

**RESEARCH PAPER****Role of Gender, Age, and Family System on Neuroticism, Attachment, and Well-being among Young Adults****¹Maria Muzaffar Janjua*, ²Aaisha Shaukat and ³Farah Shamim**

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***Corresponding Author** aaishashaukat@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

This study focuses on investigating the relationship between personality traits, attachment styles, and psychological well-being in young adults in Pakistan. The research explores the moderating effects of gender, age, and family system on these relationships. The study employed a quantitative approach and a correlational cross-sectional research design. Data was collected using questionnaires from 274 university students aged 18 to 30. The instruments used included the Ten Item Personality Inventory (TIPI) to measure personality traits, the Adult Attachment Scale (AAS) to assess attachment styles, and the Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWS) to measure psychological well-being. The results showed that gender moderated the relationship between personality traits and adult attachment styles, with females demonstrating a stronger association. Gender also acted as a moderator between neuroticism and close attachment style, buffering the relationship. Age was found to moderate the relationship between neuroticism and self-acceptance, weakening the association as individuals grew older. The family system, particularly joint family systems, was found to moderate the relationship between neuroticism and personal growth, strengthening the association. These findings have implications for understanding and promoting psychological well-being in young adults and highlight the importance of considering gender, age, and family system in psychological research and interventions.

Keywords: Calamities of Refugee, Ecocritism, Ecological Devastation, Natural Environment, Refugee Trauma**Introduction**

Numerous research has discovered a connection between the Big Five Personality Traits and young people's attachment preferences and psychological health (Ilie et al., 2018; Clifford & Nelson, 2019; Khosravi & Kasaeiyan, 2020; Lan & Wang, 2020). According to literature, shy persons prefer to avoid speaking up for themselves even when they are young (Ying Yang et al., 2010). They may be continually shy and hide behind their significant other due to parental or academic pressure (Coplan et al., 2020). Because they don't think they are capable, they consistently turn down invitations to join (Evans, 2010). Additionally, according to Shaver and Brennan (1992) and Marrero-Quevedo et al. (2019), all five personality qualities are likely to have a good or negative link with adult attachment and young adults' psychological wellness. The present study concentrated on Neuroticism, one of the Big Five Personality Traits.

It's an intriguing issue to investigate because we live in a world that is mostly governed by interpersonal relationships and attachment. Numerous investigations on the mentioned variables and their relationships are currently being conducted in the west (Liu et al., 2018; Luan et al., 2019; Satici, 2019; Iranmanesh et al., 2021). Young adults in Pakistan are also affected by several connected concerns (Moosa et al., 2011; Ahmad et al., 2020; Javed, 2020). Therefore, the purpose of the current study was to investigate how the Big Five personality traits relate to adult attachment and psychological well-being in young adults in Pakistan.

Literature Review

A personality attribute defined by a general absence of good feelings and a decline in positive mood in favorable circumstances (Keltner, 1996). It is believed to be connected to a tendency for negative feelings such pain, aggravation, worry, and guilt (Costa & McCrae, 1980) and is characterized by negative affectivity and emotional instability (Bouchard et al., 1999). Neuroticism is a term used to describe individual differences in how one feels when faced with a intimidation, annoyance, or defeat (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Goldberg, 1993). Items that have been operationally categorized as neuroticism include irritability, anger, sadness, anxiety, distress, hostility, self-consciousness, and vulnerability (Costa & McCrae, 1992a; Goldberg, 1993).

These items have been found to be strongly associated with one another in factor analyses. For those with high levels of neuroticism, such negative emotional reactions to difficulties are typical and often out of proportion to the circumstances (McCrae & Costa, 2003). According to Clark and Watson (1991), "the degree to which a person is feeling bothered or unpleasantly engaged rather than calm" (or "the degree to which a person is feeling bothered or unpleasantly engaged rather than calm") is a key feature of the five-factor model of personality.

A deep bond with someone is known as attachment. When people are attached, they quickly create an emotional connection with others for protection, conflict resolution, and welfare. Primary care relationships are the most crucial for growth (Bowlby, 1988), while friendships and loving relationships may also be significant (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). According to one study's findings, secure attachment has a good link with components of psychological wellbeing, but avoidant and anxious attachment has a negative correlation with psychological wellbeing (Young et al., 2020). According to Muris et al. (2001), there are strong relationships between attachment and the Big Five personality traits, particularly neuroticism.

