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Mediated Globalisation: Gay Identity and the World Wide Web

Name: Matthew David Beetar

Student Number: 205508540

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In seeking a definition and understanding of globalisation theories have often ignored the uses to which the media are put, and the important role that media forms play in the lives of people. A starting point for an appreciation for the complexities of mediated globalisation is an understanding how macro concerns both influence and are reflected in the everyday lives of people, and how people utilise the media to further contribute to globalisation. This essay uses a mediagraphy (Rantanen, 2005) to emphasise *how* the World Wide Web is used by gay men in a globalised space of Durban. The essay reveals that whilst globalisation is a reality for four urban gay white men, their sexual orientations are oppressed by local structures. Mediated globalisation is then explored, in this regard, by investigating how the macro elements of global identity politics, cosmopolitanism, homogeneity and heterogeneity are reflected in the men's use of the Web. The essay reveals how the World Wide Web is a valuable tool of empowerment for the gay men, which speaks to a new sociological subjectivity of transnational identity production. The mediagraphy analysis explores how the nature of mediated globalisation in a sphere of everyday reality can take the form of a ‑rhizomic' connection to the duality of experiences of both local and the transnational spaces.

Keywords

Homosexuality; global identity; sociological empowerment; mediated globalisation; cosmopolitanism; heterogeneity; rhizome

d discussed topic in the context of Media and Cultural studies. The combination of ─new mediaø forms, economic trends, transnational cultures and international political discourses contribute to the ever-increasing paradox of concern and celebration around the visible and tangible effects and consequences of globalisation. Often evoking chaos and uncertainty within a current discourse of supposed postmodern pluralism, globalisation theory has taken on a variety of forms and modes of expression, with emphasis being placed on different attitudes, perspectives, and mediated worldviews. The impact of a transnational flow of information, knowledge, identities, cultures and cultural products is documented according to a variety of different paradigms. However, Terhi Rantanen advocates that an understanding of globalisation is incomplete without an understanding of *how* media and communication forms are used by people on an everyday basis (Rantanen 2008: Online). To fully appreciate the complexities of globalisation the level of everyday interaction, a sphere that can be understood to embody culture in itself (Williams 1993), needs to be analysed and explored.

As such, this essay seeks to explore a so-called ─mediated globalisationø in relation to how the World Wide Web, as a media form that is iconic to globalisation, is used on an everyday basis. The variety of uses that ─the Webø can be put to demonstrates the concerns and celebrations that a liminal tension between such a powerful international media and what people do with such forms facilitates and nourishes. Similarly, mediated globalisation can be used to reflect on the nature of aspects of South African society itself.

This essay seeks to merge aspects of gender studies and media studies to draw attention to realities in contemporary South Africa. As a country heralding one of the most progressive sovereign Constitutions in the world, South Africa has been at the forefront of promoting gay and lesbian rights in Africa. The rich history of a struggle against apartheid is seen by some as synonymous with the development of a gay and lesbian rights movement and the fight for equal human rights, despite sexual orientation. Neville Hoad, Karen Martin and Graeme Reid (2005) thoroughly document the politics surrounding the battle for legal recognition of sexual equality, and Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron (1994) shed light on the wide fragmentation of sexual identities that seek protection from the Constitution. The promulgation of a final Constitution in 1996, followed by the passing of the Civil Unions Act

ayö rights are a primary concern for the public of South ... of diversity.

In a context of globalisation, the transnationalisation of gay identity (Hoad 1998: 34) and the expression of such an identity need to be explored. The freedom and protection that gay men are theoretically afforded needs to be investigated, particularly in relation to the globalised space of Durban city. The physical space of Durban offers few ÷officialø spaces of interaction for gay men. Personal experience has shown me that whilst Durban is a part of a so-called ÷global worldø, the politics of identity favour a model of heteronormativity: homophobia and hegemonic monitoring of ÷properø masculinity is a very real part of everyday reality for many gay men. What, then, are the implications of mediated globalisation for gay men?

The Web can have the implication of increased connectedness and availability of information and cultural resources. In relation to the theme of identity, P. David Marshall (2004) suggests that in the context of globalisation engagement with media forms has shifted to a model of õinteractionö, and a subjectivity of production and individuality permeates a contemporary social mindset. In such a context the impact of a transnational flow of information and cultural products into a privileged urban space needs to be assessed. The World Wide Web is a rich cultural artefact that is used by many people to connect with like-minded individuals and groups. The õannihilation of distanceö (Eriksen 2005: 26) that the Web advocates has implications for the everyday negotiation of identity in relation to the õduality of experiencesö (Isaacs and McKendrick 1992: 6) of homosexual men.

This essay thus seeks to investigate to what extent a group of gay men have based, and continue to base, their sense of Self on materials and resources found online ó how social networking sites, Instant Messengers, Blogs and websites have been used to develop and *produce* their sexual identities, and how such a media form can be õa driving force [in the] public and private livesö of these users (Stern 2007: 1). Similarly, this essay aims to show how these forms of engagement on the Web can be vital in actively producing a sense of self and identity in relation to a context that can be considered conservative in many regards. The role of the World Wide Web in creating a transnational sense of cohesion (Fraser 2005) cannot be underestimated when considering globalised identity politics. The possibility that a gay identity helped forged by the Web can be more cohesive than other ÷physicalø or

sented in everyday life speaks of the various paradoxes similarly seeks to reflect on the tensions of reality that a mediated globalisation presents in relation to the possibility that a real and lived õfailure to recognize [basic human rights] bespeaks a fundamental injustice in our politics that must be intolerable to reasonable people of good willö (Richards 1999: 1).

This understanding of the practical and real use of the Web is crucial to engage with the true implications of globalisation on a level of normality and reality for a ÷cultureø that has played a vital role in the development and advancement of South African politics. Indeed, an understanding of what gay men *do* with the Web in relation to their identities, and in a context of individualist mediated globalisation relates directly to macro concerns of expectations and identities õuncritically imposed by the dominant cultureö (Richards 1999: 4).

