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Neighborhood Disorganization, Atmosphere for Citizen Involvement and Satisfaction with Police Services

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Neighborhood Disorganization, Atmosphere for Citizen Involvement and Satisfaction with Police Services

ABSTRACT: Previous research on satisfaction with police services has shown a variety of factors can be significant such as race, neighborhood disorganization, and fear of crime. Furthermore, policing that is visible can help community residents feel higher levels of security and order. Some cities have more fractured community-police relations in comparison to others nationwide. Recently, The City of Dallas Police Department has had several race-based incidents in the national media, and they have been working to increase citizen satisfaction with public safety and obtain community cooperation. Residents of Dallas were given surveys regarding satisfaction with police services, contact with police, fear of crime, atmosphere for citizen involvement, and neighborhood disorganization. Findings support some conclusions from previous research on satisfaction with police services. Namely, respondents who felt "listened to" reported greater satisfaction with police services. Results also revealed respondent's perceptions of crime were significant predictors of satisfaction with police services. Finally, consistent with other research, level of neighborhood disorganization was also a significant predictor of satisfaction with police services. Our results indicate a respondent's perception of the neighborhood and community they live in are more important factors than actual contact with law enforcement officials.

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Community perceptions of the police and public support play an important role in determining their efficacy as an institution (Schafer, Huebner & Bynum, 2003). There are many benefits in studying community residents' attitudes toward police such as understanding residents' willingness to participate in community policing initiatives, explaining residents' willingness to obey the law and judgments of police legitimacy, and measuring police agency performance (Schuck, Rosenbaum & Hawkins, 2008). Additionally, residents' perception of his or her community's effectiveness related to crime counteract the impact of actual crime. This shows traditional concerns with crime rates within a neighborhood are not as imperative and reiterates just how important residents' perceptions of the community and police are (Schafer et al., 2003).

Previous research has found an overall positive attitude from Americans toward the police (Schafer et al., 2003). However, we know that these opinions may vary depending on factors such as a respondent's age, race, gender, socioeconomic status, and education. Of all these characteristics, race is a considerable factor when analyzing satisfaction with the police. According to Carr, Napolitano, and Keating (2007) Black individuals are less likely than Whites to trust the police and Whites are more favorably disposed to the police. At the same time, there is evidence of the declining significance of race when controlling for neighborhood disadvantage and socioeconomic class among Black and Hispanic communities (Schuck et al., 2008 Wu, Sun & Triplett, 2009). In particular,

middle-class Black individuals were more likely to have positive attitudes toward the police and did not feel the police engaged in systematically inappropriate behavior (Schuck et al., 2008).

This goes hand in hand with Schafer et al. (2003) affirming residents who have higher “stakes” or investments, such as owning a middle-class home, in their community are more disposed to support policing and have more positive ratings of police behaviors and services. This could relate to a resident’s income or socioeconomic status. Typically residents who have a higher socioeconomic status will have less social and physical disorder and view the police more positively because they live in a nicer area (e.g. less crime) than lower socioeconomic neighborhoods. Some examples of social and physical disorder include drug dealing, conflict and fighting, people loitering, vacant housing, abandoned cars, and graffiti. Other research has found the impact of individual social class does not persist when neighborhood class level is controlled for, suggesting that it is neighborhood class status that matters more in measuring satisfaction with police (Wu et al., 2009; Zhao, Schneider & Thurman, 2002). Wu et al. (2009) found within socially disadvantaged neighborhoods White and Black individuals display similar attitudes toward police, whereas in socially advantaged neighborhoods Black respondents were more likely to hold negative attitudes toward police. Based on their findings Wu et al. (2009) call for future research to take neighborhood class status into consideration when assessing inter-racial attitudes toward police, which is exactly what the current study does when analyzing satisfaction with police services.

In socially disadvantaged neighborhoods with high percentages of violence, residents are at risk for enduring negative outcomes including poor economic infrastructure, deterioration of safety, and resident cohesion (Zeldin, 2004). However, what a resident defines as neighborhood disorganization is subjective and based on various social, physical, and economic factors. Marans and Stimson (2011) convey that each person occupying the same environment might differ in their views about it, which in turn affects

perceptions and assessments of the neighborhood. For example, if a resident is accustomed to these disturbances in the neighborhood it could have little to no influence on their perception of the police within the community (Perkins, 2016). The mediation effect is described as satisfaction with social, economic, and physical features of the neighborhood, which tend to contribute to one’s overall satisfaction with the neighborhood (Sirgy & Cornwell, 2002). In sum, how a resident feels toward their neighborhood can influence many other factors such as perceptions of police services and crime.