Being happy and content with our lives is the main desire of all people. Feeling much healthier and having a nice day at work are both signs that life is going well (Tiberius, 2018). Promoting constant happiness as a means to wellbeing may overlook the importance of negative emotions in appropriate situations, such as sadness after a disaster or anger in response to injustice. Suppressing or dismissing these emotions can hinder personal growth and social change. Well-being encompasses a range of emotions, both positive and negative, and embracing their presence allows for a more authentic and balanced experience of life. It is through navigating and learning from these diverse emotional states that we cultivate resilience, empathy, and a deeper understanding of ourselves and others.. According to some researchers, happiness is defined as having just happy feelings (Layard, 2005, 2011) or as having a healthy mix of both good and negative emotions (Kahneman & Krueger, 2006).

One study (Wang & Sun, 2022) looked at the relationships between teachers and students and parents in Chinese children, as well as the mediating and moderating effects of resilience. However, in the current study, we are assuming that certain demographic characteristics of an individual e.g., age, gender & family system will have a moderating role between personality traits, attachment styles, social acceptance & personal growth among university students.

Hypotheses

1. Gender buffers the relationship between Personality Traits and Adult Attachment Styles.

2. Gender moderates the relationship between Neuroticism and Close Attachment Style among University students.
3. Age is moderating the relationship between Neuroticism and Self Acceptance University Students.
4. The family system is moderating the relationship between Neuroticism and Personal Growth among university students.

Material and Methods

Research Design

The current study employed a quantitative approach, utilizing a correlational cross-sectional research design. This design involved conducting the research simultaneously on various groups of individuals. The data collection method relied on a questionnaire, comprising a series of questions designed to gather information from the respondents. To conduct the physical survey, a self-report structured questionnaire was made available to students of diverse age groups, ranging from 18 years and above, considering demographic factors.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Initially, the sample consisted of 400 individuals, divided evenly between 200 males and 200 females. During the analysis phase, researchers noticed unusual patterns in the data, prompting them to undertake data cleaning procedures. Data cleaning involves the removal of contaminated, irregularly patterned, and poorly completed questionnaires from the dataset. After careful examination and handling, 126 contaminated questionnaires were excluded from the data, resulting in a final sample size of 274 individuals, comprising 94 males and 180 females. The sampling method employed was convenience sampling, with participants aged between 18 and 30 years. The demographic data sheet included instructions, informed consent, and details such as age, education, gender, occupation, number of siblings, educational background and occupation of participants' fathers and mothers, as well as the type of family system they belonged to.

Participants

The participants in this study were university students, and those who did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded from the research.

Inclusion criteria. The following criteria were employed for the inclusion of participants in the current study.

1. Enrolled University Student
2. Citizen of Pakistan.
3. Age from 18-30.

Exclusion criteria. The following was the criteria for excluding participants from the present study.

1. Participants below the age of 18.
2. Participants above the age of 30.

3. Incomplete survey responses will be excluded.

Instruments

Ten Item Personality Inventory (TIPI)

The Ten Item Personality Inventory (TIPI) is a personality inventory scale developed by Gosling et al. (2003) that consists of 10 items. Neuroticism is measured on a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating "disagree strongly" and 7 indicating "agree strongly." The scale takes approximately 5 minutes to complete. TIPI assesses five subscales: Extraversion (E), Agreeableness (A), Conscientiousness (C), Emotional Stability (ES), and Openness to Experience (O).

The psychometric properties of TIPI have revealed significant convergent correlations, with substantial reliability coefficients: E ($\alpha = .87$), A ($\alpha = .70$), C ($\alpha = .75$), ES ($\alpha = .81$), and O ($\alpha = .65$). In the present study, the use of this instrument aimed to measure the levels of Neuroticism among the participants.

Adult Attachment scale (AAS)

The Adult Attachment Scale (AAS) is a self-reported questionnaire developed by Collins et al. (1990). It consists of 18 items and measures attachment using a 5-point Likert scale. The scale ranges from 1, indicating "Not at all characteristic," to 5, indicating "Very characteristic." The AAS comprises three subscales: Close, Depend, and Anxiety.