It is important to note from the onset that this essay squarely locates itself in a realm of urban privilege. Concerns around globalisation include the ever-increasing ÷digital divideø, involving excessive exclusion based, in part, on a lack of access and/or a lack of knowledge of how to utilise global media forms. Whilst I recognise such concerns affect the majority of people in South Africa, this essay seeks to explore the realm of saturated commodification and globalisation. I do not claim that the theories I engage with and concepts I explore are applicable to all South Africans. Similarly, I do not wish to homogenise any gay identity ó the uses of the Web that I explore are by no means indicative of an all-encompassing homosexuality. The effects of the Web, however, will be discussed in relation to the perception of a homogenous homosexual identity.

Key Theories, Concepts and Themes

A New Sociological Subjectivity

Within a context of mediated globalisation the World Wide Web has offered, and continues to offer, numerous avenues for the consumption of culturally produced texts and artefacts. The nature of the Web and its seeming ubiquity in our privileged lives affords users the opportunity to explore subjects; share information; network according to interest; merge the public with the private; and conflate divisions of leisure and work. The ability of users to

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about what information they choose to access, and te content (through means such as Instant Messengers, social networking sites, Blogs or video sites) speaks to P. David Marshalløs (2004) theory of õtransformed subjectivityö: globalisation exploration takes the form of a desire to be actively involved in õthe production and the reception of the text and images that become part of our reception and pleasureö (Marshall 2004: 25). The interaction between the individual and the Web speaks to an intensified yet normalised cultural experience (Marshall 2004: 25) within an ideology of empowerment and subjectivity (Marshall 2004: 24). The ways I interpret uses of the Web are based upon the interactive and transformative relationship between user and the media form (Marshall 2004: 13) in that *how* users engage with the Web speaks to a wider social discourse of identity empowerment and independence. In turn, the ways in which people *use* the Web forms an overall understanding of globalisation.

This theory is invaluable for exploring how gay men, in the urban environment of Durban, may utilise the Web in order to negotiate and produce identity using tools that may not be afforded in everyday reality. Whilst Marshalløs cultural production thesis is not without its flaws, it forms the foundation of this essay in understanding the *why* and *how* of globalised media form use. The potential of the Web to empower users through its provision of choices and resources (Marshall 2004: 24) relates explicitly to the effects and concerns of globalisation ó particularly regarding the themes of identity, cosmopolitanism, homogenisation and heterogenisation. An exploration of and appreciation for a combination õthe experiential quality of the lived cultural conditionö (Marshall 2004: 32) and the seemingly simulated reality of the Online world is bound to any understanding of the Web, and thus to any understanding of mediated globalisation. As such, to fruitfully grasp the impacts of globalisation one has to explore the lived experience of a gay identity in relation to a mediated expression of it. The integration of the Web into everyday realities of the selected gay men in this essay, in the context of Marshalløs argument, speaks to a hypothesised break-away from structured identities and (inter)active utilisation of this global media form to produce a self-determined identity.

Identity, Cosmopolitanism and Homogeneity/Heterogeneity

The themes of identity, homogeneity and heterogeneity, and cosmopolitanism are intrinsically linked in this essay. Whilst they may be separated, it is best to understand them

isation. The central theme of this essay is that of identity …tand globalisation without an understanding of identity politics (Eriksen 2005). In a South African context, the issues of identity and identity politics are broad and complex. Discourses of race, culture, gender, age, tradition, colonialism and reconciliation contribute to the ever-increasing tensions around which identity is the most valuable, appreciated and important. This takes place with concurrent battles to define ‐South African identityø or ‐African identityø. ‐Gay identityø is equally hard to define in such a context. This essay recognises that õthere is no single, essential 'gay' identity in South Africa: õwhat has passed for 'the gay experience' has often been that of white, middle-class urban menö (Gevisser and Cameron 1994: 3). At the level of socialisation, globalisation is õtantamount to a re-negotiation of social identitiesö (Eriksen 2005: 26). The Web has wide-reaching consequences for identity and identity politics, possessing the potential to enable people of suppressed minorities to find transnational voices (Friedman 2005: 25) and provide new spaces for expression (Friedman 2005:26). Understanding globalisation as õall the sociocultural processes that contribute to making distance irrelevantö (Eriksen 2005: 26) demands an exploration of how identities in a privileged sphere are affected by the availability of globally mediated resources on the Web. The perceived irrelevance of distance coupled with the increased commodification of sexualities and sexual identities (Sigusch, 1998) has implications for the expression and assertion of identity. Similarly, in a context of Constitutional gay rights the continual processes of negotiation around a gay identity, and the way in which such an identity õpermeates every aspect of [a gay manøs] existenceö (Cage 2003:8), is impacted by the exposure, especially on the Web, to international manifestations of gay identity and gay existence. Essentially, an understanding of identity politics is a direct appreciation for the complexity of globalisation.

In the South African context the variety of identities that globalisation has offered has increasingly led to identity politics (Eriksen 2005: 29). The space of Durban city can quite easily be labelled a õcosmopolisö in that it goes beyond both the national and the local in a reality that involves õ(re)attachment, multiple attachment, or attachment at a distanceö (Rantanen 2005: 120). To define what is ‐localø about Durban is difficult when considering the combination, to name a few factors, of colonial architecture and culture; South African-Indian culture; tourist-developed destinations which focus on ‐authenticø Zulu culture; a variety of religious places of worship; and drastic extremes of highly affluent and highly

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text the experience and exploration of identity becomes cised. The development of õcosmopolitan qualitiesö (Rantanen 2005: 124) is relevant both in relation to the city of Durban and the Web. Gay men living in Durban experience a specific form of socialisation according to their various discourses and cultures, suggesting an awareness or attitude about diversity. However, the scope for expression of such an identity in Durban itself is questioned in this essay. To what extent does the Web offer gay men õthe ingredients for the development of cosmopolitan awarenessö (Rantanen 2005: 125) and the possibility of a more enjoyable and fruitful exploration of identity? Does Durban, as a globalised space, suppress identity? And if it does, do gay men living in Durban and using the Web possess truly cosmopolitan identity in that one is both experiencing the lived cultural condition *and* experiencing new subjectivities and identities through a sense of transnational connection? How do gay men relate to Web-based advertisements for and discussions on õqueer space functionsö which in themselves may act as indicators of cosmopolitanism (Rushbrook 2002: 183)? In uniting a use of the Web within the city of Durban we may come to realise that

> [f]or the homosexual person, a *duality of experiences* exists. He gains two sets of behaviours...firstly from his immediate environment...and secondly from his direct or indirect exposure to the homosexual sub-culture (Isaacs and McKendrick 1992: 6)

This essay seeks to explore such questions in relation to this õduality of experiencesö, and seeks to investigate how the processes of negotiation of a gay identity are influenced both by the immediate environment of Durban and the direct exposure to the homosexual sub-culture on the Web. This, in turn, shall reflect an appreciation for the lived effects of mediated globalisation.

