

# Social Exclusion through Lack of Access to Social Support in Rural Areas<sup>1</sup>

**Bill Reimer**

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The availability of appropriate social support is critical for social inclusion. This is most important under conditions of change and stress. In order to ensure such support, therefore, we need to understand the nature of social support in rural areas, how it is used, and the conditions that facilitate or inhibit its use. This paper provides theoretical and empirical contributions to understanding those processes of social inclusion and exclusion as they are reflected in social support. Using a theoretical framework rooted in social relations and data from 1995 rural households in 20 field sites from across Canada as well as the General Social Survey 22, we examine various types of social support that are used under conditions of change, the characteristics of the households using them, and the community-level contexts that condition their use. Both policy and research implications are drawn from these results.

Rural Canada has undergone significant changes over the last 50 years. In the process, a new realignment of winners and losers has emerged—creating new challenges for those concerned about equity, social exclusion, and the future of rural people (Reimer, Bill and Ray D. Bollman 2010). In order to prepare for that future, it is necessary to understand the processes that have brought us here, their consequences for rural people, and the options that have been created by this realignment.

We take an approach that reflects the multidimensional, dynamic, multi-leveled, and relational nature of social exclusion (Shucksmith, Mark and Lorna Philip 2000). Social inclusion and exclusion processes are rooted in social relations and norms that legitimate

and provide access to resources and services. We propose a classification of four basic systems of social relations that condition this access and provide evidence regarding how they are distributed in rural Canada. To do this, we focus on the use of social support by rural households and examine the types of households that use this support. The results of this study are used to justify the need for intensive case studies of social inclusion and exclusion processes within a research design that permits systematic comparisons across different contexts. If successful, this approach will not only corroborate the perspectives developed regarding social exclusion, but will also serve to guide practical policy proposals for dealing with challenges related to social exclusion and inclusion.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Although the use of social support reflects only a part of the way in which inclusion and exclusion occurs, it is particularly critical to the way in which access to resources or services is enhanced or limited. It also serves as a useful focus because of the wide range of

ways in which support occurs. This allows us to examine the shifts in sources for social support related to the nature of the need, the type of person requiring support, and the context in which it occurs.

In this framework we propose that there are four fundamental types of social relational systems through which support and distribution occur: i.e. market, bureaucratic, associative, and communal (Reimer, Bill et al. 2008). Being able to operate in one or more of these types of relations is critical to having access to resources, services, and the systems of legitimation that support entitlements. Since each of these systems is in turn organized and supported by more general social structures and processes, the framework provides a basis for understanding how these general changes might alter the conditions, people, and groups that are excluded or included.

Market relations are based on the exchange of goods and services within a relatively free and information-rich context (Swedberg, Richard M. 1991:21). Social inclusion within this system requires access to tradable goods or services, adequate information about markets and prices, good negotiation skills, and a high level of mobility.

Bureaucratic relations are based on a rationalized division of labour and the structuring of authority through general principles and rules (Gerth, H. H. and C. Wright Mills 1967:196f). Social inclusion depends on the ways in which rights are institutionalized, the capacity of institutions to enforce those rights, either formally or informally (Stinchcombe, Arthur L. 1968:149ff), and the ability of individuals or groups to articulate their interests in terms of general rights and forms of organization.

Associative relations are primarily based on shared interests. Individuals come together to accomplish specific goals and express concerns that are common to the group (Gunn, Christopher and Hazel Dayton Gunn, 1991:156; Olson, Mancur, 1977). Inclusion based on associative relations is likely to be highest where common interests are shared, information about others' interests is easily available, where the symbols of commitment to the goals are clear, and where members provide many contributions to the goals.

### THE CHANGING RURAL CONTEXT IN CANADA

Changes in rural Canada have significantly impacted the manifestations of all four types of social relations. The massive outmigration of populations from resource-based communities since the 1940s has undermined the pool of people for voluntary organi-

Communal relations are based on strongly shared identity. Membership and collective action is often tied to ascribed characteristics of birth, ethnicity, or location (Benokraitis, Nijole V. 1997; Fiske, Alan Page 1991:258ff; Hamilton, Gary G. and Nicole Woolsey Biggart 1992). These relations require a relatively high level of trust and loyalty, especially where exchanges are long term or the objects of exchange are unclear. For this reason, they are often associated with strong markers of inclusion and exclusion such as rituals, symbols, rites of passage, and ascribed characteristics (Cooley, Charles Horton 1922).