The Close subscale items are AAS1, AAS7, AAS9, AAS13, AAS15, and AAS17. The Depend subscale includes items AAS3, AAS6, AAS8, AAS14, AAS16, and AAS18. The Anxiety subscale consists of items AAS2, AAS4, AAS5, AAS10, AAS11, and AAS12.

The internal consistency of the scale has been reported as follows: Cronbach's alpha of .69 for the Close subscale, .75 for the Depend subscale, and .72 for the Anxiety subscale (Collins & Read, 1990).

Psychological wellbeing scale (PWS)

The Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWS) was employed in this study to measure psychological wellbeing. This scale was developed by Ryff et al. (2010). The PWS is an English version scale consisting of 18 items that assess psychological wellbeing using a 7-point Likert scale. The scale ranges from 1, indicating "strongly agree," to 7, indicating "strongly disagree." It takes approximately 3 to 5 minutes to complete.

The PWS comprises three subscales. The internal consistency of the six scales within the PWS, as reported in Ryff's original paper (1989a), demonstrates adequate reliability (α), ranging from .93 to .86. This indicates a high level of scale reliability.

Operational definition

Neuroticism

Emotional instability, or neuroticism, is a prominent trait within the Big Five personality framework. It characterizes individuals who do not experience a sense of calm and relaxation but instead exhibit traits such as anxiety, moodiness, easy agitation, and susceptibility to stress (Gosling et al., 2003).

Psychological wellbeing

The understanding that health encompasses more than just the absence of physical illness has prompted the emergence of the concept of psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989; Ryff and Keyes, 1995). Psychological well-being is supported by factors such as life happiness and satisfaction (Ryff, 1989).

Attachment

According to Collins and Read (1990), the attachment system refers to the cognitive representation of how individuals establish and maintain relationships with others throughout their lives, as well as how others have responded to their social interactions and close relationships. Working models of attachment involve the beliefs and expectations individuals develop about themselves and others.

The attachment system encompasses three subdomains:

Close Attachment. This refers to the degree to which an individual feels comfortable with and seeks out emotional closeness and intimacy in relationships.

Depend Attachment. This pertains to the extent to which an individual feels they can rely on others to be available and supportive when needed.

Anxious Attachment. This relates to the extent to which an individual experiences worries and concerns about being abandoned or unloved in relationships.

Procedure

The participants for this study were conveniently selected from various universities in the vicinity of Wah Cantt. Prior to data collection, permission to conduct the research was obtained from the chairperson of the Department of Psychology, University of Wah, Wah Cantt. The study included a total of 274 participants, comprising 94 males and 180 females, within the age range of 18 to 30 years. Participants were approached through convenient sampling, with permission obtained from the respective heads of institutions and universities.

During the participant recruitment phase, individuals were approached in person and given detailed information about the research's objectives and purpose. They were then requested to provide informed consent to participate, with the assurance that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point without facing any negative consequences. Participants were allocated approximately 20-30 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

In addition to the aforementioned variables, a demographic sheet was utilized in the study to gather information on various participant characteristics. This sheet collected data on age, gender, education level, number of siblings, occupation, as well as the educational background and occupation of both the participant's father and mother. Furthermore, it also encompassed information on the type of family system the participant belonged to.

Results and Discussion

Statistical analyses were employed to calculate the results of the study. Descriptive statistics were utilized to summarize the data, while correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationships among the study variables. In addition, a moderation analysis was conducted using the Process Macro to assess the moderating effect of certain variables on the relationships under investigation.