Of course, uses of the Web spark fears of homogenisation as a macro concern with globalisation. Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron (1994) already identify an essentialised notion of homosexuality in South Africa; that of the white, middle-class urban man. The proliferation of the Web in a context of unequal exposure and access may further entrench both emic and etic perceptions of homosexual identity, as well as disintegrate any attempts to define a cohesive yet diverse gay and lesbian identity (Hoad, Martin and Reid 2005: 205). Eng-Beng Lim explores the mediated globalisation of gay identity as õglobal queeringö in

...morized Western gay culture is transforming the rest of ...k of as õmodernø homosexualityö (Lim 2005: 383). In such a context, the Web may be viewed as a tool to further homogenise local gay identities alongside Western paradigms (Rantanen 2005: 75).

However, within a context of identity politics it is important to realise that the Web has essentially increased õthe range of sources and resources available for the construction of identityö (Rantanen 2005: 96), giving those gay men who are exposed to it the potential to forge a liminal identity on the basis of their lived cultural experiences. In a context of Durban city the Web potentially offers a heterogenising element to the variety of identities available. Rantanen asserts that globalisation both homogenises and heterogenises on various levels (Rantanen 2005: 116). As such, gay identity exploration and development through the Web not only needs to be related to a potential homogenisation of perceptions of homosexual identity, but also to a reflection on the viable possibilities for lived connection and community development within Durban. The local reinterpretation and distribution of gay identity, which Lim terms õglocalqueeringö (Lim 2005), needs to be placed alongside *how* the Web is used in relation to homogenising South African hegemonies and Durban-based experiences, and essentially to *how* such experiences contribute to notions of globalisation.

Methodology

In order to investigate how the Web is used in relation to a mediated globalisation of identity, I adopted Rantanenøs (2005) approach of a õmediagraphyö. A thorough understanding of what globalisation embodies needs to acknowledge the uses of media and communication (Rantanen 2005: 76). A mediagraphy, in this sense, õexplores the relationships between macro- and micro- processes of globalizationö, considering the importance of õindividual experienceö (Rantanen 2008: Online). This methodology balances concerns of homogenisation, heterogenisation, cosmopolitanism and identity with an understanding of the õlived cultural conditionö (Marshall 2004: 32). As such, to investigate mediated globalisation in the form of the World Wide Web in relation to gay identity I opted to investigate *how* the media is used, based on Rantanenøs model, in order to õpinpoint the multiplicity and complexity of connections, the crucial differences and similarities in life experienceö (Rantanen 2008: Online). Evoking the memories of participants, a mediagraphy draws on

and everyday reality. The essential goal of this ...people and globalization and to show the pivotal role played by the media in the process of globalizationö (Rantanen 2005: 18).

Rantanen originally used this methodology to compare mediated globalisation across generations and across nations. The nature of this essay, however, does not demand such vertical and horizontal comparisons. Rather, it is my goal to explore the uses to which the Web may be put amongst a very particular identity living in a globalised space so as to reflect on globalisation itself. The nature of this essay does not permit extensive cross-cultural research. Similarly, my motivation behind this essay relates to my own subject position ó that of a white, urban, middle-class gay man living in Durban. My own experiences of a gay identity, Durban city and the Web initiated this essay. As such, I selected four white, middle-class gay men living in Durban city. These four men are close friends, but all come from very different cultural, social and economic backgrounds.

It would be a mistake to assume that one can draw conclusions about gay identity and related media usage based upon the menøs varying backgrounds: acceptance, expression and exploration of gay-related issues are subject to innumerable conditions, including family support; personal perceptions and history; religion; media exposure; and cultural discourse. As such, this essay does not adopt a comparative aspect of mediagraphy. To do so would simply undermine the complexities of identity and mediated globalisation. Rather, the motivation behind using a mediagraphy is the emphasis it places on media use in relation to everyday life: these four men have all been exposed to the Web, and all use the Web. Thus this seeks to explore this element of their socialisation.

To engage with the macro elements discussed above in relation to the participantsø everyday experiences I developed a broad questionnaire for my participants to complete. This questionnaire provided answers for questions around basic media usage, including frequency of Web use and uses to which the Web is put. These questionnaires formed the basis of semi-structured written interviews with the subjects (Dawson, 2007: 29). It was important that I knew the participants personally so that they would be willing to share their experiences with me. The pre-established levels of trust allowed me to engage with them on familiar issues, and simultaneously gauge unconscious interactions that spoke perhaps more strongly of issues of reality, Web use, sexuality and culture than their words did. I utilised a semi-

...ing point for variable perspectives on sexuality, gender, ... of this was to expand on topical points initiated in the questionnaire: I asked each of the participants standard questions on the basis of their questionnaires and what content they searched for. These interviews were a combination of verbal and written questions and responses. I gave the participants the questions, and encouraged them to write down their thoughts and answers. Ensuring that I conducted the interviews in a relaxed environment afforded me the time to allow each participant to carefully gather his understanding of questions and write a written response. This proved to be invaluable for analysis and reflection.

These interviews were finally complemented by a very relaxed focus group session. Assuming the role of facilitator after ensuring that all participants were relaxed and secure (Dawson, 2007: 81), I pointed discussions centred on the areas of sexual definitions, media, community, culture, and daily life. I began with simple, relatively non-personal questions so as to allow time to relax (Dawson, 2007: 81). I invited responses from all four participants, and where opinions differed I encouraged debate. The essential advantages of this mode of ethnographic research included the variety of responses acquired, and the way in which participants were encouraged by each other to voice their own individual opinions (Dawson, 2007: 31). It was imperative to avoid reducing all answers to pure academia: this essay is located in the everyday, the arena of popular culture. Consequently, non-academic, practical and realistic ideas were encouraged through the wording of questions. Similarly, due to the interaction I had had with the participants beforehand, the focus group had the benefit of allowing me to critically reflect on modes of interaction and word choice (Dawson, 2007: 31). I ensured that each participant commented extensively, and that each person was comfortable enough sharing their experiences and views, consequently minimizing perceived disadvantages of this form of research (Dawson, 2007: 31). I transcribed the session as I engaged with subjects, and referred back to this transcription for analysis.

