

An Empirical Research Study of Spiritualist Mediums and Ordained Ministers and their Call to Service and Spiritual Gifts

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Abstract

This research study focussed on Spiritualist mediums and ordained ministers and their call to service and their spiritual gifts. Using a detailed questionnaire, a core group of Spiritualist mediums and ministers willing to be subjects were initially contacted and then they, in turn, were asked to introduce the study to other Spiritualist mediums and ministers. The entire study was anonymous in order to ascertain the most authentic and honest responses from the subjects. There were 138 respondents who participated in this study. Regarding personal demographics, a section of the study analyzed the subjects' backgrounds (i.e. sex, age, years as a medium or minister, etc.). The main part of the study used a qualitative format to inquire into specific aspects of the minister's mediumship. Primarily, the study focused on the ministers' awareness of mediumistic gifts, initial experience with mediumship, and the use of tools in their mediumship work. This ethno-religious study of Spiritualist mediums and ministers mirrors two previous studies conducted by this researcher, and the results are compared throughout, offering, in general, more insight and understanding into how Spiritualist mediums and ministers have transformed or diversified over the past twenty years of my active research on this topic.

Introduction

Spiritualism first became a movement when two young sisters, Kate and Maggie Fox, decided to try to make contact with an incarnate spirit that had been plaguing them every night in their home for some time. Of course, spirit communication has been around since time immemorial and even during the time the Fox sisters first made their contact with the spirit of a peddler who had been murdered in their home years before they moved there, spirit hauntings were not unknown. So, Spirit communication was not an entirely new concept for the people during that time.

However, the fact that the young sisters made contact that was responsive, does set it aside from other forms of spirit communication. So, on March 31, 1848, the young sisters decided to "talk" to this spirit that kept making rapping noises all around them, keeping them awake at night. To their surprise the entity responded to their verbal commands with raps. After alerting their parents, alarmed, confused and shocked, Mr. and Mrs. Fox called in neighbors as witnesses to see what was happening. The rappings continued and the group made a laborious code, asking the entity to rap for each letter of the alphabet. They were able to ascertain that the entity haunting them was named Charles B. Rosna, who was a

peddler, who had been murdered in the home some years before the Fox Family had moved into the farmhouse.

This simple spirit contact put into motion a religious movement the likes the world had never witnessed before. Before long, people clamored to meet the young sisters, some wanting messages from departed loved ones, others who wanted nothing more than to kill them as witches.

The sudden interest in spirit communication exploded and the sisters became a verifiable phenomenon, thrusting them into the spotlight that quickly included having benefactors who were part of the powerful and influential elite society of New York City.

The Spiritualist movement gradually came into being, as interest in spirit communication began to take shape across the country. In its most early incarnation, mediumship was being carried out by anyone who said they had the gift and hung a sign outside their home. This perplexed many true believers as the condition was ripe to have fraudsters claiming to be mediums intermingling with authentic mediums. Eventually, it was decided that the movement needed to have some sort of consistent and organized association to monitor and vet authentic mediums from those just pretending.

As the movement gradually transitioned into a religion, many common facets of Christianity and Christian church services served as models for the rapidly growing Spiritualist church. One huge departure, however, from the typical Protestant church service was the offering of messages by a Spiritualist minister or medium as part of the regular worship service.

Not all Spiritualist mediums are ministers, but as a rule, all Spiritualist ministers are indeed mediums. A common prerequisite today in becoming an ordained Spiritualist minister within the majority of associations and seminary programs (in the United States) that actively ordain ministers within the religion of Modern Spiritualism is the requirement to demonstrate an ability to communicate with the so-called dead. In other words, to be developed mediumistically to the point of being able to relay information in the form of messages involving "spirit communication" from loved ones who have passed over from the living here on the earth plane. (Leonard, 2015)

Spiritualism teaches that, those who have passed on are not in an unconscious state of being. The Spirit is very much conscious and well. No longer is that Spirit hampered by the burdensome physical body. No longer is there the tormenting physical pain, the anguished mind. The Spirit is free at last. Free, and yet, with its "will" to do the many things the physical did not allow, or the element of time or weather, that now in the Spirit World can be accomplished. Indeed, it is a proven fact that Spirit is very much alive and active; even more so in the Spirit World than when on the earth Plane. (Sher, pp.2-3)

There are several key components that aspiring mediums and Spiritualist ministers must try to incorporate in their work. 1) a natural ability or propensity to connect with Spirit and/or one's personal spirit guides; 2) the opportunity to develop one's own mediumship under the direction of a certified development teacher or mentor; 3) the appropriate amount of time and effort an aspiring medium or minister needs or is willing to devote to developing his/her own mediumship, with ample opportunities to practice giving messages. (Leonard 2015)

The Research Study

This particular study was conducted on Spiritualist ministers and mediums who are actively working in these roles throughout the world. One condition to be a subject in this study was that the person had to be ordained or certified by an actual Spiritualist church or association. The majority of the subjects were initially selected through referral, meaning that once I was able to contact a core group of ministers and mediums through my own personal contacts after years of research in this area, these people then referred their contacts to the on-line questionnaire with my prescribed criterion in place. This type of research sampling is referred to as “snowball sampling.”

