

# HOW TO WARM UP THE CHILLY CLIMATE

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Most people want to be fair to each other and try to act in a fair manner. Unfortunately, even people with the best intentions may often treat others unknowingly in ways that are less than fair or equitable.

This paper deals primarily with “microinequities,” a term coined by Dr. Mary Rowe of Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Many of the behaviors that are described below are the small, everyday inequities by which individuals are often treated differently because of their gender, race, age or other “outsider” status. This paper focuses on issues particularly relevant to gender inequity, but many of the recommendations can help warm the climate for everyone and are easily adapted for use with other diverse groups.

Taken by themselves, many of these behaviors have a minuscule effect, if they have any at all, and are often not even noticed by the person they happen to or by the person who engages in this behavior. Yet when these behaviors occur again and again, and especially if they are not noticed or understood, they often have a damaging and cumulative effect, creating an environment that is indeed chilly – an environment that dampens one’s self-esteem, confidence, aspirations and participation.

Not everyone will be comfortable with all of the strategies described. The aim is to provide a variety of ways to respond so that individuals can choose the strategies with which they are most comfortable and to devise additional ones.

Many of the recommendations listed below are directly aimed at helping *both* men and women treat all their colleagues equitably. Some of the strategies deal with specific behaviors; others are aimed at ensuring that women and other members of underrepresented groups receive encouragement and opportunities to participate.

## **Part I**

### **Examining and Changing Your Own Behaviors**

**EXAMINE YOUR OWN BEHAVIOR AND THAT OF OTHERS** as a colleague or co-worker, as a supervisor, manager or administrator, and/or as a committee chair or member to see if men and women are treated differently:

Which people get the most and best responses?

Who gets the most attention?

Who talks the most?

Who talks the least?

With whom do others talk?

- Who gets praised?
- Who get criticized?
- Who receives feedback about their work?
- Who is called by name?
- Who receives encouragement to do more?
- Who gets credit for new ideas they suggested?
- Who is suggested for professional opportunities, such as attending conferences?
- Which students are encouraged to apply for awards, employment opportunities, and internships?
- Who is asked to take notes at meetings?

Examining your own behavior and that of others will help you understand these behaviors and what to do about them.

**USE PRAISE AS A DELIBERATE STRATEGY, COUPLED WITH FEEDBACK ABOUT THE QUALITY OF WORK AND WHAT IF ANYTHING NEEDS TO BE DONE.** Praise about appearance, or “uh-huh” or “OK” does not count as praise and bears little relationship to learning, self-esteem or increasing someone’s confidence about one’s work and progress. Comments about appearance, in particular, can be more damaging than helpful. [Women tend to get less praise, less constructive feedback and fewer suggestions for improvement.]

**Praise good comments, abilities, ways of working, problem-solving and good work in general.** Sometimes males are praised for their *talents* (“You’re really smart,”) and females for their *hard work* (“I can see you put a lot of work into this.”)

**Give positive feedback often and as close to possible to the behavior that deserved the praise.**

**Examine how you and others give feedback about someone’s work: how do often do you and others use the following, and for whom:**

- praise for a specific achievement
- criticism or evaluation (feedback on performance)
- remediation or correction (help and suggestions for improvement)
- acceptance (such as “OK” or “uh-huh.”)

The first three are important in all kinds of learning; the last, acceptance, merely acknowledges that a person has spoken, and passively implies that nothing very good or very bad was said.

**WHAT TO DO WHEN GIVING CRITICISM AND FEEDBACK:** It is hard for some men (and women) to give critical feedback to women – perhaps they are worried that the women will get angry or cry. Some people find it hard to give anyone criticism.

**Insofar as is possible, give criticism in the form of a question.**

*How would your response differ if you took into account the environmental impact? rather than “Your response is wrong because you did not mention the impact of the environment.”*

**Include praise along with criticism and include specific ways to improve**, such as *I know you can do better. You need to redo the experiment and keep an eye on the fluid levels.*

*This isn't up to your usual standard of very good work. You need to include more descriptions of the problems.*

**Cite specific observations and situations rather than generalized or abstract comments or interpretations.**

**Focus on the actual behavior rather than “why” it may have occurred.**

**Where possible, describe behaviors on a continuum between “low” and “high,” “large” and “small,” or “frequent” and “rare” rather than “either - or” or “yes” or “no.”**

*Your participation in meetings is on the low side.*

*I notice that you rarely hand in materials on time.*

**Where appropriate, put the criticisms in terms of your own feelings about the behavior(s).** This helps in putting the behavior(s) in a larger context, as well as helping the person understand that changing the behavior(s) is in his or her best interest.