Each type of social relation operates with considerable internal coherence. However, they are not isolated from each other (Oughton, Elizabeth et al. 2003). Although all four usually operate in a specific situation, only one or two may be dominant. Mutual enhancement among them is not always assured, however, since there are many points where their basic structures and processes differ (Coase, R. H. 1991).

Social inclusion and exclusion are mediated by the interplay among all four of these types of relations. At an individual level, access to resources and services associated with each type is predicated on one's ability to function well within the appropriate normative system (Seiling, Shanon et al. 2011). As banking bureaucracies moved from tellers to ATMs, for example, the heavier reliance on bureaucratic-based relations created significant obstacles for those unfamiliar with the technology and isolated them from those who could help in the transaction.

Similar processes occur at a collective or community level. Rural communities have had to become proficient at grant-writing, business-planning, and community-development techniques in order to access the resources and services of contemporary public and private sector institutions. Those that are unable to do so, because of isolation, population size, human capital, or social capital, will remain relatively excluded unless the dominance of market and bureaucratic types of relations declines.

zations and encouraged the withdrawal of state services (Reimer, Bill and Ray D. Bollman 2010). The concentration of corporate organization and power has reduced the ability of local people to control their futures. This is especially the case because the policies

guiding those organizations are most often formulated in distant urban centres with little sensitivity to local conditions or interests.

Rural communities often face particular difficulties with respect to these types of changes (Meert, Henk 2000). Traditionally, their social networks have been deeply embedded in associative and communal types of relations—where status is more often attributed to helping neighbours rather than closing a lucrative deal and the strong division of roles so often found in public life is made difficult by the many different venues in which the same people meet.

In contemporary society, however, associative and communal types of relations are less effective for

accessing resources. Currently, it is market and bureaucratic relations that have become dominant. Since rural people are required to compete in this context, they are disadvantaged so long as they fail to develop the skills associated with these latter types of social relations.

Our objective is to understand the ways in which these general changes affect the organization of social support in rural areas. To this end, we will focus on rural people and households and examine their responses to recent changes—inquiring specifically into the people and groups to whom they turned for support when it was needed.

## THE DATA AND APPROACH

Our analysis makes use of two sources of data. The first (NRE) consists of 1995 interviews conducted in 2001 in rural households from 20 field sites across Canada.<sup>2</sup> As part of these interviews, respondents were asked to identify the most important change that had occurred in their household over the last year. Follow-up questions were asked in order to explore the ways in which the household dealt with that change, the success of their response, and the nature of the trade-offs they made in order to deal with the change.<sup>3</sup> This series of questions yielded a rich source of information regarding the types of social support they sought and the outcomes of their strategies.

The second source is from the 2008 General Social Survey on social networks (GSS22). As part of that survey, a module was developed based on the questions in the NRE survey but modified for delivery by telephone (cf. Section 3 of the GSS: Changes Experienced by the Respondent). The GSS22 included 20,401 respondents from 10 Canadian provinces (Social and Aboriginal Statistics Division 2008). As in the NRE interviews, the GSS22 gathered information regarding the sources, nature, and outcomes of the social support they received from family, friends, local groups, formal organizations, and other sources.

These two surveys complement each other. The NRE survey contains detailed information about the type and nature of responses to stress by household members along with considerable information regarding the local communities in which the households were embedded. It was restricted to a few smaller rural communities (less than 10,000 population), however.

The strength of the GSS22, on the other hand, is its large sample population representing household dwellers from both rural and urban regions. It is limited, however, since there is little that is known about the local community context of the respondents. The information it gathered about this context is filtered by the perception of the respondent. Evidence from the NRE survey cautions us that this perception is not always trustworthy when people are identifying the services and opportunities in their community (Reimer, Bill 2006).

