



"YOUTH UNDISGUISED 2024"

An in-depth psychological-representative study from Lönneker & Imdahl rheingold salon compiled for IKW – German Cosmetic, Toiletry, Perfumery and Detergent Association

Do we really need another youth study? For almost 10 years, IKW has regularly looked at young people. In 2016, the first study "Youth undisguised" was published, a representative in-depth psychological study that not only examines individual facts, but also deciphers the basic psychological structure of a generation. The study hits a nerve, so that a selfie and an Instagram study followed in the subsequent years. Currently there is still a great deal of interest in the content of this the 2016 fundamental youth study, as it explains what it means to grow up in today's world and it addresses the importance of cosmetic products for young people. So yes, another study is needed, because a lot has happened in the world in recent years. What impact did all the crises have on young people, on their dreams, fears and self-esteem? How do young people deal with today's crisis-ridden challenges? What has changed in recent times? And what special methods have young people developed to cope with it?

With "Youth undisguised 2024", IKW is now presenting the 4th youth study. The results of which are based on 34 in-depth psychological surveys and a representative online study with 1012 young people.

The core of the results: Young people still feel "lost" within the many crises but want to retain the upper hand over their lives. Because little can be done about the crises themselves, it is obvious to use one's own body to (re)establish control. And the young people achieve this by working on the surfaces of various levels. Moreover they want to get a grip on their own psyche. It's all about happiness. And what doesn't make them happy can go. This applies to both jobs and romantic relationships. Mind coaches, red flags, but also the search for the perfect job and lifestyle have become central to the "ego modeling" of young people.

For many young people, it is very important to optimise their façade for the outside world. Life should appear smooth and perfect on the outside. Everything is smiled away and, if possible "smoothed out", nothing should go wrong or look wrong. 44% emphasize that everything in their lives really does run smoothly. It is not uncommon for this smoothing to appear artificial. But 55% are convinced that nobody notices their – potential – problems. At the same time, 63% of young people say they have experienced something really bad. They also share their drug or psychiatric experiences without being asked. Compared to older people, they believe they are much more open about recognising and discussing mental health problems. This behaviour, the smoothing out as well as the "Oversharing", are attempts to deal with the feeling of a loss of control. This was also found in the previous studies: Young people try to get a grip on all imponderables by smoothing out the façade or by overemphasizing their problems to demonstrate a particularly mindful, controlled approach to them.

Growing up is not easy. It never has been. However, young people today find themselves in a greater field of tension compared to a few years ago. On the one hand, they are struggling with the physical and hormonal changes that everyone must go through. Pimples, the smell of sweat and other embarrassments alone convey the feeling of a physical loss of control. What's more, young people today no longer simply become men or women. Never before have so many people in a generation described themselves as non-binary or genderfluid. Around 20% state that they are not heterosexual. This leads to an intensification or complication of the search for personality. Becoming a man or a woman is no longer a "fixed" factor. Having to come to terms with sexual orientation and the "right" body means to question one of the last certainties in life and to make that falter.

Despite the importance of tolerance for all people, it has become an additional challenge when growing up. On the one hand, 68% of young people consider themselves tolerant and do not want to be prejudiced. However, 55% are also overwhelmed and annoyed by the "constant" LGBTQI+ discussions and in some cases already aggressively distance themselves from these.

One young girl says: ***"It really stresses me out that the LGBTQI+ group at our school keeps asking me if I want to reconsider"***. 25% feel even greater doubts and insecurities about themselves and their physicality than it is generally the case in adolescence.

Physicality and identity formation



It's good that it's more accepted today to be able to live one's own sexuality and gender.



Are annoyed by the LGBTQI+ discussion.



It is sometimes difficult to be clear about one's own identity – also in the context of the LGBTQI+ discussion.

■ Total

Base: All respondents (n = 1012)

Question: To what extent do the following statements apply to you? – Answer scale from 1 ("Does not apply at all") to 6 ("Fully applies"), top 3 values

But that's not all: young people also feel “lost” at the social level. Corona, the climate crisis and war, as well as inflation, all that leads to a constant concern that they will not be able to shape their lives in a self-determined and controlled manner. 59% find financial uncertainty extremely frightening, 55% inflation, 48% climate change and over 80% wars.