*I'm worried that this will affect your formal evaluation.*

*I'm concerned that others are annoyed when you don't get your work in on time.*

*I'm concerned about how this affects your productivity.*

#### **WHAT TO DO WHEN WOMEN DON'T TALK AS MUCH AS MEN AT MEETINGS:**

**State at the beginning of the meeting that it is important for everyone to participate.**

**Encourage everyone to participate more at group meetings and to take a more active role, by “coaching” females as well as males.** Coaching someone is a specific form of encouragement which conveys the expectation and belief that the another person is bright, talented, and able to say more and/or participate more actively.

**Use questions or statements such as**

*Why do you think that is?*

*Tell me more about this.”*

**To the extent possible, use questions that have no “wrong” answer, such as:**

*What kinds of questions do you have about today’s work [problem, project, etc.]?*

This encourages people to speak and participate more actively, rather than “Does anyone have a problem?”

**Encourage women (and any others who are not participating) by saying**

*I’d be interested in hearing what Susan [or whomever] thinks of this.*

*Let’s be sure we get everyone’s opinion before we move on.*

**When you ask a question, look at all the people in the group,** not just males, not just those you expect to respond, not just the ones you consider bright, and not just the people who are Caucasian. **Be sure to look at women as well.** Eye contact often indicates to others that you expect them to respond and often they will.

**Respond to women’s comments (and those of others) with more than “uh-huh” or “Okay.** Many men and women respond more extensively to men’s comments than to women’s by developing a dialogue, coaching, asking questions or discussing the information further.

**If you are a leader of a small work group (or in a position to appoint leaders of such groups) remind the group (and the leaders of such groups) of the importance of participation by openly articulating some group groundrules, such as the following, that are important for everyone to observe:**

Everyone should be encouraged to participate.

Everyone should take turns speaking.

Everyone should respect each other’s contributions.

Everyone should allow everyone else to finish speaking without interruptions.

Everyone should listen carefully to everyone else.

Leaders should understand that part of their responsibility is to encourage everyone to speak. Note: Females should not be singled out for encouragement; do not comment on women as a group not participating such as “I wish the women would participate more.” Instead, encourage individual women, as in:

*Jane, what do you think about this?*

Similarly, asking women to give the “woman’s point of view” mistakenly assumes that all women think alike. Ask individuals about what they think.

**LISTEN ATTENTIVELY TO ALL PEOPLE WHEN THEY SPEAK**, even if their answer is wrong, even if they speak slowly or hesitantly, or speak English as a second language. A common form of differential treatment of men and women in the workplace is listening attentively when males are speaking by looking at the person, nodding and gesturing, but in contrast, when women speak, shuffling papers, looking elsewhere and avoiding eye contact.

Watch to see how others “listen” when men and women are speaking.

**DO NOT ALLOW COLLEAGUES AND CO-WORKERS TO INTERRUPT EACH OTHER.** Men more often interrupt women than the other way around, often changing the topic or direction of the conversation. Examine your own interruptions of others. Can you listen without interrupting?

When someone interrupts, you can say

*Please let Mary finish.*

**THE APPEARANCE FACTOR:** *Don't let a woman's appearance make a difference in the way in which she is perceived and evaluated.* Women who don't smile, women who are not “feminine” in their behavior or appearance sometimes make other people uncomfortable. Their discomfort may spill over into the evaluation of that person's work. Can you find examples of this in your own behavior or that of others?

Are women described by their appearance and physical characteristics, such a “blonde”? Are women judged by their “attractiveness” or lack of “attractiveness”?

Are women's appearance, personal qualities and relationships given more attention than that of men, as in “I'd like to hear from that charming woman in the back” rather than

*I'd like to hear what Joan has to say about this; she always has good ideas.*

**AVOID COMMENTS THAT LUMP ALL FEMALES (OR MALES) TOGETHER.** Even positive comments, such as “The women in this section are much more responsible because they always turn in their work on time.” can create a chilly climate, especially since it is likely to be untrue for *all* females and likely to be true for *some* males. It is better to single out *individuals* for praise, feedback and criticism/remediation, and to characterize or group people in ways other than by gender, race or ethnicity.