According to Skogan (2009), one way to increase satisfaction with police services is to have police more visible in the community. More specifically, Skogan suggests when policing is visible and accessible, residents perceived greater security and order (2009). This type of policing gives greater devotion to and appreciation of officer’s efforts to reduce disorder, solve neighborhood problems, and build a bond with citizens (Paoline, Myers, & Worden, 2000). Residents who believed that police-community partnerships are “healthy” perceived lower levels of disorder and reported less fear as an outcome (Skogan, 2009). If a community has a strong relationship with the police it increases the resident’s confidence in the police, which will influence a more positive perception of police officers. Community policing gives citizens the chance to be involved with police efforts and voice their opinions. Citizens like the feeling of being “listened to” by the officers, which causes them to respect the officers and view them positively in the community. Other research within the field of criminal justice suggests that when individuals feel comfortable expressing their opinions they typically report greater satisfaction (Slate, Wells, & Johnson, 2003).

On the other hand, a direct experience or encounter with a police officer was found to be a critical element in a resident of the community’s satisfaction on the police. Schuck et al. (2008) found that residents who reported recent contact with the police generally expressed more negative views of the police than residents who did not have such contact. Whether the contact with the police was voluntary or involuntary can

also play a role in how residents of a community assess the police. If the encounter was voluntary (resident contacts police) they typically have a positive perception towards police officers. If the contact was involuntary (police-initiated) it resulted in a more hostile manner which reflects a negative perception of police officers (Schuck et al., 2008). However, this is not always the case. According to Skogan (2009), whether a citizen encounter with an officer is positive or negative, it still reduced the community's confidence in the officer. Residents have a greater satisfaction toward police services when police are in the community and feel like they have a say; however satisfaction decreases when they come into contact with an officer (Skogan, 2009). Thus, both contact with police and atmosphere for participation should be controlled for when analyzing their impact on satisfaction with police services.

Neighborhood disadvantage or disorganization may have a limited role when accounting for individual perceptions. If a neighborhood has a number of problems like crime, graffiti, gangs, and drug activity, this could spread fear among residents and therefore influence a resident's satisfaction with police services (Schnuck et al., 2008). Residents may place blame on the police because they hold the officers to a high standard to keep the community safe and in order, otherwise known as the Accountability Model. The Accountability Model can be seen in action by confidence diminishing in the police as a result of high fear of crime (Skogan, 2009).

Fear of crime could influence perception of police services. Fear of crime has previously been measured in a variety of ways such as fear of personal safety in a neighborhood during the day or night and expected victimization (Zhao et al., 2002). Gender has been found to play a role in fear, which in turn can relate to satisfaction with police services. Consistent with a majority of research on fear of crime related to gender, females are significantly more likely than males to fear criminal victimization and perceive themselves to be more at risk of victimization (May, Rader, & Goodrum, 2010). Additionally, some studies also tend to report more negative attitudes and perceptions among females of

police services (May et al., 2010; Schuck et al., 2008). However, as stated earlier in the current review of the literature, both race and gender can be very inconsistent measures when determining a resident's satisfaction toward the police, especially when other variables are introduced. Residents being "heard" by police or city officials, neighborhood disorganization, and recent citizen contact with the police all contribute to a resident's satisfaction with police services. It is fair to say that all these factors may impact an individual's satisfaction with police services.

Why Dallas?

The Dallas Police Department is in the national spotlight for several race-based incidents involving their police force over the last twenty years. In 2001, a statewide ban of racial profiling was passed by the Texas legislature, and there was a decrease in general racial profiling complaints within the City of Dallas. However, when comparing the number of racial profiling complaints to other large cities in Texas, Dallas still has the highest number of reported incidents. According to the Dallas Police Department website (2016a), there were eleven complaints of racial profiling in 2014 for a population of about 1.3 million (United States Census, 2017). In the same year the Houston Police Department, which services 2.2 million, only reported three complaints of racial profiling (2015).