Future concerns

Financial insecurity and security

59%



Inflation

51%



Climate change

48%



War in Ukraine

32%



■ Total

Base: All respondents (n = 1012)

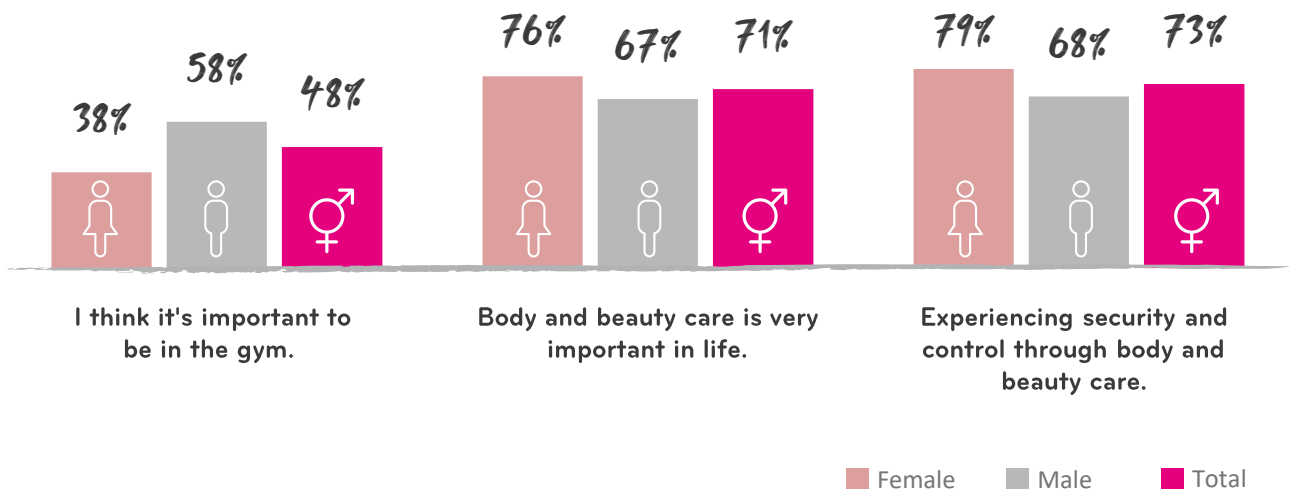
Question: Please check all the statements below that apply to you. This worries me for the future...? – Multiple choice

How do young people deal with the increasing loss of control they experience? No one can endure the feeling of being at the mercy of others forever. However, the social and public spheres seem to be beyond the control of most people. This is why young people model and shape the most obvious thing: themselves, both on a physical and psychological level. When it comes to shaping their own bodies, the use of cosmetic products is becoming increasingly important. On a psychological level, the focus is primarily on the right mindset. This is intended to help people achieve quick and eternal happiness as well as a lot of money and sometimes unrealistic life goals.

PHYSICAL LEVEL: SELF-ESTEEM AND CONTROL THROUGH INVESTMENT IN APPEARANCE

From the point of view of young people, it is always worth investing in the surface and smoothing or beautifying the façade. After all, their own body is, more or less consciously, the part that they regard as the easiest to control and influence. For around half of young people, the gym is therefore essential for shaping their own body. This is particularly true for young men. Overall, young people's gym registrations have almost doubled since 2018. Cosmetic products help even more regarding body control. Although young women are ahead of men at 79% (68%), the products give everyone a high level of confidence.

Relevance of body and beauty care



Base: All respondents (n = 1012)

Question: To what extent do the following statements apply to you? – Answer scale from 1 ("Does not apply at all") to 6 ("Fully applies"), top 3 values

Despite the relevance of modelling the body according to one's own ideas and working on the surface, young people cannot be described as superficial. Because the confrontation with oneself does not stop at the physical level.