**AVOID STORIES, JOKES AND COMMENTS THAT DENIGRATE WOMEN, GIRLS AND MEMBERS OF OTHER UNDER-REPRESENTED GROUPS.** Most jokes about women demean females, just as most jokes about African-Americans are demeaning to them.

Talking about sex or women in a “humorous” way makes many females uncomfortable. The fact that a woman does not object to sexual jokes and sexual remarks does not mean she likes them; indeed some women will even laugh at jokes that offend them because they do not want to appear unfriendly or hostile.

**IN GIVING CREDIT TO CO-WORKERS’ AND COLLEAGUES’ CONTRIBUTIONS, BE SURE TO GIVE IT TO THE RIGHT PERSON.** Giving credit (*What Mary said summarizes the issue perfectly.*) is a very powerful form of praise. However, males are more likely to get credit for their contributions and suggestions, and sometimes even get credit for something a female said earlier in a discussion.

You can check what happens at meetings you attend to see if women’s suggestions are ignored more often than men’s. Check to see whose suggestions are listened to, and notice if women get credit for first introducing an idea that is later mentioned by someone else and adopted by the group.

If someone else is given credit for another person’s contribution or suggestion, remind the group who deserved the credit:

*I like the way Jim built on Carol’s earlier suggestion.*

*I agree with Jim, but we also need to give Carol credit for the original suggestion.*

**JUDGE FEMALES’ (AND MALES’) CONTRIBUTIONS TO DISCUSSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS BY THE CONTENTS OF THEIR IDEAS RATHER THAN BY THE STYLE OF THEIR SPEECH.** Do not assume that an incisive, self-assured style equals knowledge, or that a hesitant style equals ignorance. Do not assume that females (or males) who preface their remarks with an apology (“I don’t know if this makes sense but...”) are not bright or do not understand the problem being discussed.

## **HOW TO AVOID THE “LANGUAGE POLICE:”**

**Use parallel terminology in describing both genders, such as *men and women*, or *boys and girls*, not “girls and men.”**

**Use “he or she” rather than the generic “he” or words such as “mankind.”** Doing so communicates a concern about gender equity, and shakes up stereotypes about gender behavior. Several research studies confirm that the use of the generic “he” or “man” is typically viewed by listeners or readers as pertaining to males only.

**Avoid describing female professionals as “women engineers” or worse, “lady engineers.”** They are simply “engineers”.

**Check your language and that of others:** Do you use different words for men and women to describe the *same* behavior?

Are men described as “aggressive” and women as “pushy?”

Are men seen as “direct” and “to the point” and women as “abrasive”

Are men viewed as “confident” and women as “conceited?”

Are men described as “angry” and women as “bitchy?”

Are men described as “sociable” and women as “charming?”

Are men’s decisions described as “good judgment” and women’s as “intuition?”

**In using examples, try not to use stereotyped roles,** such as the engineer is always a “he” while the secretary is always a “she.”

**Don’t fall back on disparaging stereotyped words when angry or annoyed with women:** “Look here, *sweetie*,” or “Don’t talk back to me, *little girl*.”

**DO NOT GROUP CO-WORKERS OR COLLEAGUES BY GENDER.** Such groupings often imply that females are not as qualified as males. Do not set up all male and all female work groups in order to have each gender compete with the other. In most instances, grouping employees or students by gender violates anti-discrimination laws.

**DO NOT MAKE SEEMINGLY HELPFUL REMARKS THAT DISPARAGE FEMALES’ ABILITIES,** such as “I know that a lot of females have trouble with lifting heavy materials, so I’ll be happy to help anyone who needs extra assistance.” Better:

*If anyone is having trouble lifting the materials, let me know and I’ll be happy to help them.*

**ASK MALES AND FEMALES THE SAME KINDS OF QUESTIONS:** Avoid asking males the critical thinking questions (“*Why* did the revolution occur?”) and females the factual and easier questions (“*When* did the revolution occur?”). This is sometimes apparent in interviews with prospective employees where male applicants will be asked more open-ended questions (“How did you get interested in marine science?”) and women asked more factual questions (“What textbook did you use?”).

