in their sports training (Lumpkin & Favor, 2015). Such information partially supports the fourth hypothesis of this study since a greater positive influence on the study was also found.

As they become involved with the sport, young people tend to have greater interaction and involvement with their teammates. What makes this social agent a relevant source of influence, since athletes who perceive encouragement and receive feedback from teammates, to help them develop and promote feelings of belonging, become more likely to prolong their sports involvement (Vazou, Ntoumanis, & Duda, 2006). However, corroborating the ideas of Vallerand (1997) and confirming the fourth hypothesis of this study, about the influence of teammates, high levels of a positive influence of these agents in specific situations in sport were evidenced. In turn, there were lower levels of positive influences and higher levels of indifferent (neutral) perception in the study, perhaps because they are not part of the same school context, which is leading young people to have this perception.

The second objective of this study was to correlate the influences of personal engagement and the influence of family members, coaches, and teammates in the sport and in the study. Evidence confirmed the existence of moderately significant correlations between sport and study and a strong significant correlation between the sport and study dimensions themselves. These findings corroborate the studies that have shown a positive relationship between sport and study (Soares et al., 2015; Bailey, Armour, Kirk, Jess, Pickup, & Sandford, 2009; Alahmed et al., 2016) and the academic success of young athletes (Lindner, 1999; Donnelly, Gibson, Sullivan, Hansen, Hillman, Mayo, Smith, Lambourne, Herrman, Scudder, Betts, Honas, & Washburn, 2013).

In this sense, perhaps the difficulties encountered by young people in reconciling both contexts are reflecting the absence of a strong relationship between them, since young people are forced to associate two roles that are compatible with a cost: that of athlete and that of the student. Training and competition commitments seriously impinge on the role of the student, hindering academic engagement and performance, as well as the educational qualifications that are sought after (Borggrefe & Cachay, 2012). However, despite the difficulties experienced, it is clear from the view of student-athletes that the positive aspects arising from sports participation in parallel with studies are greater and more beneficial than the adversities experienced, leading them to develop skills and competencies that enable them to overcome obstacles and maintaining a dual career for as long as it takes.

The healthy and positive relationship between the three main influencing social agents (Keegan et al., 2009) can lead young people to feel supported and perceive levels of influence that facilitate and strengthen their dual career. Nevertheless, the observation of the influence of social agents is still recent, as research that addresses multiple social influences is relatively less common than research that emphasizes a social agent (Ullrich-French & Smith, 2006). However, existing investigations in the literature reinforce that athletes' social perceptions are contextually relevant and have a unique potential to impact their development. In this way, social support can minimize the symptoms of stress and burnout over time (Defrese & Smith, 2014).

Social support in this context can be understood as the help provided and perceived by individuals who make up the social network (Martinez-Hernaez, Canceller-Maicas, DiGiacomo, & Ariste, 2016) of the student-athlete. From this perspective, it is reflected that, in addition to the engagement and support of social agents, sports participation and academic life can be possible by changing the attitude of young people, that is, a student who wants to practice and get involved with the competitive sport should strive more to obtain better academic performance, aiming to reconcile and provide its participation in both contexts (Alahmed et al., 2016).

Despite exploring the level of personal engagement and social agents in sports and study and correlating the influences of personal engagement and the influence of family members, coaches, and teammates in sport and in the study, a theme little explored in both Brazilian and international literature, the present investigation presented as main limitations the fact that it did not analyze the perception of all members of the student-athletes social network and the types of support provided by each social agent (emotional, informative, tangible), as well as not considering the

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analysis of influences at other times in the sports season and school calendar.

In this sense, the elaboration of investigations on the subject is recommended, not only for its contribution to the sport and study of student-athletes, but above all for the understanding of the role of family members, coaches, and teammates in the conciliation between sport and school. Finally, it is believed that the production of evidence in this regard will help in sports and school education, in which both family members, coaches, and teammates are able to work in a collaborative way, aiming at the participation of student-athletes in both contexts for them to develop positively and pleasantly through sport and study.

V. Conclusions

In summary, the results of this study showed high levels of positive influences in sport and in the study. In turn, there were slightly higher levels of positive influence for the sport, especially in relation to personal engagement and coach influences, while family members had slightly higher levels of positive influence for the study, compared to other agents and levels lowest for positive influences and highest for the indifferent (neutral) perception of influence in the study, in teammates dimension.

Future research is needed to qualitatively investigate the reasons why athletes maintain this perception. Additionally, longitudinal, and experimental studies would demonstrate the nature and mechanisms of how involvement and sports performance contribute or not to the involvement and school performance of young athletes. Finally, looking at different moments of the sporting season and school year, as well as analyzing the perception of all social agents involved (family, coaches, teammates, teachers, entrepreneurs, directors) and the type of support provided and perceived arising of each social agent (emotional, informative, tangible), could support a greater understanding of the involvement and sports and school performance of young athletes.

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