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of the participants (N= 274)

Variables	<i>f</i>	%
Gender		
Male	94	34.3
Female	180	65.7
Age		
18-21	179	65.3
22-25	91	33.2
26-30	4	1.5
Educational level		
BS	103	37.6
Undergraduate	97	35.4
Others	74	27.0
Number of sibling		
0-3	146	53.3
4-7	123	44.9
8-10	5	1.8
Family system		
Nuclear	197	71.9
Joint	76	27.7
Number of close friends		
0-10	261	95.3
11-20	8	2.9
21-30	1	.4
41-50	3	1.1

Note: *f* = frequency, % =percentage

Table 1 explains the frequency and percentage of demographic variables of the participants included in the study. There were both males (94) and females (180) in the study. 65.3% age range was 18-21. In this sample most of the participants (37.6%) have BS level education. 53.3% participants are in siblings range of 0-3. Mostly participants (71.9%) belonged to nuclear family system. Moreover, most of the participants (95.3%) have close friends in the range 0-10.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics for the study variables.

variables	K	α	MEAN	SD	range		skewness	kurtosis
					Actual	Potential		
TIPI	10	0.48	39.22	14.21	15-117	10-70	0.06	0.64
EX	2	0.40	8.15	5.09	2-78	2-10	0.43	0.29
AG	2	0.41	8.38	2.48	2-14	2-10	-0.11	0.29
CNC	2	0.4	8.37	2.55	2-14	2-10	0.03	0.29
NEU	2	0.48	8.81	2.93	2-14	2-10	-0.12	0.29
OP	2	0.41	8.02	2.42	2-14	2-10	0.08	0.29
AAS	18	0.67	49.49	9.12	29-69	18-90	0.13	0.64
CLOSE	6	0.47	16.51	4.11	6-29	6-30	0.37	0.29
DEPEND	6	0.41	17.79	4.01	7-27	6-30	-0.12	0.29
ANXIOUS	6	0.49	17.52	4.23	7-29	6-30	0.01	0.29
PWS	18	0.82	58.37	14.24	27-92	18-126	0.03	0.64
AS	3	0.70	9.99	4.81	3-21	3-21	0.42	0.29
EM	3	0.75	10.54	3.69	3-21	3-21	0.31	0.29
PG	3	0.41	9.81	4.09	3-21	3-21	0.40	0.29
PRO	3	0.63	10.75	3.65	3-21	3-21	0.10	0.29
PL	3	0.61	11.10	3.72	3-21	3-21	0.06	0.29

SA	3	0.43	10.13	4.07	3-21	3-21	0.55	0.29
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Note. K = number of items, α = Cronbach's alpha, SD = standard deviation, Ten item personality inventory (TIPI), Extraversion (EXT), Agreeableness (AGR), Conscientiousness (CONS), Neuroticism (NEUR), Openness (OPEN), Adult attachment scale (AAS), Close (CLO) Depend (DEP), Anxiety (ANX), Psychological wellbeing scale (PWS), Autonomy Subscale (AS), Environmental Mastery (EM), Personal Growth (PG), Positive Relations with Others (PRO), Purpose in Life (PL), Self-Acceptance (SA).

Table 2 provides an overview of the scales used in the study, including the number of items, Cronbach's alpha, mean, standard deviation, range (potential and actual), skewness, and kurtosis. The alpha coefficients for all scales range from .48 to .82, which falls within an acceptable range of 0 to 1, indicating their validity for further analysis. The skewness and kurtosis values of the scales are within the range of +2 to -2, satisfying the assumption of normal distribution.

Reliability, which measures the internal consistency of the constructs in the study, was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. A construct is considered reliable if the alpha (α) value is greater than .70 (Hair et al., 2013). In this study, the Ten Item Personality Inventory (TIPI) scale with ten items had a lower reliability of α =.45. However, it is important to note that the original TIPI manuscript by Gosling et al. (2003) aimed to create a short instrument that prioritized validity, including content validity, rather than optimizing alpha coefficients and goodness-of-fit in confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The Attachment scale with 18 items exhibited a reliability of α =.674, while the Psychological Wellbeing scale with 18 items demonstrated high reliability with α =.826.

Table 3
Moderating role of Gender in relationship between Personality Traits and Adult Attachment Styles

Variables	Adult Attachment Styles		95% CI	
	β	P	LL	UL
Constant	62.20	.00	40.30	84.11
Personality traits	-.33	.21	-.86	.18
Gender	-17.28	.03	-33.65	-.92
Int	.46	.03*	.04	.87
R^2	.19			
F	4.9			
ΔR^2	0.03			

Note. $p < .05$, β =Beta Value, CI=Class Interval, p =Significance level, LL =Lower Limit, UL =Upper Limit

Table 3 representing that Gender is acting as moderator between the relationship of Personality Traits and Adult Attachment Styles with others. The Values demonstrate that gender is strengthening the relationship between the two under observed variables. Detailed effect of moderation has been illustrated in figure 1 by modgraph. Figure 1 further demonstrating that female gender strengthens the relationship between personality traits and Adult Attachment styles more as compared to male.