Comparisons between the two surveys have been very promising insofar as they seem to be measuring some of the same fundamental conditions (Reimer, Bill 2011). The method of information gathering in each survey, however, is very different. In the NRE survey, the types of changes were open-ended so respondents were able to identify many different types of changes, and were then asked to select the one with the greatest impact from their list. These responses were subsequently coded into 4 categories for analysis: *financial or income* changes (including education or legal), *health*-related changes (including parenting and home care), changes in *relationships* (living arrangements or personal achievements), and *other* types of changes. The GSS22 survey began with the range of responses from the NRE survey, modified some for greater precision, and then adapted them to a telephone style of engagement. Respondents were prompted by questions regarding each of the types of changes rather than coding those changes using open-ended questions. These different styles of delivery may

affect some of the response rates, but the discrepancies appear specific and localized (Reimer, Bill 2011).

These databases provide information allowing us to explore the use of social support at three levels: the individual, the household, and the site. By doing so, we can identify the characteristics of those using various types of support as well as some of the contextual circumstances that may condition their choices. We will do this using the following three major questions.

- What are the major sources of support sought by people and households?
- What types of people or households use what types of support?

- How are the uses and outcomes of support affected by the rural or urban location of the households?

Indicators for the use of the four types of normative systems are derived from the various types of support to which the respondents turned when faced with major changes. Employers, financial advisors, and accountants, for example, were considered to be sources that required familiarity with market-based norms. Social services, municipal officials, and doctors were considered to be bureaucratic-based and clubs, religious organizations, and recreation groups were considered associative-based. A more detailed list and description can be found via Reimer (2011).

**RESULTS**

**Major sources of stress**

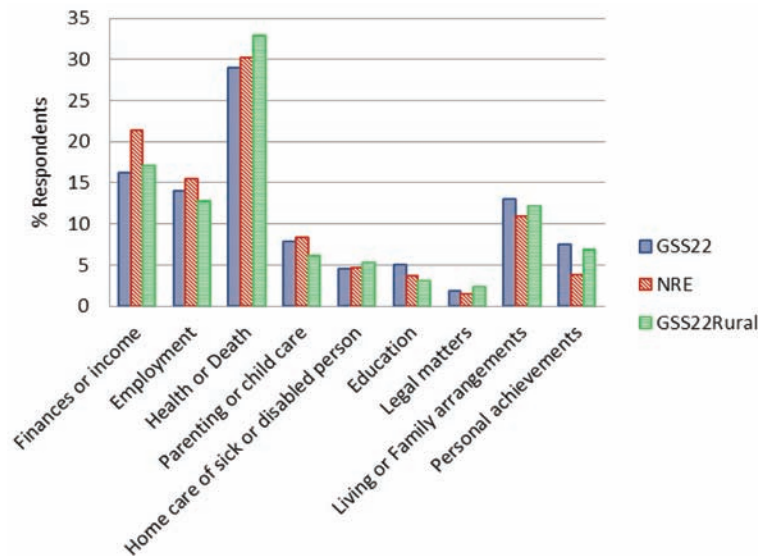
Of the 1995 household members interviewed in the NRE survey, 70% of them (1405) reported information concerning the most significant change that had affected them over the year before the survey. Similarly, about 70% of the respondents in the GSS22 survey (14,392) provided information about their most significant change.

Figure 1 provides results for the distribution of major change types for the NRE and GSS22 surveys.<sup>4</sup> The analysis includes a separate bar for those respondents who live outside Census Metropolitan Areas

(CMA), Census Agglomerations (CA), and Prince Edward Island (PE). This provides a proxy indicator for rural and small town Canada—making it more equivalent to the sites selected for the NRE survey.

Figure 1 makes it clear that changes related to health (including death) are the most important to households in all three surveys and locations. Finances or income are second, while employment and living or family arrangements are third and fourth respectively. These categories will provide the primary bases for our subsequent analysis of the sources of social support.

**FIGURE 1: Major changes by NRE and GSS22 Surveys**



**Use of Social supports**

Figure 2 shows that communal-based social supports are most often used to deal with the stresses identified above, while bureaucratic-based ones are the second most important source. The lower levels of communal support in the NRE survey are noticeable in these results—with the NRE sample showing a difference of more than 15%. There may be some effect due to the presentation protocols of the two surveys since the GSS22 procedure took the respondent through each of the categories in sequence while the NRE approach was more open-ended, but at this point we are not able to independently verify such an interpretation.