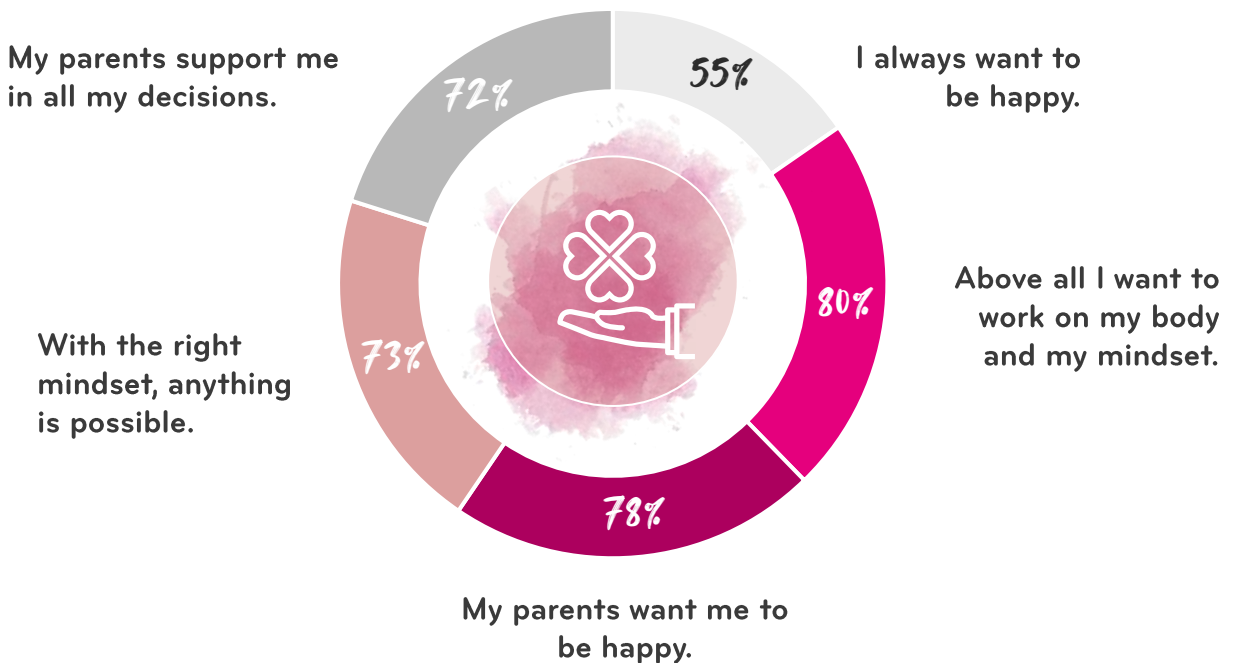
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MENTAL LEVEL: FIND HAPPINESS WITH THE RIGHT MINDSET

A second part of ego modelling takes place on a psychological level. It is crucial for young people to be happy. This applies above all to their job. Also in other areas, such as friendship, love and hobbies, the main question always is: does this make me happy or can I get rid of it? At first glance, happiness is desirable. Young people are rarely offended by this desire. Even their own parents support this: **"My parents always say, the main thing is to be happy."** However, the ideas of what young people and their parents understand by happiness diverge unnoticed. For young people, happiness means a kind of lifelong thrill, while older people tend to see it as a general satisfaction in life.

Young people believe they can achieve their goals with the right mindset: high earnings, happiness in their dream job, a house or a family. In their eyes, the right mindset also replaces the acquisition of certain skills and abilities.

Happiness and what is important for it



Basis: All respondents (n = 1012)

Question: To what extent do the following statements apply to you? – Answer scale from 1 ("Does not apply at all") to 6 ("Fully applies"), top 3 values/ Please mark all statements below that apply to you. This is what I would like for the future... – multiple choice

All young people want to earn a lot of money. Against the backdrop of inflation, existential financial fears and the feeling that they can hardly outdo their parents, it is important for young people to earn a lot of money. They believe money enables them to control their lives. The ideas of what can be earned are overly ambitious and quite unrealistic:

Average desired net income by gender

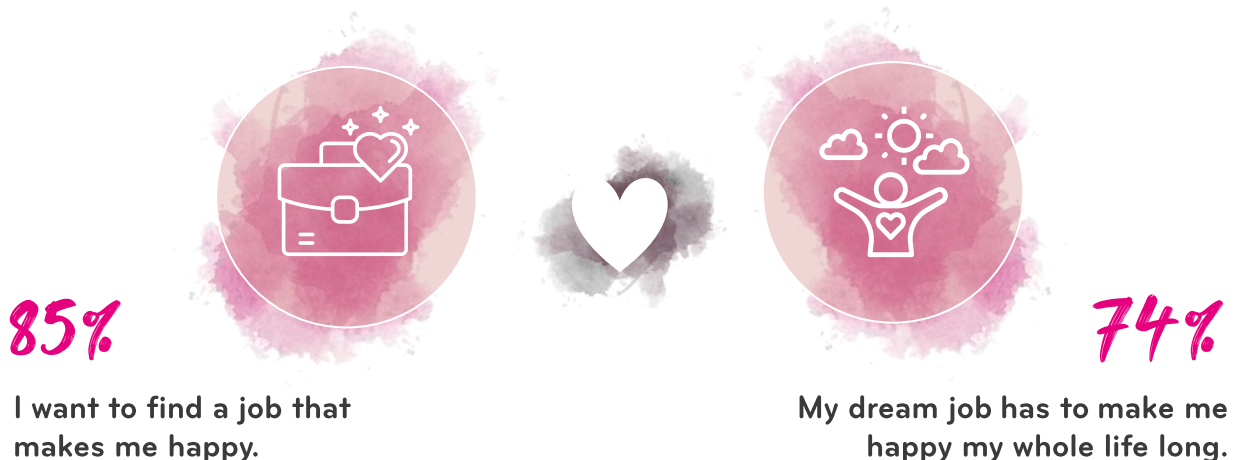


Base: All respondents (n = 1012/520/487/5)

"My monthly desired salary or desired earnings for the future is..." – figures in Euro

The idea of happiness associated with a job is also somewhat unrealistic. Instead of the great love of their lives, they are primarily looking for a job for life. Young people want to imagine themselves in a job or activity for the next 30 or 50 years. Behind this is a special idea of happiness: a kind of permanent euphoria like the first time you fall in love, which of course cannot last either in love or in a job.

Expectations of the job



Base: All respondents (n = 1012)

Question: To what extent do the following statements apply to you? – Answer scale from 1 ("Does not apply at all") to 6 ("Fully applies"), top 3 values

CANCEL AND WAIT FOR THE "CLICK-MOMENT"

If the job or their studies doesn't make them happy straight away – they can get rid of it. The young people quickly feel that they have understood and mastered the job or study programme. After just a few weeks, they often believe they know the right direction or they are confident that they already learned anything they need to now. As they do not expect anything exciting or thrilling to come, they often change or drop out of their study program or their professional training.

Career choice



Base: All respondents (n = 1012)

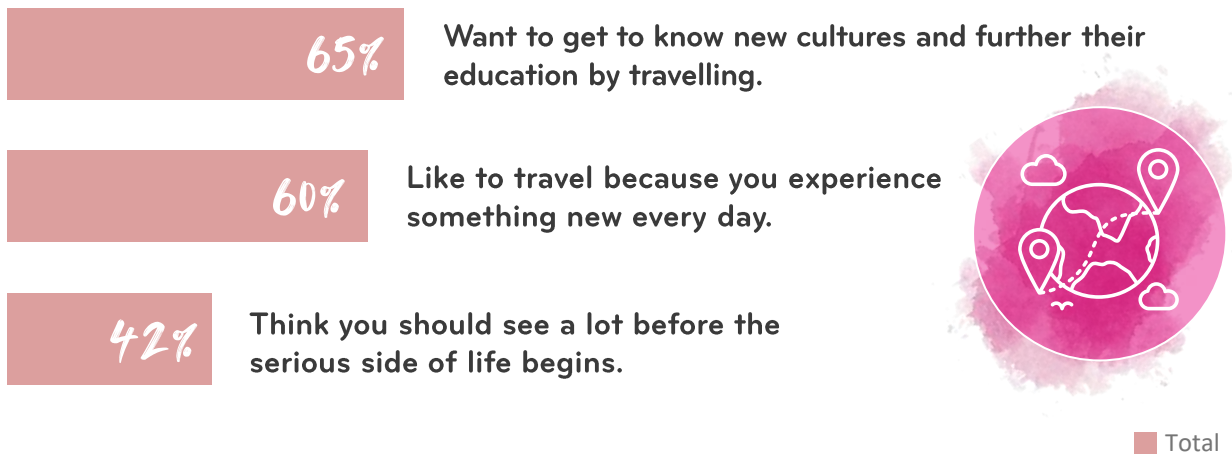
Question: To what extent do the following statements apply to you? – Answer scale from 1 ("Does not apply at all") to 6 ("Fully applies"), top 3 values

The young people are in no hurry to commit themselves. In their eyes, they have time to wait and try out new things again and again. Even until they are 30 years old. Until then, they often don't even want to work. Rather, this time is seen as a period in which the right idea or the right job will hopefully somehow "fall to them": they are waiting for the "click moment".