Table 4
Moderating role of Gender in relationship between Neuroticism and Close Attachment (subdomain of Adult Attachment Styles)

Variables	Close Attachment Styles		95% CI	
	β	p	LL	UL
Constant	13.93	.00	8.87	18.99
Neuroticism	.73	.00	.18	1.27
Gender	.53	.00	-2.47	3.55

Int	-.32	.04*	-.65	-.00
R ²	.10			
F	3.91			
ΔR^2	.01			

Note. $p < .05$, β =Beta Value, CI=Class Interval, p =Significance level, LL=Lower Limit, UL=Upper Limit

Table 4 representing that Gender is acting as moderator between the relationship of Neuroticism (Personality trait) and Close Attachment Style (Sub Domain of Adult Attachment styles). The Values demonstrate that gender is buffering/weakening the relationship between the two under observed variables. Detailed effect of moderation has been illustrated in figure 1 by modgraph. Figure 1 further demonstrating that females tend to be lower in

Table 5
Moderating role of Age in relationship between Neuroticism and Self-Acceptance (Subscale of Psychological Wellbeing Scale)

Variables	Self-Acceptance		95% CI	
	β	p	LL	UL
Constant	13.77	.00	30.57	3.02
Neuroticism	2.16	.02	.29	4.0
Age	1.15	.00	.35	1.95
Int	-.10	.02*	.19	0.89
R ²	.03			
F	5.37			
ΔR^2	.01			

Note. $p < .05$, β =Beta Value, CI=Class Interval, p =Significance level, LL=Lower Limit, UL=Upper Limit

Table 5 representing that pressure from Age is acting as moderator between the relationship of Neuroticism and Self-Acceptance. The Values demonstrate that age weakens/buffers the relationship between the two under observed variables. Detailed effect of moderation has been illustrated in figure 3 by modgraph. It is depicted that the higher the chronological age of students, neuroticism will be leading to less self-acceptance.

Table 6
Moderating role of Family System in relationship between Neuroticism and Personal Growth (Subscale of Psychological Wellbeing Scale)

Variables	Personal Growth		95% CI	
	β	p	LL	UL
Constant	17.02	.00	12.48	21.56
NEURO	-0.88	.00	-1.37	-0.39
Family System	-4.28	.00	-7.45	-1.12
Int	0.54	.00*	0.19	0.89
R ²	0.05			
F	9.36			
ΔR^2	0.03			

Note. $p < .05$, β =Beta Value, CI=Class Interval, p =Significance level, LL=Lower Limit, UL=Upper Limit

Table 6 representing that Family System is acting as moderator between the relationship of Neuroticism and Personal Growth with others. The Values demonstrate that the Family system strengthens the relationship between the two under observed variables. Specifically Joint Family System plays a great role in personal growth of individuals

possessing neurotic personality traits. Detailed effect of moderation has been illustrated in figure 3 by modgraph.

Discussion

Hypothesis 1 postulated that gender would moderate the association between personality traits and adult attachment styles. The hypothesis has been confirmed, consistent with prior research. For instance, Diehl et al. (1998) found that an individual's gender strongly influences the relationship between specific personality traits and attachment styles in young adults. Similarly, Simon et al. (2019) demonstrated that gender is significantly associated with personality traits such as neuroticism and avoidant attachment, particularly among female college students, thus corroborating the present study's findings.

Hypothesis 2 posited that gender would act as a moderating factor in the relationship between neuroticism, a personality trait, and close attachment style, a subdomain of adult attachment styles, specifically among university students. Results supported the notion that gender buffers the relationship between neuroticism and close attachment style in young adults. Contradicting the present study's findings, prior research by Khosravi and Kasaeiyan (2020) indicated that females tend to score higher on the neuroticism scale and exhibit a higher propensity for close attachment style. This contradiction may stem from cultural variations between Western and Eastern contexts. Additionally, Idrees and Malik (2022) found that females significantly displayed higher levels of close and caring attachment styles, further contrasting the outcomes of the current investigation.