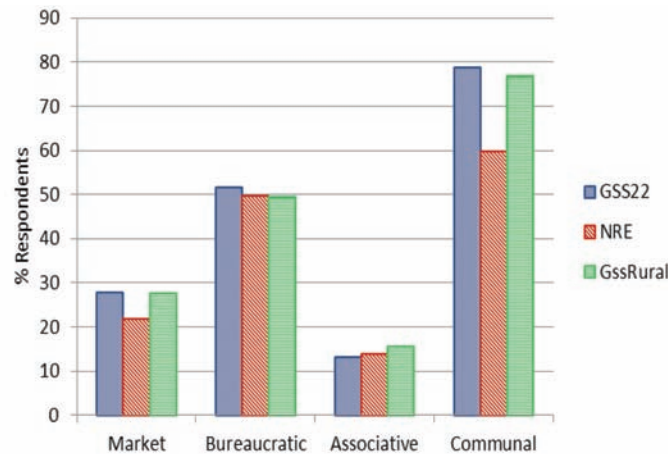
Our NRE analysis demonstrated that these various types of support are typically used in combination—an important point for the development of policy initiatives within government and community organ-

izations (Reimer, Bill 2004a). An analysis of the GSS22 data confirms this pattern in general, but does so in a manner that differs from the NRE research in a few dramatic ways (cf. Figure 3).

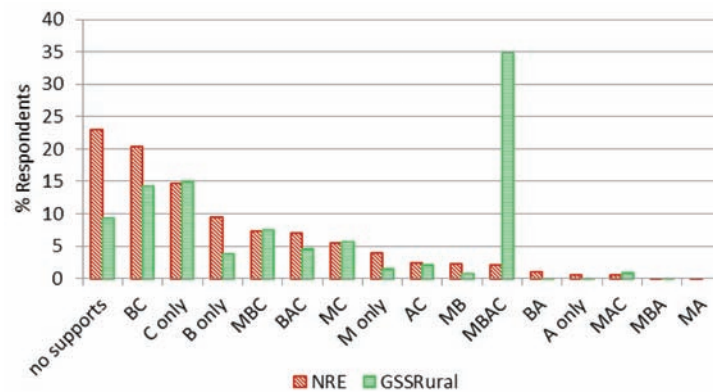
The most noticeable feature of the comparison is that the GSS22 respondents were much more likely to use all four types of support than those in the NRE survey. Thirty-five percent of the GSS22 respondents indicated they used all four types while only two percent of the NRE respondents did so. On the other hand, the NRE respondents were more likely to make use of no supports, bureaucratic and communal supports in combination, or bureaucratic supports alone than those answering the GSS22 survey.

These data reinforce the key role of family and close friends for the social support of rural people and households. As we suspect, communal-related sup-

**FIGURE 2: Sources of support by 4 normative systems and survey (NRE and GSS22)**



**FIGURE 3: Social support by combinations of normative types (NRE and GSS22 Rural)**



ports are also key elements in providing access to bureaucratic, market, and associative types of relations and the assets they provide. This suggests that social support policy directed solely to building bureaucratic institutions, or relying on bureaucratic channels of distribution will provide only a limited solution to social exclusion unless the communal types of relations supporting them are also facilitated.

**Supports used by type of change**

Although communal-based types of support are the most frequently used, there is variation in the other types according to the nature of the change that the household has faced. Figure 4 illustrates that for financial changes, bureaucratic and market-based supports follow communal ones, with associative-based supports playing a relatively minor role. As one might expect in a country with a relatively strong health care system, bureaucratic-based supports are extremely important for health changes—along with communal-based ones, whereas both associative and market-based supports are less critical. For changes in living arrangements and family issues, communal and bureaucratic-based relations continue to play an important role while market and associative-based sources make fewer contributions.