When viewing the Dallas Police Department website their Mission Statement explains their goal is to increase citizen satisfaction with public safety and obtain community cooperation (2016). In efforts to do so, Dallas has a number of community-based programs such as a crime watch group, VIP program (Volunteer In Patrol), and crime prevention presentations available in one's neighborhood. Additionally, the Dallas Police Department currently requires all officers to be instructed on Fair and Impartial Policing, police legitimacy and procedural justice (*Dallas Police Respond to Demands from Protest Group*, 2016). An officer who is trained on how to recognize bias and improve community relations is essential for a healthy relationship with the community. Another program in place in Dallas

is Project Unity. The goal of Project Unity is to initiate open conversations about racial unity between guests and as a result strengthen law enforcement and communities' relationships (Lao, 2018). Project Unity was developed in response to the shooting of five Dallas police officers by Micah Johnson (Lao, 2018). Police Chief, David Brown, with the Dallas Police Department said Johnson was upset about "Black Lives Matter" and recent police shootings, and that he "wanted to kill white police officers" (Rankin, 2016). Again, clearly Dallas is a city with strained community and police relations.

The purpose of our study is to predict satisfaction with police services while controlling for resident demographics, contact with police, fear of crime, atmosphere for citizen involvement, and neighborhood disorganization.

Data and Methods

Survey Methodology and Sample

The current paper uses a questionnaire and data from the 2014 Community Survey for the City of Dallas. According to a city memorandum, the survey was originally conducted by the ETC Institute (Gonzalez, 2014). The sample of respondents were randomly selected from residents of the City of Dallas and mailed a questionnaire. Respondents were directed to return their completed survey in an enclosed postage paid envelope. At least 100 surveys were collected from each district with a response rate exceeding 30% in each district (Gonzalez, 2014). The 182-item questionnaire was designed to measure the quality of city services and priorities for the community. The questionnaire addressed the following areas: perceptions of the city as a place to live, problems in the city (e.g. crime, homelessness), perceptions of safety (fear of crime), performance of city and public services, quality of city and public services and some limited respondent demographics.

Variable Measures

We included the following variables in the current study: race, gender, atmosphere for citizen involvement, neighborhood income, contact with police, neighborhood disorganization, fear of crime, and satisfaction with police

services. Due to a lack of data on respondent income, our last demographic measure was average neighborhood income based on respondent zip code. We calculated this using our original data set (respondent five digit zip code) and the web tool, "Z: Income by Zip Code", which pulls data from the US Census Bureau and the American Community Survey 2016 five-year estimates (2018). We visited the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Income Guidelines limits for Dallas County (2017) after coding each zip code's average household income. Based off HUD income limits we coded each zip code average household income into two categories: neighborhoods with an average income of \$40,001 or above (0) and neighborhoods with an average income of less than \$40,000 (1).

The final two variables we recoded into dichotomous variables were atmosphere for citizen involvement and contact with police. To measure atmosphere for citizen involvement we recoded the question, "Using a scale of 1 to 5 where 5 means 'strongly agree and 1 means 'strongly disagree' please indicate your level of agreement with... the City of Dallas government listens to citizens." These categories were collapsed into two groups, comparing those that agreed/strongly agreed and neutral/disagreed/strongly disagreed responses. Contact with the police was measured by asking respondents, "please rate the City's performance in the following areas... police services": Excellent (1), Good (2), Fair (3), Poor (4), Used this service during the past year (5), and Don't Know (9). While it would have been desirable to have satisfaction with police services coded separately from if a respondent used these services in the last year, the data were collected together within one question. Based on the available data we recoded to compare anyone that rated police services but did not use their services in the last year (recoded from 1-4 to 0) versus those that used police services in the last year (recoded from 5 to 1). "Don't know" was removed from data analysis for both measures.