From this combination of research techniques I was able to compile a variety of responses and opinions about the Web, homosexual identity, and Durban. These answers are deconstructed in this essay using a discourse and content analysis approach within a context of the above-mentioned macro themes of globalisation.

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the number of participants selected was due to time ...ssay: the aim was not to select a sample size that was indicative of an entire identity. The selection of my subjects was by no means reflective of a gay ‑niche‑ as a whole. It is important to realise the aim of this essay: I do not seek to investigate how the urban, gay, white population as a whole perceives itself and the Web. Rather, I seek to investigate the role of homosexuality as mediated through the Web in the daily lives of members from this highly mediated group, and problematise notions of identity, cosmopolitanism, social subjectivity and homogeneity. I seek to explore the relationship between media, people and globalisation. As such, the views and experiences from the lives of my subjects serve to illustrate the diversity and complexity that exists within an ever increasing context of mediated globalisation. For ethical reasons, the essay uses pseudonyms.

In the context of this introduction, it is now my intention to show that mediated globalisation on the level of macro concerns has a very real, lived impact on the everyday realities of gay men. In a paradoxical context of globalisation yet intolerance, the World Wide Web can play a crucial role in developing a sense of identity, Self and cohesion within a marginalised group.

Tabulated Summary of Responses

Below is a table of summarised answers from the four participants. The table does not include answers for every question, but merely serves as a starting point for analysis of the Web in relation to identity and subjectivity. In my analysis, all quotes have been taken from the interviews or the focus group session.

		Mick	Steph	Craig
		28	20	24
Position	reasonably popularö	õComfortable ó Manufacturing Director for a Pharmaceutical Companyö	õUnemployed hairdresserö	õOverworked, underpaid, long suffering teacherö
'Out' to...	Everybody knows	Out to those close to him. Does not make it a priority to tell new people that he is gay	Everybody Knows	All friends/colleagues and most family know
Exposure to Web	Several years, over the time he was õcoming outö	Several years	Limited exposure ó only through cellphone	Limited exposure and access ó recent use
Gay-related uses for the Web in the past	Porn: what aroused him Information on gay sex Famous gay people How to õcureö homosexuality Coming out information	Coming out information Religion and Homosexuality Information on gay sex Famous gay people HIV Information Porn	Famous gay people HIV Information	Chatted in chatrooms General lifestyle information
Level of importance of the Web day-to-day	Important to keep in touch via Facebook and Gaydar, as well as general information	Important for socialising and work	Does not use it that much	Important, but no longer for gay-related information
Has the Web helped explore issues/answer questions that were not resourced on a level of "reality"?	To explore õgaynessö Looked for a way to meet others Medical concerns	Play ó õfooling aroundö online Used it to help deal with a breakup	Very important in relation to HIV and disease ó too õnervousö to ask parents	Not especially ó but it has helped since he has had access
How has the Web been used to explicitly explore sexual orientation?	Sex chats on MSN; Webcam use (sexual); Downloading porn Open on FB	MSN; Blog reading; Webcam use (sexual)	Use of Mig33 to talk to other gay men ó under a pseudonym, in chat rooms	Very open on FB. Due to limited access, has never downloaded porn ó but has used cellphone to receive pornography
Main uses of the Internet today	Email, chatting, porn, Information	Email, chatting, porn, information, social networking	Email, social networking, porn	Email, educational resources
Do you know all of your online contacts in person?	No	No	No	Yes
Demographics of those you do not know?	Mainly gay men	Mainly gay men	Mainly gay men and gay women	N/A
Where do you/have you meet gay men online?	Facebook Gaydar Mig33	Facebook Gaydar MSN Skype	Facebook Gaydar Mxit Chatrooms Mig33	Facebook MIRC
Do you have international gay friends that you have never met?	Yes ó they added him/he added them on the basis of their orientation, which was either revealed online or explicitly mentioned	Yes - They either told him or they met via online groups that are gay specific	Yes	No
Can your relate to	Yes ó similar õkindö of	Yes ó probably share	In some regards	Yes ó õmutual

		similar experiences		understanding and common interestsö
Life as a gay man in SA	Not as open as overseas Not widely discussed Difficult to find information	In Durban it is õslowö. CT and JHB have more of a õvibeö	Durban is õboringö in relation to CT and JHB. Theyøre the only places with a õgay sceneö	õUndoubtedly far behind overseas countriesö in terms of acceptance
Awareness of other gay identities	Lesbians Read about black lesbians Bisexuals Transsexuals	Homosexual Bisexual Asexual Transgendered Cross dressing	Lesbians Transvestites Sex changes Bisexuals	None ó one gay identity
Is it easier to "be gay" online or in reality?	Previously ó online. Since coming out it is more entertaining to explore in reality	Online ó anonymity makes it easier to explore topics	Initially ó online. Now he doesnøt like talking to people he doesnøt know	Equally for both
Importance of the web today in relation to sexuality?	No longer as important	Extremely ó meet new people	No longer as important	No longer as important
Does the web offer avenues to explore sexual identity?	õNever ending supply of gay informationö õFacilitates the development of socializingö	Yes ó many ways to õexplore your flavour of gaynessö	Yes, it is õimpossible not to find out about anything gay on the webö	Yes, but personally does not find it necessary to explore online any more
Reflection on the Web	Has allowed him to explore certain identities (e.g. foot fetish and sex toys). Has helped him come to terms with sexuality	Has allowed him to feel a part of a gay community, and the anonymity has helped him ask questions	Has helped him find out information not available in person, but feels that physical interaction has advanced his identity more	He understands that it can be helpful, but one can survive without it
Is Durban gay friendly compared to other cities?	No	No	No ó õno advertisingö	It is increasing, but still no
Have you experienced hate speech/abuse in Durban?	Yes	Yes ó was asked to leave a restaurant	Yes ó physical violence	Yes
Gay places in Durban?	The Lounge Beanbag	The Lounge Beanbag	The Lounge Beanbag	The Lounge Beanbag
Do you go to such places?	Yes ó easier to be openly gay with partner, and people are prepared to handle it	In the past, yes. At present - no, still recovering from breakup	Yes, to be open	Yes, to be open and feel safe
Do you feel comfortable/safe in Durban on a day-to-day basis?	Acts the same no matter what ó doesnøt perceive self as õexcessivelyö gay ó straight acting, therefore feels safe	No ó there is õa stigma attached to being gayö	No ó Durban isnøt gay friendly	Mostly, with friends ó not at work
International locations you would like to travel to based on "gay reputations"?	Sydney ó based on Craigøs stories	No ó would not travel on the basis of its gay reputation	New York ó the gay scene	San Francisco