The importance of the type of change is also found when examining the combinations in which these various supports are used, but a more complex picture emerges—one that is important to explore for its theoretical and policy implications. Figure 5 provides the same type of information as Figure 4, however, it identifies the ways in which the most frequently used

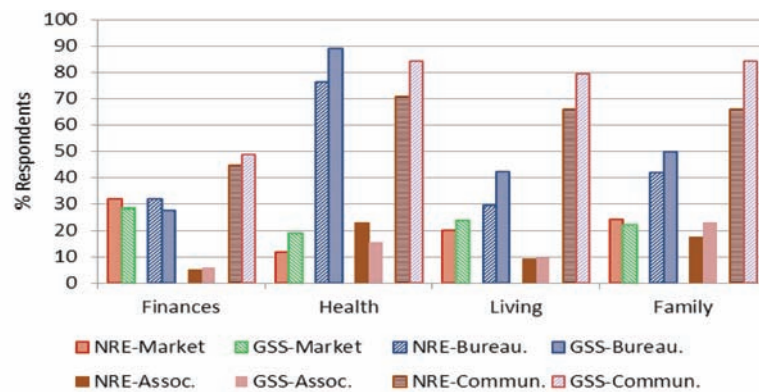
types of support are combined—for rural respondents to the GSS22 survey. From Figure 4, for example, we see that communal-based supports are most often used for financial changes. Overall, we find that these communal-based supports are most often used on their own (20%), but sometimes in combination with bureaucratic-based supports (8%). The patterns are different when we examine each type of change, however (cf. Figure 5). For health-related changes, communal-based supports are most often used in combination with bureaucratic ones. For both living and family-related changes, communal-based relations alone provide a high percentage of support, but combinations with bureaucratic and associative-based ones remain important.

These results reinforce a multidimensional approach to social support. It suggests that addressing social support and inclusion by augmenting bureaucratic, associative, or market-oriented infrastructure alone will provide only a partial solution to the problem. Instead, each of these approaches should be seen as part of a package: one in which support for communal-based relations is critical—either on their own or in combination with other types of support. They also imply that those with weak communal supports are likely to face social exclusion when faced with all types of household changes.

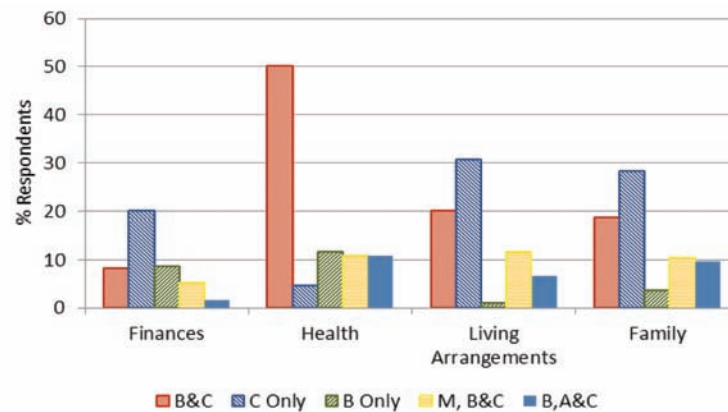
**Examining vulnerable types of people**

The complexity of social support processes is further illustrated when we consider the types of individuals and households involved. The data allow us to consider some of the key characteristics mentioned in the lit-

**FIGURE 4: Use of social supports by type of change in household (NRE and GSS22-Rural surveys)**



**FIGURE 5: Use of supports by combinations and types of changes (GSS22-Rural Only)**



erature that are associated with special challenges in a rural context. Age, gender, employment, income, housing, health, family structure, ethnicity, length of time in the community, and specially challenged populations have all been shown to be particularly vulnerable to exclusion in rural areas (Shucksmith, Mark and Lorna Philip 2000). Our analysis begins with an examination of some of these issues, but with particular attention to the four types of relations to which people with these characteristics are likely to turn for support.

Since we expect these household characteristics to be related, simple bivariate analysis is likely to be misleading. As a result, we have employed logistic regression analysis to examine the relative strengths of the relationships between these characteristics and the use of various types of social support. Independent, but

parallel analysis was conducted for the two surveys —making slight changes to accommodate the different ways in which the key variables were operationalized. Table 1 provides a summary of these results with respect to the selected variables. In order to reduce the complexity we have identified only the statistically significant relationships (Wald chi-square  $p \geq .05$ ) and reported only the odds ratios for those variable categories.