Fear of crime was measured with eight questionnaire items in which respondents were asked to indicate, "using a scale of 1 [Very Unsafe] to 5 [Very Safe]... please indicate how safe you feel

Table 1: Demographic Variables of Sample by Race

	Non-White			White			Signif.
	<i>n</i>	%	mean	<i>n</i>	%	mean	
Ethnicity	988	67.0		486	33.0		
Gender							.180
Female	520	35.3		238	16.2		
Male	467	31.7		248	16.8		
Citizen involvement							
Agree	337	27.2		171	13.8		.456
Disagree/neutral	499	40.3		231	18.7		
Neighborhood Income							
Less than \$40,000	406	28.8		121	8.6		.000**
\$40,001 and above	530	37.5		355	25.1		
Police contacted last year							
No	906	65.7		443	32.1		.659
Yes	19	1.4		11	.8		
Neighborhood disorganization			22.00			19.56	.000**
Fear of crime			25.05			27.32	.000**
Satisfaction with police			13.24			10.85	.000**

Note: **p<.000

in the following situations.” The eight items, which measured crime included how safe respondents felt, “in your neighborhood during the day; in your neighborhood after dark; in Dallas’ downtown area during the day; in Dallas’ downtown area after dark; in Dallas’ parks area during the day; in Dallas’ parks area after dark; from violent crime (rape, assault, robbery); from property crime (burglary, theft).” Missing data and “Don’t Know” responses were removed from analysis. Possible respondent scores ranged from 8 to 40, with higher scores indicating lower levels of fear in the city of Dallas. Our reliability analysis indicated a Cronbach’s alpha of .885 for our fear of crime scale.

Neighborhood disorganization was measured using seven items, which assessed, “the extent to which you think each of the following is a problem in the City of Dallas by circling the corresponding number below.” Respondents could circle, Not a problem (1), Minor Problem

(2), Moderate Problem (3), Major Problem (4), and Don’t Know (9). The seven items respondents were instructed to assess included, “run down buildings, weed lots, or junk vehicles; graffiti; unsupervised youth; homelessness; noise; crime; drugs.” By removing missing data and “Don’t Know” responses, respondent scores could range from 7 to 28, with higher scores indicating more negative perceptions/greater levels of neighborhood disorganization. Our reliability analysis indicated a Cronbach’s alpha of .856 for our neighborhood disorganization scale.

For our main dependent variable, satisfaction with police services, we used a scale created from five questionnaire items rather than relying on the single measure regarding satisfaction we discussed above. Once again respondents were asked to rank, “the City’s performance in the following areas,” with Excellent (1), Good (2), Fair (3), Poor (4), Don’t Know (9) as possible responses. The five items included in our scale

as performance measures of police services were, “crime prevention; efforts by police to fight crime in your neighborhood; efforts by police to work with residents in your neighborhood to solve local problems; efforts by police to effectively deal with problems that concern people in your neighborhood; response time of police to emergencies.” Missing data and “Don’t Know” responses were removed from analysis. Scores ranged from 5 to 20 with lower scores indicating greater satisfaction with police services. Cronbach’s alpha analysis indicated a high level of reliability at .925 for our satisfaction with police services scale.

Results

After running frequencies of data, we discovered that although some measures were included on the questionnaire they were not within the dataset. Measures on the questionnaire that were not included in the data, which could have been significant factors were respondent’s age, homeownership status, total annual household income, and educational attainment. We were still able to uncover significant relationships within the data we did have. Data analysis was conducted for all analyses using the program—the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Below we primarily focus on significant results within the current section.

As shown in Table 1, there was a significant difference between race groups (non-White and White) in our sample regarding neighborhood

type (low to moderate income versus moderate to high), neighborhood disorganization, fear of crime, and satisfaction with police services. More specifically, in Table 1 we report the percentage totals by race group for neighborhood type. This means in Table 1 it appears non-Whites are more likely to live in moderate to upper class neighborhoods; however when looking at the percentage within race group, 74.6% of Whites within our sample lived in moderate to upper class neighborhoods compared to ~60% of non-Whites. Within race group, 43.4% of non-Whites live in low to moderate income neighborhoods compared to 25.4% of Whites.