The best point to commence analysis is an unpacking of the perceptions of Durban city, for it is in the context of this space and place that mediated globalisation affects the lived experiences of my subjects. In a national context of Constitutional protection and the seeming advancement of gay rights in the form of the Civil Unions Act it is easy to become seduced by a perception of security and tolerance. Indeed, South Africa has become a major international tourist destination for gay men and women on the basis of õConstitutional antidiscrimination provisionsö (Puar 2002: 108). In an environment where gay identity and gay culture, õlike Coca-Cola, Madonna and blue jeans, has become a potent North American cultural export to much of the worldö (Hoad 1998: 34) it is easy to assume through a lack of understanding of the realities of people living in such a mediated and globalised world that expression of identity and community development are facilitated by discursive structures. This is even more the case in Durban, where a variety of seemingly oppositional cultures, traditions and religions exist and are ÷celebratedø through commodification.

However, all of my participants revealed a distinct discomfort within Durban. Although all of them are õoutö, meaning that they are personally comfortable with their sexual orientations and have willingly shared such and identity with others (Cage, 2003: 7-8), they shared personal accounts of how they have to suppress such identities out of fear, intimidation or social expectations. The physical spaces in Durban, as identified by the participants, where being openly gay is tolerated (in terms of a lack of fear and ability to display sexuality through, for example, public affection) amount to a mere two locations ó a club called *The Lounge* and a bar/restaurant called *Beanbag*. Outside of these spaces the participants have been met with aggressive, hostile and dehumanizing behaviour. Steph shared the example of standing outside *The Lounge* and having a glass bottle thrown at him by people driving past in a car; Mick shared the example of being asked to leave an up-market Durban restaurant for kissing his boyfriend in front of other patrons; Scott spoke of countless examples of verbal abuse of people simply assuming he is gay; and Craig shared a story of his õobviously gayö friend being beaten to the point of unconsciousness for simply walking into a õstraight clubö. None of the participants regard Durban as an overall õgay friendlyö city, and Mick specifically recognised that õthere is a stigma attached to being gayö (Mick 2008). Whilst Craig generally feels comfortable, partly owing to him being õoutö for a

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he still identified a hegemonic pressure in a context of where an expression of his gay identity is tantamount to abuse, whether it be physical, verbal or psychological. All of the participants shared that they have been to and continue to go to *The Lounge* and *Beanbag* with the intention of feeling more secure about their identities, and in Scottøs case to õbe openly gay with [his] partner where [he] knows people expect it and are prepared to handle itö (Scott 2008).

Essentially, the exploration and expression of any manifestation of a gay identity in Durban is bound to very real concerns and fears for the participants. The participants have all experienced a degree of the õmultiplicity of powers and hierarchiesö (Weeks 2003: 127) that exist in the space of Durban. Such powers and hierarchies reflect the delicate yet often violent relationship between globalisation and people: national and inter-national expectations of race, gender and age dictate methods of socialisation. Craig, Mick, Scott and Steph have all felt restrained by structures of society. The ideologies that permeate their cultural group are reflected in day-to-day structures, both in the spheres of work and leisure: Craig feels that he cannot reveal his sexual orientation at his work place (a school) due to parent reaction, and Scott shared that both he and his partner intentionally õdress straightö and avoid all interactions that could be construed as affectionate whilst out at õstraight nightclubsö (Scott 2008).

These physical restrictions in Durban are part of wider, globalised hegemonic heteronormative discourses and ideologies. A paradox of mediated globalisation is the tension between an increasing exposure to and availability of identities, and the retreat to more familiar identities and discourses enforced by various societal structures (Eriksen 2005: 28). Indeed, the attitudes manifest in the abuses suffered by the participants, or the ÷gay bashingsø and ÷corrective rapesø reported in the media are part of an entrenched homophobia which serves to police and monitor appropriate masculinity and femininity (Leatt and Hendricks 2005: 317). The participants, whilst comfortable with their identities as men, have all experienced levels of doubt about the compatibility of a gay identity and a male identity. As such, at the level of macro concerns, globalisation seemingly perpetuates oppressive ideologies, which in turn impacts on the lives of the participants. The policing of identity is part of a localised global õmoral slaveryö (Richards 1999: 4), categorised by the structural support of gay rights but the practically rationalised abridgement of human rights (Richards

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...und homosexuality is reflected in political discourse ...liated intolerance epitomised by Jon Qwelane's loathing of the 'shame[less] flaunting' of public affection amongst gay men which has led to a 'rapid degradation of values and traditions' (Qwelane 2008: 14). The politics surrounding gay identity are thus complicated in a context of globalisation: the national and international discourses of intolerance are countered by the cosmopolitan quality of Durban as a city space, and the lived realities of these white urban gay men.

It is in this context that mediated globalisation in the form of Web usage becomes exceptionally relevant and important. Further contributing to this mix of discourses and tensions is the means through which gay identity becomes transnational. The culture of intolerance that my participants have experienced is balanced by identity exploration on the Web. It is at this juncture that a full understanding of globalisation may arise: the relationship between macro globalisation elements, people, and the media. The varying degrees of exposure that my participants have had to the Web may correlate with factors such as their individual processes of 'coming out' and the degree of comfort that have with their sexual orientation. Such conclusions, however, are best left of a more in-depth research project in order to avoid the risk of 'reducing human complexity to the simplistic terms of a dehumanizing stereotype' (Richards 1999: 5). What my engagements with the participants do reveal, however, is that the Web has played, and continues to play, an important role in the exploration of homosexuality and the forming of an individualist subjectivity. In turn, globalisation takes the form of identity politics and subjectivity formation beyond the confines of the local.