Hypothesis 3 suggested that age would moderate the relationship between neuroticism and self acceptance (a subdomain of psychological well-being) among university students. Results indicated that age acts as a buffer or weakens the association between these two lesser-explored variables. Moreover, the findings were elucidated by Shallcross et al. (2013), who demonstrated in their study that neuroticism and negative affect contribute to lower levels of self acceptance among young adults. However, as individuals become more mature and their stability increases with age, there is a higher likelihood of experiencing greater self acceptance. The findings of Guo et al. (2018) are consistent with the results of the present research, as they revealed that individuals with higher levels of neuroticism tend to exhibit lower levels of prosocial behaviour and self acceptance. This alignment provides support for the current study's findings and reinforces the link between neuroticism and social behaviours.

Hypothesis 4 posited that family system (nuclear/joint) would moderate the relationship between neuroticism and personal growth (a subdomain of psychological well-being). Results indicated that the family system strengthens the link between these two examined variables, particularly in the case of joint family systems, which significantly contribute to the personal growth of individuals exhibiting neurotic personality traits. This aligns with prior research by Conger et al. (2010), who emphasized the vital role of family structure or system in the personal growth of individuals with neurotic personality traits.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides evidence supporting the influence of gender, age, and family system on the relationship between personality traits, attachment styles, and psychological well-being. Gender was found to moderate the association between personality traits and attachment styles, while age acted as a buffer in the link between neuroticism and social acceptance. Joint family systems were shown to enhance personal growth in individuals with neurotic personality traits. These findings highlight the importance of considering these factors when examining and promoting psychological well-

being in individuals. Further research in this area is warranted to deepen our understanding and inform targeted interventions.

Recommendations

The present study is subject to certain limitations, and the following suggestions are proposed for future research:

1. The study focused on a specific aspect of personality, which is a broad and complex construct. To enhance the comprehensive understanding of the subject, it is recommended to explore other personality factors such as the Big Five traits, which may provide a more robust understanding of individual differences.
2. The findings of the study may be influenced by the characteristics of the sample. In order to obtain a more diverse and representative perspective, future research should aim to include larger and more varied samples, encompassing individuals from different backgrounds, cultures, and demographic profiles.
3. The research primarily examined a limited set of demographic variables. To gain a broader understanding of the subject matter, future research should consider collecting data on a wider range of demographic variables, allowing for a more comprehensive analysis of their influence on the variables of interest.
4. Time constraints posed a challenge during the research process, impacting data collection and other procedures. To mitigate this limitation, future studies should allocate sufficient time for data collection, analysis, and interpretation, ensuring a more comprehensive and rigorous investigation.

It is important to acknowledge these limitations and address them in future research endeavours to enhance the validity, generalizability, and comprehensiveness of the findings.

Implications

The findings of the present research have several implications for various stakeholders:

1. **Parents and Teachers:** The findings can provide valuable insights to parents and teachers in supporting young adults who experience neurotic behaviours. By understanding the factors that contribute to psychological well-being, parents and teachers can employ strategies and interventions that promote the well-being and resilience of young adults facing these challenges.
2. **Future Researchers:** The current study highlights the potential role of gender in moderating the relationship between neuroticism and psychological well-being. This finding suggests a need for further exploration and in-depth examination of how gender influences this relationship. Future researchers can build upon these findings to expand our understanding of the complex interplay between personality traits, gender, and psychological well-being.
3. **Parents and Families:** The research outcomes can guide parents and families in adapting their interaction styles with young adults. By fostering secure attachment styles and creating supportive and nurturing environments, parents and families can contribute to enhancing the psychological well-being of young adults.

Overall, the findings of the present research have practical implications for promoting psychological well-being among young adults. They offer valuable insights for

individuals involved in supporting and guiding young adults, including parents, teachers, and future researchers. By applying these insights, stakeholders can work towards creating a conducive environment that fosters the psychological well-being and resilience of young adults.

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