Beyond neighborhood type differences, we also found significant differences by race for feelings of neighborhood disorganization, fear of crime, and satisfaction with police services. In order of appearance in Table 1, non-Whites reported higher levels of neighborhood disorganization ($M= 22.00, SD=4.06$) compared to Whites ($M= 19.56, SD= 4.19; t(1074)= 9.01, p= .000$). Additionally, White respondents reported significantly lower levels of fear of crime ($M= 27.32, SD= 4.98$) in comparison to non-White respondents ($M= 25.05, SD= 6.13; t(841.77)= -6.32, p= .000$). Whites also felt greater satisfaction with police services ($M= 10.85, SD= 3.49$) compared to non-Whites ($M= 13.24, SD= 4.21; t(564.14)= 8.79, p= .000$). Overall, this suggests White respondents felt safer than non-Whites and lived in neighborhoods with higher average household incomes with fewer indicators of

Table 2: Correlations Between Predictor Variables Included in the Model and Satisfaction with Police Services

		Y1	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6	X7
Y1	Police Services	1.00							
X1	Race	.259**	1.00						
X2	Citizen Involvement	-.312**	.021	1.00					
X3	Neighborhood Income	.143**	-.175**	.038	1.00				
X4	Police Contact	-.022	.012	-.007	-.065*	1.00			
X5	Gender	.053	-.035	-.202	.043	.017	1.00		
X6	Neighborhood Disorganization	.472**	-.265**	-.192**	.153**	-.082**	.114**	1.00	
X7	Fear of crime	-.511**	.184**	.175**	-.155**	.056	-.138**	-.570**	1.00

Note: * $p < .001$, ** $p < .000$

neighborhood disorganization. Perhaps due to these factors, White also felt more satisfied with police services compared to non-Whites.

In Table 2 are the results of our correlation matrix between variables included in our multiple regression model. Three of the most significant variables with the strongest correlations were between neighborhood disorganization and fear of crime, neighborhood disorganization and satisfaction with police services, and fear of crime and satisfaction with police services. More specifically, lower levels of neighborhood disorganization was significantly correlated with lower scores on our fear of crime scale ($r = -.570$; note: fear of crime is reverse coded with higher scores indicating lower fear). Fear of crime was also significantly correlated with satisfaction with police services. Respondents' lower fear of crime scores significantly correlated with being more satisfied with police services ($r = -.511$). Lastly, respondents that lived in neighborhoods with fewer indicators of disorganization were more satisfied with police services ($r = .472$).

While none of the correlations in our correlation matrix were above .80 indicating possible multicollinearity (see Table 2) we ran additional analysis during our regression test to reduce the likelihood of this issue between our variables. Our largest variance inflation factor (VIF) was 1.570 for our neighborhood disorganization scale, which is less than standard cut off (5) suggested by other researchers (Field, 2013). Our tolerance statistics were all above the standard .2 cut off with our lowest score being a .637 for the neighborhood disorganization scale (Field, 2013).

We regressed race, gender, neighborhood average income, atmosphere for citizen involvement, police contact, neighborhood disorganization, and fear of crime on satisfaction with police services. Overall, a significant multiple linear regression equation was found ($F(7, 532) = 44.273, p = .000$), with 36% of the variance explained by our model. Four variables were significant in our regression model: race, atmosphere for citizen involvement, neighborhood disorganization, and fear of crime. Fear of crime had the greatest effect on satisfaction with police services. As fear of crime increased

by one standard deviation, a respondent's satisfaction with police services decreased by .379 units when holding all other variables present in the model constant ($p = .000$). This echoes what we observed in the correlation matrix—individuals with lower fear of crime scores were more satisfied with police services while controlling for other factors.

Atmosphere for citizen involvement had the second greatest effect ($\beta = -.184, p = .000$). Respondents who felt the City of Dallas government listened to citizens reported greater levels of satisfaction with police services. Beyond these two factors, the third greatest effect on satisfaction with police services was neighborhood disorganization. Respondents felt less satisfied with police services ($\beta = .140, p = .001$) as indicators of neighborhood disorganization increased. Our last significant variable was a respondent's race. White respondents were more satisfied with police services compared to non-Whites in our sample ($\beta = -.137, p = .000$). Gender, average neighborhood income, and contact with police in the last year were not significant in our regression model. Still, after running several multiple regression models and based on our correlation matrix, we knew there was a possibility that some of these variables may have an indirect effect on satisfaction with police services. Gender and average neighborhood income may have an indirect effect due to their significant relationships with fear of crime and neighborhood disorganization, both of which were strong predictors of satisfaction with police services. Additionally, neighborhood disorganization was significantly correlated with contact with police and could have a mediated effect on satisfaction with police services.