The most valuable observation is that all four participants have utilised the Web in the past to explore questions and unfamiliar feelings. This was largely due to the lack of such avenues of subjectivity formation in the 'reality' of Durban life. Scott, who described his high-school years as an emotional period trying to balance the expectations of heteronormativity placed on him as head prefect and provincial sportsman, utilised the Web to help him come to terms with his attraction to men. As he reflected,

> the Web allowed me to find out information about gayness. When I realised I was attracted to men I didn't feel I could tell anyone. So I searched the Web for this

y resource I had ó I didnøt have any gay friends. I

to meet South African gay boys. I also looked for what

kind of medical conditions were associated with anal sex ó I thought there were many. (Scott 2008)

Scott found himself placed in a situation of liminal tension: his environment allowed him to explore the several of identities of a white, male, urban, middle-class school achiever, and yet the lack of resources available prevented him from fully exploring a sense of Self. The Web in this regard assisted him, as Marshall (2004) suggests, in actively forging a sense of identity based on the materials found online. Mick, Steph and Craig all shared similar uses for the Web in the past: each of them has used the Web to discover information that was not easily available to them in Durban. Such information included where to meet other gay men; what it õmeantö to be gay; the experiences of gay people around the world; how to õcureö homosexuality; and how to õcome outö. Similarly, all the participants have, in the past, created Web-based ‒profilesø on social networking sites such as *Facebook*, *Mamba* and *Gaydar*. The latter two sites are international websites specifically created for gay men and women. The creation of such profiles reflects Marshalløs cultural production thesis in that the participants were able to actively upload images and descriptions of the identity that they wished to convey or explore. Mick favoured the anonymity of *Gaydar,* where his lack of profile picture allowed others to be attracted to him for his interests and not his looks. Scott similarly favoured the anonymity of *Gaydar*, as it allowed him to openly connect with other gay men and yet hide his ‒realø identity.

On this note, we cannot assume that there are no resources in Durban to aid the development of an apparent õhealthy gay identityö (Cage 2003, 9). It is disturbing, however, that a global perception of tolerance is in reality a practiced system of identity politics where gay identity is exceptionally short of cultural resources (Eriksen 2005: 28). Indeed, the Web has provided a crucial platform for Steph and Mick to explore health related concerns, allowing them to question gay-related HIV questions, with Stephøs reason being that he õwas too embarrassed to speak to [his] parentsö (Steph 2008). Whilst Craig did not explicitly pursue such questions on the Web, he acknowledged that his participation in numerous chat rooms whilst he was at school contributed to his understanding of what it ‒meantø to be gay. I can reflect on the importance of the Web in my own life, where I wrestled with religious

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...uality by engaging with the seemingly other-worldly ...from America, ‑gay churchesø in the United Kingdom, and gay marriage across the globe. Both my and the participantsø understanding of what homosexuality encapsulates, and the scope for change, have been profoundly influenced by information available on the Web.

The relevance of such information is that our understanding of what globalisation truly encapsulates is enhanced by an appreciation for the balance between overwhelming transnational hegemonies, local restrictions and structures, media form, and user. My mediagraphy reveals thus far that local restrictions may be bypassed through the use of the media, and identities forged through exposure to the dual experiences of day-to-day interactions and mediated interactions with lifestyles from other countries. Mediated globalisation, in this sense, is defined by õa re-negotiation of social identitiesö (Eriksen 2005: 26).

One of the most valuable resources for constructing a sense of identity, my participants revealed, is pornography. This not only takes the form of consumption off of the Web, but production and distribution as well. In the case of Scott, Mick and Steph this translates to having had sexually charged discussions with strangers in Web-based chatrooms; using browser webcam Websites to engage in mutual sex acts; taking and uploading pornographic photos; and adopting womenøs names to ‑trickø heterosexual men into revealing their sexual secrets. Whilst these activities may seem somewhat reprehensible to a moral purist, they speak of a crucial role that the Web serves in the exploration of sexuality and the construction of identity. Recognising that sexual engagement on the Web evokes emotion as real and as intense as ‑regularø sexual engagement (Ben-Zeøev 2004: xii) speaks to the cultural production (Marshall 2004) of a sociological subjectivity based on a globally mediated sense of attraction and belonging.

This exploration of sexuality and production of identity takes the form of a very Westernised sense of homosexuality ó which, given the participants heritage, culture and ethnic identities is understandable. However, their uses of the Web can be argued to be unbalanced in relation to a sense of local community awareness. None of the participants are aware of other South African homosexual identities, which includes a history of õblack

mineworkers, lesbian sangomas, rich white 'entertainers' drag queens, cross-racial working-class couples, political prisoners and sex workersö (Gevisser and Cameron 1994: 3). The formation of identity for the participants is based firmly on a Western mediation of homosexuality. None of them, for example, have sought out information about young, black, rural gay men. Indeed, none of the participants feel any sense of community or cohesion with such identities. This paradox is an interesting one. In some regards one may argue that the Web homogenises gay identity according to the subjectivities of those privileged enough to contribute to content available. The participantsø awareness and sense of connection to what can loosely be termed as a ÷gay sub-cultureø extends to the experiences of Western white gay men, possibly õmaintaining, if not constructing, existing boundaries in civil societyö (Friedman 2005: 3). At the level of macro concerns, globalisation thus includes a homogenising effect whereby the already vague gay community in South Africa is further parted. At the level of people and media, globalisation has resulted in a ÷gay cultureø based on Western notions of gay lifestyle, which ultimately reflects the õdeep social cleavages" (Hoad, Martin and Reid 2005: 204) of contemporary society. This is illustrated by my participantsø lack of knowledge of other South African identities, lack of a sense of connection, and lack of a desire for connection.