However, persevering and learning something for a longer period of time to achieve the selfset goals is less in line with their own ideas. Young people prefer a kind of "shortcut to happiness". Becoming a real estate agent and earning a lot of money in three days, this is interesting for everyone. This also illustrates the great influence of social media such as TikTok: Short films show shortcuts to jobs, in life and also feelings. Laugh, cry, wonder in 7 seconds. Such videos also show what has to be perfect and why it's best to stay away from certain jobs, bosses and people: "Red flag" videos are the new etiquette for young people.

Before they start working, they all want to travel a lot. Right after graduation, but definitely before starting a job. The fascination of travelling lies in experiencing something new every day and in being constantly on the move in a state of slight euphoria. When travelling, the scenery changes on a weekly or even daily basis. Travelling promises an eternal, constant new beginning – from a psychological point of view, "travelling" is the dream job of youth.

Reasons for travelling



Base: All respondents (n = 1012)

Please check all the statements below that apply to you. I would like to travel because... – multiple choice

"My house, my family, my dog...", next to the "Red Flags" young people orient themselves primarily on traditional images of the future. These provide the necessary security on the horizon. Alternative life models are rarely developed because the existing ones provide the necessary stability. However, how exactly one is supposed to get there, how "suddenly" 7,000 euros net per month can be earned and how the right job can really be learned is still very much an open question. At the same time, many people complain about great pressure and stress in their lives. The eternal waiting and hoping for the click moment is exhausting. Always having to make new beginnings and secretly having high expectations of yourself and your life obviously lead to a feeling of stress and ultimately do not make you happy.

So preoccupied with themselves, they often find it difficult to engage with other topics. Young people find topics relating to politics or climate change "depressing". They prefer to ignore them very much.

Working on the "surface" is still one of the most important areas for young people to establish a sense of control in their lives. In that respect they do not have a problem with the fact that sticking with a subject and continuously working on it is needed to achieve a goal. In that area they practise, without consciously realizing, that it is perseverance that leads to achieving a goal.

Megatrend: routines

In recent years, young people have increasingly developed "routines" for beautiful skin and hair. These routines can currently be found as trends on social media and on TikTok in particular.

However, the beauty routines also have another benefit: While elaborate facial routines are shown, it is at the same time often explained what "red flags" (exclusion criteria) there are when choosing a suitable partner, what employers must not do or how not to let things get you down. Cosmetic routines therefore provide security for other rather uncertain and uncontrollable areas of life. They are an exercise for real life.

Beauty routine and feelings of control

49%

Use products explicitly to show others that they have their lives under control.

Use products in particular because beauty routines structure their daily lives.

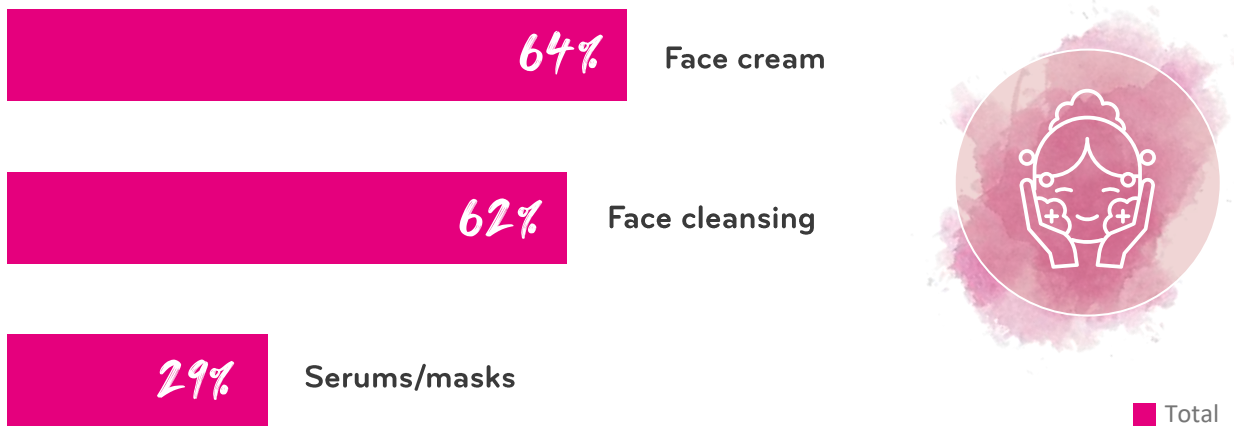
50%

Base: All respondents (n = 1012)