Discussion and Conclusions

Our results mirror the complex findings other researchers have found regarding the relationship between individual factors, neighborhood disorganization, fear of crime, and satisfaction with police services. Race had a significant relationship with satisfaction with police services without controlling for other factors. This relationship remained significant in our regression model while controlling for gender, neighborhood

average income, contact with police, atmosphere for citizen involvement, neighborhood disorganization, and fear of crime. In other words, even in a city like Dallas where racial tensions between the community and the police seem to be at an all-time high, other factors were more important when assessing satisfaction with police. In this case neighborhood disorganization and fear of crime were significantly better predictors of a citizen's satisfaction with police services than their race.

We also found that atmosphere for participation (labeled citizen involvement) was consistently a significant factor. When examining the relationship atmosphere for participation had on satisfaction with police services, it had the third strongest Pearson correlation behind fear of crime and neighborhood disorganization. Additionally, when atmosphere for participation was included in our multiple regression model, it was the second most significant predictor after fear of crime.

In all of our analyses, neighborhood disorganization was a significant predictor of satisfaction with police services. This was the same for fear of crime and its relationship to satisfaction with police services. Overall our results support existing research, which suggests perceptions of crime and neighborhood disorganization are more significant predictors of satisfaction with police services than actual contact with the police or other factors (Schafer et al., 2003).

As with any research we encountered limitations that we hope open the door for future studies related to satisfaction with police services. We would have liked to control by officer beat rather than zip code for neighborhood measures. Dallas is broken into seven patrol divisions, which are divided into sectors, and then further divided into police beats (Dallas Police Department, 2016b). Generally speaking, police beats would be better representations of a community neighborhood than a zip code, which may cut-across neighborhoods. Further, police beats would be a better representation of community relations with the same few officers assigned to a particular beat. On the Dallas Police GeoLocator App using a residential address one is able to look up the sector and beat for that location. We were

unable to use this information by zip code due the dataset lacking the respondent's entire residential address (e.g. could fall under several different beats or a different sector).

Findings from our study continue to raise questions about the role police need to have in communities to increase citizen satisfaction with police services. Our findings suggest that feeling heard (atmosphere for participation) is more important than actual contact (actually voicing concerns about crime directly to the police). This supports Skogan's (2009) research that also found contact both positive and negative resulted in lower satisfaction with police services in comparison to those that did not have contact with the police. In terms of social policy, how would cities or the police be able to balance the citizens' belief that they are being heard with actual police contact?

One option for citizens to feel heard without having direct contact with police could be through smartphone technology or the internet. Residents in cities such as New York are targeted through pop-up advertisements on websites such as Facebook or Instagram or through applications like Candy Crush (Weichselbaum, 2018). Precincts now have a monthly trust score that includes rankings that measure satisfaction with police services. Another option for departments with smaller budgets could be through increased news or community bulletins in which citizens are informed of police efforts in their neighborhood to reduce crime or victimization. For example in some communities, in which there are a string of property crimes such as cars being broken into, citizens are informed of the date, time, and location of these crimes so they may report anything suspicious they may have witnessed. Would these types of bulletins just increase residents' fear of crime instead of strengthening police-citizen interpersonal communication? Future research should further investigate how communication without direct contact could be attained in order to increase citizen satisfaction with police services.

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Contributor Bios

Krystal Karas graduated *summa cum laude* with a bachelor's degree in criminology from Florida Southern College in May of 2019. She was an All-American student athlete of the NCAA DII Women's Florida Southern Swimming team, member of the Phi Eta Sigma Honor Society, and on the president's scholar list. She is currently employed as a legal assistant at a personal injury law firm in Southfield, Michigan and plans on attending law school in the near future. Chastity Blankenship earned her Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Central Florida in 2011. Currently, Dr. Blankenship is an Assistant Professor of Social Science in the Department of Criminology at Florida Southern College. Dr. Blankenship is also the Chair for the Women and Gender Studies Minor at her institution. She has a variety of research area interests, which broadly include issues related to social inequality.

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