**CALL FEMALES BY NAME AS WELL AS MALES.** Often people are surprised to learn they know more names of male colleagues, coworkers and students than those of females, and call males by name more often.

Be sure to use parallel names, such as *all* last names or *all* first names. Calling males by their last names and females by their first names implies a difference in status.

**CHECK OUT THE TRUTH OF ASSUMPTIONS YOU OR OTHERS MAKE ABOUT WOMEN WHO ARE PARENTS, PREGNANT, OR WHO MIGHT BECOME PREGNANT.**

Often people make assumptions about a woman's ability to do her job or carry out specific assignments or to engage in travel-related assignments because she has children and/or is pregnant. *Unless someone asks, there is no way of knowing whether these assumptions are true or not. Ask for information.*

Similarly, don't make assumptions about women not wanting to move to another job because she is married and/or has children any more than you would assume that a man who is married and/or has children would not want to move.

Are marriage and parental status viewed differently for men and women? Are men seen as future professionals and women as future mothers who will drop out of the professional career? *Differential treatment based on marital or parental status is generally considered discrimination based on sex and is illegal.*

**WITH WHOM DO YOU TALK? WITH WHOM DO YOU HAVE LUNCH?** Informal conversations are important in building a sense of group solidarity. Just as important, a good deal of important information about the work environment is not written down and is often transmitted through these informal conversations, such as unit politics, including who are the more powerful people in a unit; whether it is better to deal with a particular kind of problem by memo, a group meeting or a separate talk with an individual; what are the hottest topics for research in a particular area; etc.

To some degree, most of us are more comfortable with people who are like ourselves, including those of our own gender, so that generally men talk more to other men and women talk more to other women. Because there are typically more men in many settings, women often have fewer people who talk to them than men do. What can you do?

**Seek out opportunities to talk to women,** not just about their families but also about areas such as their work, their occupation, their plans and their thoughts about various aspects of the work environment.



Often it is easier to speak to people singly or in groups of two or three than in larger settings; **speak to women before and after meetings.** If men are worried about the sexual aspect, they can talk with several women, not just one or two.

**Invite women to lunch.** Men can defuse any mistaken sexual implications by inviting one or more persons to join the two of you. If lunch is informal, such as lunch while working in the field, sit next to women occasionally, or ask women to join you and whomever you are sitting with.

**HOW TO AVOID MISTAKEN SEXUAL IMPLICATIONS:** Some men and women avoid each other's company because they are worried that any friendliness on their part will be perceived by that person and others as a sexual overture. Others may be worried that any friendly behavior toward a woman may be misperceived as sexual harassment.

**Meet with co-workers and colleagues in places that discourage sexual intimacy,** such as offices, labs and other work related settings.

**Talk with the person in a professional manner,** whether you are discussing personal or professional concerns.

**Avoid sexual joking or innuendos, comments about personal appearance and intimate confidences.**

**Don't address others by terms such as "honey," "dear," or "sweetie."**

**If having lunch, dinner, or drinks together, invite others to join you.**

**If you have one, mention that you have a spouse, a partner or a significant other early in the relationship.** This often has the effect of giving the message that you are neither available nor interested in a sexual or romantic relationship.

**If someone seems to be suggesting a sexual or romantic relationship, confront the issue in a straightforward way.** For example, say something like

*I'm very flattered by your attention to me but I don't want to ruin the working relationship we have developed.*

(In this type of circumstance, it is probably wise to keep a written record of the incident(s).) If the behavior continues, you should talk with your supervisor or whoever handles sexual harassment.

**You can leave the door open when you meet with others, regardless of their gender.** Some people leave the door open *only* when they are meeting with a person of the other

gender. This behavior is discriminatory because it treats men and women differently. It also ignores the possibility of same-sex sexual harassment allegations.

**WHAT DO YOU DO IF SOMEONE COMES TO YOU WITH A COMPLAINT, WHICH IS GENDER-RELATED?**

Take the complaint seriously. Ignoring such complaints or brushing them off can be a violation of anti-discrimination law.