Question: To what extent do the following statements apply to you? – Answer scale from 1 ("Does not apply at all") to 6 ("Fully applies"), top 3 values

Many young people – including men! – now carry out regular skin care routines. Cleansing and care are key. What is new is the comparatively frequent use of serums and masks, which around 30% of young people have already integrated into their daily routine.

New products for skin care routines



Base: All respondents (n = 1012)

Question: How important are the following cosmetic products for you and your personality? – Answer scale from 1 ("Not at all important") to 6 ("Very important"), top 3 values

Hair care routines that are established in everyday life are also becoming increasingly common. Oils, cures and special treatments are becoming increasingly important alongside shampoo and conditioner.

While most young people tend to hope for serendipity when it comes to choosing a career and planning their lives – and are often caught up in unrealistic wishful thinking – they have developed a great deal of skill on a "physical" level. With the consistent use of cosmetic products, beautiful skin is "earned". And it shows the continued almost "existential" relevance of cosmetic products for young people. The treatment of the surface serves much more than just a beautiful appearance. Psychologically, it is more than just an important anchor point in young people's lives: Cosmetics serve the purpose of gaining control AND practicing perseverance or sticking with it.

Psychological product benefits

As always, the study also looks at specific product uses and the psychological function of products. It is striking that young people now use a great variety of products in almost all product areas. Serums, toners, beard shampoos, concealers, primers, hair oils, hand creams and mouthwashes are just some of the products that have become relevant. Also interesting: men cannot escape the megatrend of routines and also use a wide range of products.

Some particularly relevant products are listed here as examples.

Perfume

Deodorant has been one of the most relevant products for young people for years. Its main purpose is to prevent unpleasant perspiration odours and to help control one's own body. In recent years, the relevance of perfume has also increased, including in the premium segment. Perfumes help to stage facades and "dream worlds". They are intended to strengthen the self-image, make an impression, but also calm existential fears. Expensive perfumes are sometimes collected by 20-year-olds and dream worlds are created. "Dupes" (inexpensive variants that smell just like...) help to create illusory dream worlds.



Spot treatment



When it comes to pimples, a different approach was adopted in adolescence. While on the one hand it is important to get pimples and blemishes under control – as a sign of being able to control one's own body – on the other hand there has been a kind of normalisation in dealing with the issue. Some influential influencers are contributing to the "Unshaming" from an area that is actually highly shameful. The majority of young people want to present themselves more confidently – even though the topic is still unpleasant.

Toothpaste and oral hygiene

While toothpaste has hardly been a top-of-mind cosmetic product for any young people in recent years, some have developed a great deal of expertise in this area. Some young people attach particular importance to white teeth and use special toothpaste – often toothpaste that is currently popular on TikTok and which they then buy themselves. Others reveal their tips, such as using coconut oil to whiten their teeth. The central point is that teeth have become more of a focus. For some, toothpaste is no longer a cosmetic product that is taken for granted, but a product that is valued.



Conclusion

Young people try to counteract the perceived loss of control on several levels by treating their body and their mindset. On a physical level, they have already developed effective methods over the years. Cosmetic products provide the special feeling of security when regaining control. Young people find stability in sophisticated routines. These not only help to increase self-esteem, but also symbolise practicing procedures, sticking to them and persevering. Something that young people tend to find particularly difficult in other areas. What does not make them happy immediately is often quickly abandoned. Happiness is the measure of all things – coupled with sometimes unrealistic expectations regarding earning money or finding a dream job and the perfect family with a house and garden. It is the path to these goals of life that is not obvious to most young people. However, cosmetic routines do provide clues, at least on a subconscious level, as to how succeed in their future living practice. From a psychological point of view, cosmetics therefore remain anything but superficial. Cosmetics are existential for young people.



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