This homogenising effect of the Web can be contrasted, however, with the realisation that an imposed notion of a unified South African gay identity is in itself a homogenising concept which can further aid in the perpetuation of õculturally constructed stereotypes and prejudicesö (Richards 1999: 4). Just as we should question the validity and necessity of a national identity, so we should question the necessity and motivation behind the development of a singular South African gay identity. The Web has afforded the participants the ability to actively and interactively explore an identity that is otherwise largely suppressed by everyday discourses and experiences. In this regard, the hybrid identities that the participants hold suggest the heterogenising nature of mediated globalisation. The Web has empowered the participants (Stern 2007: 8) to explore a foreign sexuality that they would otherwise shy away from, and õtransgress social normsö (Stern 2007: 69) placed upon them in other spheres of life. The combination of the participantsø utilisation of the Web to explore aspects of their identities and the ultimate translation of such exploration to a level of lived experience, whether through Mickøs use of the Web to deal with a broken relationship or Scottøs use of the Web to meet his partner of nearly three years, speaks to the localising of global gay

Lim 2005). This, in turn, reflects a liberating and globalisation: it can diversify restricting macro identities to include the availability of suppressed and oppressed liminal identities.

The sense of identification that the participants feel though the Web speaks towards the cosmopolitan quality of mediated globalisation. The essence of globalisation in relation to media is that it connects strangers (Rantanen 2005: 125): a thorough conceptualisation of globalisation incorporates the combination of mediated connections and lived experiences. The ways in which my participants had used the Web reflects an effect of globalisation in that it changes local environments, which are õopen to external influencesö (Rantanen 205: 120) via the Web, and forms discursive arenas õthat overflow the bounds of both nations and statesö (Fraser 2005: 1). The modes of identity exploration that the participants discussed, including finding information on homosexuality; web-based discussions with people from other countries; the use of Instant Messengers to form new contacts and friends; and the creation of various online profiles are all best understood as a form of global identity. Alongside the participantsø exploration of the cultural export of Western homosexuality, they have also formed links and relationships with people across the globe. Mick, Scott and Steph all have international Web-based ÷friendsø or contacts on sites such as *Facebook* and *MySpace*, or services such as *Mig33* (a Web-based programme, similar to Instant Messaging), whom they have never met, yet are friends with for the primary reason of sharing a sexual orientation. Scott and Mick admitted to having searched through gay-related ÷groupsø on *Facebook* and adding people on the basis of their profiles and sexual orientation. Similarly, Scott, Mick and Steph have all, at some point, accepted ÷friend requestsø on *Facebook* and *Mig33* on the sole basis of a shared sexual orientation. Scottøs first boyfriend, whom he genuinely perceived to be in a relationship with, was a man he had met Online but had never met, nor did they ever meet, in person. For all the participants, including Craig who does not use the Web as much anymore, a sense of connection with gay men overseas is felt. Scott, Mick and Steph feel that they can relate to gay men they have never met on the basis of õsharing similar experiencesö (Mick 2008). Whilst the perceptions of universal qualities of homosexuality vary amongst the participants, all four agree that there is a sense of connection with international gay men on the basis of probable shared experiences.

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cilitates, and thus globalisation incorporates, a very Whilst the participants are unaware of *local* gay identities, they are aware of Western-based identities around the world. Scott, Mick and Craig all expressed a desire to travel to certain locations purely on the basis of their reputation of gay-friendliness and the experiences shared by friends they had spoken to on the Web. Whilst only Craig has travelled overseas to a marketed 'gay destination' (namely Sydney), all four participants feel a sense of transnational cohesion. The notion of transnational cohesion and Scott and Mick's experiences of intimate relationships with men across the world speaks to Thomas Hylland Eriksen's conceptualisation of globalisation as "all the sociocultural processes that contribute to making distance irrelevant" (Eriksen 2005: 26). Indeed the Web, in relation to a gay identity for my participants, has largely made issues of distance and contact superfluous. The question in this context of a shifting attachment of identity, in relation to mediated globalisation, is whether one can "become cosmopolitan not by changing places but through media and communications" (Rantanen 2005: 122)?

When reflecting on globalisation theorists have often disregarded the role of the media (Rantanen 2005: 122). However, my participants have felt a sense of cohesion with a transnational identity, and have formed a knowledge of what constitutes a 'gay-friendly' space on the basis of exposure to other spaces through the Web. What is important to recognise is that cosmopolitan identity is not a cohesive and complete subjectivity which one can achieve (Rantanen 2005: 124). Rantanen argues that "people can develop cosmopolitan qualities" through exposure to different 'zones' of everyday cosmopolitanism (Rantanen 2005: 124). My participants' exposure to the Web primarily constitutes a zone of cosmopolitan awareness in that identity exploration has taken the form of transnational connection, but also in that what is learned on the Web is translated into interactions in gay spaces in Durban. The globalised mediation of cosmopolitanism as a transformation of the local (Rantanen 2005: 119) takes the form, for my participants, of explicitly 'putting to practice', so to speak, what is gained from the Web. Craig, for example, learned of gay fashion trends in Sydney initially through the Web and then through experience, and ultimately integrated such insight into his dress sense at *The Lounge* and *Beanbag*. Similarly, Steph shared his experience of chatting to a gay friend in London over *Facebook* and learning of the trend amongst gay men overseas of wearing 'skinny jeans'. Upon learning this, Steph purchased a pair of women's jeans to imitate such a trend. For all of my participants an

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estyles and gay identity has been, and in some cases a transnational connection facilitated by the Web.

Perhaps an appropriate analogy would be that of a rhizome, described by Gilles Deleuze as õan acentred, nonheirarchical, nonsignifying systemö (Deleuze 1993: 36). The relationship between macro elements of globalisation, the media, and people fits such a model. My participants revealed a strong connection to their everyday identities: they all feel comfortable with a distinct õmasculine identityö, whatever this may encapsulate, as well as identities of race, age, occupation and class. Such identities are expressed and explored regularly through the structures available to them. However, they simultaneously feel a sense of connection to a transnational identity of homosexuality, which they have not been able to fully explore in ‑realityø in the past. The Web has provided a valuable avenue of connection for all of them. As such, the participants exist as rhizomes, in a system of rhizomic connections. Mediated globalisation facilitates such a system: it allows one to be part of a system that is increasingly global and cosmopolitan (Rantanen 2005: 140). The Web forms networks of communication that facilitate the simultaneous nonheirarchical connection to suppressed identity and accepted identity. The seeking of information which was not available in Durban reflects that mediated globalisation is crucial in the expression of a sociological subjectivity that favours a discourse of postmodern pluralism and individual expression (Marshall 2004). The combination of the lived cultural condition of the participants and the transnational connection to an identity that is largely suppressed reflects the hybrid nature of subjectivity that globalisation facilitates. The consumption of gay cultural products including Web-based sex; health information; and coming out information, no matter how trivial these may seem to an outsider, speaks of a power of õqueer liberationö (Puar 2002: 111) in aid of forging a liminal identity. The effect of mediated globalisation on my participants is reflected in the fact that their