**Helpful advice:**

Tell the person you are not the best one to help but that there are other appropriate individuals who handle these issues and who have been very helpful in these kinds of situations. The EEO Officer is the appropriate person to handle formal complaints. The Ombudsperson can be helpful informally.

Offer to call that officer and make an appointment.

Offer to accompany him or her to the appointment.

Keep of record of what happened.

Check within the following week or so with the person who complained to you to see if they followed through or if additional help is needed.

Inform [name of person who handles complaints at Woods Hole] for advice on how to handle the complaint.

**What to do if the person who tells you of such behavior asks you not to tell anyone about it.**  
State the following:

WHOI takes these incidents very seriously.  
The Institution has a policy prohibiting such behaviors.  
The policy specifically prohibits retaliation.  
Only those persons who need to know will be informed.

Add that you can see how upset this person is and how you don't want that to happen to anyone else.

**Part II.**  
**How To Intervene**  
**When You Observe Differential Treatment of Women and Men**

Many people find it difficult to intervene when they observe someone being treated differently than others or they do not know what to do when male staff show disrespect for female staff (or the reverse) through overt or subtle comments or negative body language.

Some people do not know what to say or how to intervene. Sometimes they are worried about their peers' reactions, that they will not be liked or supported by them. Some people feel "It's not my business." Others may not realize that they have a responsibility to intervene.

Not responding to incidents of differential treatment often gives the impression that the person observing it or the person to whom it happens is too weak to deal with the behavior. Rather than being passive bystanders to differential treatment, administrators, supervisors, faculty members and staff need to develop ways to respond when they observe instances of differential behavior.

If you observe differential behavior by or of someone for whom you are professionally responsible such as an employee you supervise, or as a faculty member observing such behaviors among students in class or related activities, you should try to respond immediately in some manner or shortly after the behavior has occurred.

However, even in cases where you are not professionally responsible for others' behavior, you might want to respond. To some degree, everyone in a community is responsible for seeing that the community's standards of behavior are observed.

What follows is a list of ways in which people can intervene when they observe differential behaviors, especially overt behaviors that may border on or actually be a form of sexual harassment

**Using humor:** Using humor and playfulness are good ways to handle some forms of differential behavior (if you can think of something immediately) because humor in a stressful situation connotes strength. Humorous comments demonstrate that the person making the clever comment is not overpowered by the behavior. Humorous comments also help break the cycle of behavior.

Unfortunately, many of us think of wonderfully funny comments later, when it is often too late. Here are some standard remarks, which, when said jokingly and lightly, might be helpful in a variety of situations, especially in cases that might involve sexual harassing jokes or comments:

*I would hate to hear that you are being sued by your staff for sexual harassment.*

*Is this a test to see how I would handle sexual harassment?*

*Are you sexually harassing me [or name of person or group] again?*

*I'm going to have to call the sexual harassment office [affirmative action office, attorney, etc.] right now!*

These comments can also be said in a direct manner without humor.

**Showing surprise:** Showing surprise is a way of indicating that the behavior is unacceptable.

*I beg your pardon!*

*I can't believe you said that!*

*I'm absolutely speechless!*

*Why would you say something like that?*

*Do you know that behavior could be seen as sexual harassment?*

**Responding directly:** Sometimes it helps to name or describe the behavior as unacceptable and how it needs to be changed:

*That comment is offensive to all of us [not "to me"]; it is unprofessional and might be sexual harassment as well. That behavior has to stop.*

*This is not the first time you've said things like this which many people would call sexual harassment. This is getting in the way of your effectiveness.*

*That kind of behavior is not acceptable to me.*

*That behavior is disgusting [unprofessional, immature, inappropriate, etc.].*

**Pretending to not understand:** In addition to the options listed above, one can pretend to not understand a particular joke or remark, particularly in response to sexist remarks, jokes and stories which portray women and racial or other groups as the object of laughter or ridicule. Many of these jokes are offensive to these groups, although individuals may not openly complain.

Keep a deadpan expression and state that you do not understand the remark and ask the person to repeat the remark again, such as:

*I don't get the point of your remark.*

*I don't understand what you meant.*

*I don't understand how your comment is relevant to our discussion.*

Follow up by *asking the person to repeat whatever they just said, and continue to claim that you don't understand what they mean*. There is nothing worse to a joke- or story-teller than to be told by someone that they just “don't get it.” Sometimes another person will intervene and tell you the “meaning” of the remark. If they do, you can just say, “Oh,” and remain silent.