In snowball sampling researchers identify a small number of individuals who have characteristics in which they are interested. These people are then used as informants to identify, or put researchers in touch with, others who qualify for inclusion and these, in turn, identify yet others—hence the term snowball sampling. This method is useful for sampling a population where access is difficult, maybe because it is a sensitive topic or where communication networks are underdeveloped. The task for the researcher is to establish who are the critical or key informants with whom initial contact must be made. (Cohen, *et al*, 104)

A decision was made early on to utilize a variety of social media accounts to make contact with potential subjects who are subscribed to those lists. Although the primary instrument (an online questionnaire) utilized a combination of a Likert scale (e.g. “please mark accordingly—strongly disagree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree”) and/or a checklist scale (e.g. “please check the items that pertain to you.”), several sections of the questionnaire were “qualitative” in that they allowed the respondents to answer open-ended questions freely, which generated much data and information which required collating and interpreting.

Statistics of the Participants

This particular study had 138 subjects (N=138), which was more than a previous study I conducted back in 2015 which had only 54 respondents (N=54), and an even older study I conducted back in 2002 that had 46 subjects (N=46). In 2002, 82% of the respondents were female, and 18% were male. The 2015 study garnered a ratio of 70% female and 30% male, and this current study resulting in nearly the exact same ratio of females and males at 70.29% female and 29.71 % male. Since my first study, back in 2002, Spiritualist males who are mediums and ministers have had a marked increase within the religion, but women still far outnumber men by leaps and bounds.

Historically, this has always been the case in Spiritualism. Women have consistently outnumbered men by a large margin, primarily because it was the only religion at its inception that offered women equal footing with men, offering them an active voice in the leadership of associations and churches, at a time when women were largely expected to do domestic-based work in the home, like cooking, cleaning, raising children, maybe sewing for others or offering music lessons. Spiritualism offered women an opportunity to have a vocation—a career—in which they could develop a profession that was separate from their dependence upon any male figure in their household, whether that is a father, brother, husband or son. (Leonard, 2005)

Perhaps the most startling discovery was the extent to which Spiritualism and the inception of women’s rights were intertwined. At a time when women had no power

to achieve equal rights, they relied on the “other powers” provided by Spiritualism to sustain their efforts. Through the mouths of trance speakers came words of wisdom from long-dead seers, and from the spirits came the courage to go forward. (Goldsmith, xiii-xiv)

It can be deduced from the data that Spiritualist women still find great comfort and freedom in the religion and still enjoy leadership roles, and an equality of the sexes, still denied many other women who follow more mainstream religions. Spiritualism boasts one of the highest percentages of female ministers in organized religion. This is due in part to the fact that historically, as well as today, Spiritualism offers women not only a voice, but an opportunity to be heard and to serve equally with men. In most Spiritualist organizations and churches, women are undeniably the leaders of the religion. Also, Spiritualism historically and to the present day, has been on the cutting edge of social issues of the times. Spiritualists fought for the abolition of slavery, and campaigned for the right for women to vote in the suffrage movement, and today are on the forefront, fighting for the rights of LGBTQ people.

Today, nearly all Christian denominations in the United States have gradually and progressively become more accepting of LGBTQ people according to a 2015 study by the *Pew Research Center*, but generally speaking Spiritualism has always been much more progressive regarding social issues than mainstream Christianity. This historical precedence of Spiritualism to be progressive with social issues of the times, has allowed the religion to foster tolerance and the acceptance of marginal members of society, whether they be racially-based, gender-based, economic-based, or socially-based.

A new question included in this latest study dealt with the ministers' and mediums' relationship status and sexual orientation. An overwhelming percentage (75.346%) of the respondents identified as being “straight.” The selection of “gay or lesbian” came in at 15.94% and bisexual respondents at 2.90%. There was one transgendered respondent, and two respondents who selected “celibate”. Five people preferred not answer this question.

Over 50% of the respondents indicated that they were married (50.72%), with 9.42% indicating that they were widowed. Less than 20%, (18.12%) selected “divorced” and 3.62% were “separated” at the time of the study. 6.52% were in a domestic partnership or civil union, which can be essentially regarded as being a form of “marriage.” Just over 5% (5.07%) indicated they were single, but cohabiting with another person, 6.52% of the respondents identified with being single, or never married.