> contemporary identities are hybrid, made of many fragments of history and of social and personal experience; they are heterogeneous, establishing many possible identifications across the boundaries of many potential differences; they are often political in the broadest sense, making links which defy the neat categorizations of social policy and social science, and challenging settled power relations (Weeks 2003: 123).

es is largely due to the Web. The fact that countless generations before have forged a sense of gay identity in spaces far more homo-intolerant than Durban does not detract from the important role that the Web has played in the participantsø lives. Scott reflected that the Web has helped him come to terms with his sexuality. Mick, who still uses the Web to connect with global friends and find gay-related information, reflected that the Web õhelped [him] find like-minded people, and the best part of the web is the anonymity it offers ó makes it a lot easier to ask questionsö (Mick 2008). Such uses are by no means indicative of all gay men. Indeed, Craig reflected that he sees the value in the Web but did not use it as much as Scott did in relation to coming out. As I observed at the beginning of this essay the reasons behind this may be diverse. However, it is crucial to observe that the Web offers an empowering quality to users (Marshall 2004: 24) and can aid in the production of a subjectivity that would otherwise be unavailable. Mediated globalisation, in this regard, includes the impact of transnationalising identity to the point that õconcepts of national identity have [become] intricately bound up with notions of appropriate gendered or sexualized behaviourö (Weeks 2003: 124).

It is no wonder then that in a context where õ[t]he shaping of a distinctive categorization of 'the homosexual'...has been an act of power, whose effect, intended or not, has been to reinforce the normality of heterosexualityö (Weeks 2003: 127) the Web played a crucial role for my participants in their coming out years. To relate back to the original theme of identity, my participants essentially offered an appreciation for mediated globalisation. The proliferation of the Web in the lives of my urban participants reflects the dual nature of globalisation: the vibrant local cultures of Durban city reflects õglobalization from within national societiesö (Beck 2002: 24), and the uses to which the Web have been put reflects õglobalization that goes beyond national societiesö (Beck 2002: 15). All four of my participants feel that it has been, and still is, easier expressing their sexuality on the Web, which in turn provides õcontinuous possibilities for invention and reinventionö (Weeks 2003: 130). As a result of their experiences of exploration on the Web they have been able to comfortably assert their subjectivities within certain spaces in Durban, and achieve what Ken Cage terms a õhealthy gay identityö (Cage 2003: 9). Mediated globalisation then is then a step towards facilitating the interactive production of identities that are both local and global, epitomising a shift in sociological subjectivity (Marshall 2004).

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The relationship between people, globalisation and the media is central to an understanding of the complex of identity, politics and distance. My experience with the participants revealed that there was, and is, õa specific need [for the gay men] to belong to a homophile organizationö (Isaacs and McKendrick 1992: 211). Globalisation as a reconfiguration of the local space of Durban is evident from a perspective of heteronormativity: numerous cultures and traditions exist alongside each other. However, despite an international reputation for Constitutional protection from discrimination, my participants revealed that they feel unsafe and threatened in Durban as a whole. An understanding of globalisation on at level of everyday exchanges alone is insufficient in tackling the complexities of identity. Mediated globalisation through the Web, in this regard, includes a powerful source of empowerment for the forging of identity. The Web has provided the means to explore a subjectivity of production, whereby distance has become irrelevant for suppressed identities: gay men can use the Web to substitute the lack of resources in a physical reality in order to answer questions, build relationships and friendships, and form a sense of community and cohesion. Mediated globalisation should thus be wholly understood as the relationship between people and media form in the combination of social processes that annihilate oppressive distances and the transposition of local experiences to global connections.

Of course, such an understanding of mediated globalisation is fraught with problems that this essay has not addressed. It has not been my intention, however, to wholly problematise globalisation theory. Nor has it been my intention to problematise the Web and its features. Rather, I have sought to explore and celebrate the empowering quality that the Web may offer in seeking an understanding of globalisation. The development of my participantsø cosmopolitan identities through their sexual identities is not indicative of all white urban gay men, nor do their understandings and uses of the Web reveal a move away from a homogenisation of gay identity along the definitions of hegemonic Western discourses.

However, what my mediagraphy reveals is that mediated globalisation has a heterogenising quality that provides channels of exploration and production that would otherwise be inconceivable. The suppression of identity by dominant structures has the

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cipants revealed, by globalisation. Advocates of national
ion: it is quite possible that certain identities may feel a
stronger sense of cohesion with groups in other countries than with a ‑national identity‑. This
transnationalisation through the media, particularly the Web, needs to be placed in a context
of human rights. The diversification of subjectivity and the provision of means to forge
individually determined identities of a rhizomic quality is a direct move away from
homogenising national identities (Rantanen 2005: 82) toward an embracing subjectivity of
individual respect and participation. Whilst I recognise that this point is an ideal, it is
nonetheless valid: my mediagraphy revealed the extent to which globalisation has affected
people in a positive and uplifting manner.

My mediagraphy thus reveals that mediated globalisation is best understood as a form
of transnational identity politics (Eriksen 2005: 27). The everyday difficulties that my
participants have experienced in the past reveals the tense dynamics of living in a globalised
space, using a global media form to develop a cosmopolitan identity, and being subject to
macro structures of control. Although mediated globalisation has many sides and aspects, this
essay has explored the reality that *how* people use the media essentially defines globalisation
through the empowering quality of the Web and the production of transnational identities and
subjectivities. The value of this conclusion lies in its reflective quality: globalisation
incorporates a flowering of identities that cannot easily be undone. As such, if South Africa
truly wishes to embrace a globalised status in terms of fostering national, inter-national and
trans-national identities then the structures that force a duality of experiences for minorities
need to be amended so as to support, and provide, international concepts and solutions that
have been locally integrated.

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