**Private reprimand:** If you do not want to address the behavior publicly, you can still intervene immediately by addressing the person who behaved offensively, stating that you would like to talk to him or her privately. This should be done in a very serious tone of voice so that other bystanders receive the message that the person's behavior was out of line and that it will be dealt with. This works best if you have higher status or power (such as being a supervisor) over the person who is engaging in harassing behavior.

**Sending a copy of the sexual harassment policy with a letter and other materials if appropriate.** Sometimes it is helpful to underline or highlight that part of the policy that may have been violated. If you do not feel comfortable sending the policy under your name, ask the person in charge of sexual harassment to do so.

**Writing a letter to the person behaving badly:** This technique, also developed by Dr. Mary Rowe of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has been an extraordinarily successful method of dealing with sexual harassment as well as other forms of interpersonal conflict. It can be used when someone has observed sexually harassing behavior or other forms of inappropriate behavior as well as by the person to whom the offensive behavior was directed.

Part I. The writer describes what happened in a very factual manner without any evaluative words.

*Last week at our staff meeting you made several statements about the inappropriateness of women becoming engineers.*

*Yesterday at lunch, you stated that Professor Mary Smith was acting “just like a woman” when she criticized your suggestion. On several other occasions you have made similar comments about other women faculty members and students.*

Usually people agree about the *facts* but disagree about the *interpretation* of those facts. What the letter does is separate the facts from the feelings.

Part II. The writer describes how he or she feels about the incident(s) in as many words as necessary, and in non-evaluative terms.

*I am very upset with this behavior. I find it offensive and disgusting.*

*Your behavior makes me feel very upset.*

*I find this behavior unprofessional and it is interfering with the productivity of our meetings.*

*I worry about the impact these remarks have on morale.*

*I am concerned that someone will file a formal complaint against you [or our unit].*

Part III. This part is usually very short, noting what the writer wants to have happen next.

*I want this behavior to stop at once.*

*I want you to treat your colleagues [co-workers, students, assistants] in a professional manner, the way every colleague [student, employee] has a right to be treated.*

When the letter involves sexual harassment or any other offense that could involve termination of employment or a possible lawsuit, or for record-keeping purposes, the letter should be sent by certified mail, return receipt requested. In the case of one or two sexist remarks, however, one might put the letter in the person's mailbox. Should the behavior continue, the letter could be used as evidence that the person was informed of their behavior.

The writer keeps a copy of the letter for him- or herself, but does not send a copy to anyone else. The letter works best if it is a private communication between individuals. If, for example, the letter said "cc: Dean Carter," the recipient of the letter might go to the Dean's office in an attempt to destroy the credibility of the writer.

The letter has a high rate of success. It will not work with a very hostile person or with someone who is sadistic and intransigent, or with groups of harassers. Most of the time the person to whom the letter was written says nothing after receiving the letter but stops the behavior. Once in a while the person receiving the letter wants to apologize or explain, but it is best for the writer not to get into a discussion of the behavior but to simply say, "I'm not going to discuss it; I just want the behavior to stop."

The writer should keep a copy of the letter for his or her own file, as it is useful documentation should it ever be needed.

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Additional recommendations for how faculty members can warm up the chilly climate for women students (*Seventeen Ways to Warm Up the Chilly Climate: Recommendations for Faculty Members*) can be found at [www.bernicessandler.com](http://www.bernicessandler.com)

Several of these recommendations are from *The Chilly Classroom Climate: A Guide To Improve The Education Of Women* by Bernice Resnick Sandler, Lisa A. Silverberg and Roberta M. Hall, published by the National Association of Women, 1996.

The book describes more than 50 ways in which males and females are treated differently in the classroom, and examines key issues such as how gender affects the classroom, the influence of teaching style and pedagogy, intersections of race and gender, the importance of including women in the curriculum, and how gender affects faculty evaluation. More than 270 recommendations for action that administrators, department chairs, and faculty members--and even students themselves--can take to improve the classroom climate for females and other groups are also included.

The entire book will be available soon for downloading at [www.bernicessandler.com](http://www.bernicessandler.com).

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