Table 1 illustrates the variety of sources used for support by the different types of potentially vulnerable people and households. For example, according to the NRE results, we find that single parents are more likely than others to use communal-based supports. According to the GSS results, they are less likely to use market-based supports, but a gender difference appears when we consider bureaucratic-based ones. Women

**TABLE 1: Summary of significant results from logistic analysis of relationships between the types of social support used and indicators of vulnerable populations (odds ratios)**

		Market	Bureaucratic	Associative	Communal
<b>Single Parents</b>	<b>NRE</b>	ns	ns	ns	Male (2.00) and Female (3.84) high
	<b>GSS</b>	Male (.86) and Female (.73) low	Male (.80) low, Female high (1.16)	ns	ns
<b>Low Income HHs</b>	<b>NRE</b>	ns	ns	High (1.65)	ns
	<b>GSS</b>	Low (.75)	ns	ns	ns
<b>Low Education HHs</b>	<b>NRE</b>	Low (.50)	ns	ns	ns
	<b>GSS</b>	ns	Low (0.75)	High (1.14)	ns
<b>Unemployment</b>	<b>NRE</b>	Low (.56)	High (1.81)	High (1.48)	High (1.43)
	<b>GSS</b>	Low (.52)	ns	Low (.61)	ns
<b>Rural and Small Town</b>	<b>GSS</b>	ns	ns	High (1.22)	ns

are more likely to use bureaucratic-based supports than non-single parents, whereas men who are single parents are less likely to use this type of support.

Looking at other variables we see some indication that low-income households are likely to turn to associative-based supports as compensation for their lack of support from market-based ones. Those with low education are most likely to turn to associative-based supports and the unemployed rely more on bureaucratic and communal-based ones. We find equivocal results with respect to associative-based

supports when considering the unemployed, however. The NRE survey results suggest that they are more likely to use these supports than employed people, whereas the GSS22 results indicate they are less likely to do so. This difference may be due to the fact that urban households were not included in the NRE data whereas the rural-urban difference was controlled in the GSS22 analysis. According to the GSS22 analysis, such an interpretation is supported by the finding that associative-based supports are more likely to be used in rural and small town locations.

## CONCLUSIONS

Both general and specific conclusions can be drawn from this research. At a general level, the results confirm the utility of focusing on the four systems of social relations. They support our assumption that each system operates with some internal consistency—most likely a reflection of institutional arrangements on one hand and individual preference and skill on the other. If we were to overlook these differences, we would lose valuable insights into the operation of each process and miss important consequences for specific types of people.

Our research also confirms the operational feasibility of the theoretical framework. We have constructed indexes for the various types of social support that appear valid and reliable—even across different geographical contexts and measurement instruments.

Our work also identifies some specific types of people and supports that require policy attention. It confirms the special attention required for single parents, the poor, the uneducated, and the unemployed and it also suggests how their needs may be different than others. Single parents make more use of communal sources of support, for example. Policies that focus only on market-based relations (e.g. private day care) may further exclude such parents rather than deal with the special demands they face.

For those with little formal education, the data suggest a different approach. They are unlikely to make use of market and bureaucratic-based supports. In this case, our evidence suggests that it is the associative-based ones that are most likely to serve their needs. It may then be more effective to facilitate their use of market and bureaucratic-based ones by starting with associative or communal-based ones rather than focus on market or bureaucratic-based solutions alone.

Program delivery strategies must also take the geographical location into account. Building bureaucratic infrastructure in metro-adjacent areas is likely to have different outcomes than in more remote locations. Other analysis of the NRE data (Reimer, Bill 2004b) reinforces the result from Table 1 that the patterns of social support use in urban, urban-adjacent, and remote locations are likely to be different. Moving beyond the limitations of the public version of the GSS22 will permit a more direct analysis of these differences.

As is so often the case, this research opens up new questions even as it provides answers to others. At a theoretical level, we need to explore the relationship between social support and social exclusion, for example. An individual's use of particular types of support bears an equivocal relationship to social exclusion in general. Does not using a particular type of support mean one is excluded? Does using it, mean one is included? At what points does the use of a support become dependency, for example, thereby increasing the vulnerability of the user?

We also need to elaborate and explore the interdependence of the various types of supports. It is clear from both our own and others' research that access to resources in one sphere requires skills and resources in another, but the details regarding how this is done remain unclear. The data analysis also suggests that the approaches taken will not only vary by the type of person involved, but by the characteristics of their location as well. This type of research relies on the depth of information provided by interviews and observation, but only if it is done in a systematic way—allowing comparisons to be made across venues and conditions used.



## NOTES

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2. Details on the sample frame and selection of households can be found in Reimer (2002).

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