Regarding age, 63 respondents or 45.65% were between the ages of 55-64. The 2015 study found 39% of the respondents to have been in this age category, and the 2002 study revealed that the majority of subjects had an average age between 60-69. This is encouraging in that the earlier studies showed Spiritualism to be a rapidly aging religion with more older people than younger. This new research indicates that the age of ministers and mediums is a bit lower which means that younger people are increasingly becoming interested in and pursuing ordination more actively. However, of the subjects that participated in the survey, 24.64% were between the ages of 65-74, and 17.39% between the ages of 45-54. So, still today, the overwhelming majority of Spiritualist ministers and mediums tend to be on the older side. Only 11 participants out of 138 categorized themselves as being in the 44 and younger category, with only 3 of these being aged 34 or younger. So, while there is some movement toward a slightly younger average age of ministers and mediums in Spiritualism, it still leans to the older side of the spectrum, which is a worrisome trend for maintaining the religion for the future. More young people are needed to become certified mediums and ordained ministers to keep the religion solvent.

Regarding the ethnicity of the respondents, an overwhelming percentage (94.93%) identified as white. Only 1.45% identified as black or African-American, and 2.17% identified as native American or Alaskan Native. 1.45% selected Asian as their ethnicity. This lack of diversity in ethnicity is troubling, considering the historical fact that Spiritualists were always on the cutting edge of social issues, like Abolition and the Suffrage Movement. Spiritualist organizations and churches need to do more outreach programs to welcome a more diverse variation of ethnic minorities, and certainly more effort must be made to encourage people of color and other races to pursue studies in mediumship and ultimately toward ordination.

Regarding the geographic areas where the subjects hailed from, overwhelmingly North America was represented by 86.96% of the respondents. This is not surprising, considering that North America, primarily the United States, has the most active churches and associations anywhere in the world. Since the religion of Spiritualism was founded and propagated in the United States, it is logical that the majority of worldwide adherents and active mediums and ministers in the religion are located in America.

Nearly 11% of the subjects indicated they were European, with .72% from Asia, .72% from Australia, and .72% from South America. These statistics likely do not offer a sound scientific overview of the religion worldwide, due to the fact that I used "snowball sampling" that relied upon a core group of initial subjects which were largely from the United States, hence skewing the data toward this bias. It is well-known that Great Britain has a large number of Spiritualist churches and organizations, and although I tried to include people from all parts of the world, it very well could be the case that active mediums and ministers in these countries were not approached to participate in this study. A future study would do well to make a concerted effort to include as many people from all nationalities and countries as possible to get a better understanding of the actual condition of the religion's numbers of mediums and ministers in other geographical locations outside the United States.

When asked what country the subjects felt was their primary residence and where they did most of their mediumship, as expected, the United States and Canada were in the majority, with a sprinkling from other places, including, Great Britain, Italy, France, Australia and even Malaysia.

Regarding education, only 2.21% of the respondents indicated they had achieved a level of academic education that was less than a high school diploma. Over 50% of the respondents indicated they had either a bachelor's degree (24.26%) and/or a graduate degree (27.21%). There were 13.24% that selected an Associate Degree, and 24.26% indicated they had taken college level classes but did not achieve a terminal degree. Just over 10% indicated they had a high school diploma only. This is all in addition to their certification and studies toward classes they needed to take to be ordained or to be certified as a medium.

In general, looking at the statistics regarding education, it can be deduced that Spiritualist mediums and ministers are well-educated with a variety of different educational paths. Spiritualist mediums and ministers, unlike their peers in mainstream Christianity, often have professional careers separate from their Spiritualist mediumship and ministry. The majority of full-time Christian-denomination ministers are full-time clergy, being paid by the churches they serve. Often is the case with Spiritualist clergy, they must have a "day" job in addition to their ministry as few Spiritualist churches can afford to have a full-time minister that is paid a weekly or monthly salary large enough to live on. So, this explains partly why Spiritualist ministers and mediums tend to have higher levels of education apart from their seminary studies because their education likely coincides with their outside profession that is separate

from their Spiritualist mediumship work and ministry.

The subjects in this study had 43.38% indicating they had full-time employment outside of their mediumship and ministry work, with 13.97% indicating they were employed part-time. Being unemployed or unemployed and looking actively for work was 9.56% of the respondents. The percentage of retirees was quite high at 29.41%, which means that they have likely retired from their professional careers, but continue to do mediumship and minister-related work as needed. 3.68% of the subjects indicated they were disabled.

When asked before becoming a Spiritualist medium or ordained minister, what was their religious background? Only 19.69% of the subjects were lifelong Spiritualists, meaning they were raised in the religion and had practiced it since childhood. On the contrary, 80.31% selected “other” for their religious affiliation. In the 2002 study, only 8% were lifelong Spiritualists, so in the nearly 20 years since the first study was done, the percentage of lifelong Spiritualists has more than doubled.

Other than Spiritualism, a wide range of religious traditions were indicated, with Catholicism being the most prevalent among all the subjects. This mirrors the research study from 2002:

One possible reason for the interest in Spiritualism of traditionally raised Catholics, and those who converted to Catholicism as adults before becoming Spiritualists, has to do with the ritual involved in the ceremonial aspects of the two religions. A Catholic mass has a very ritualistic liturgy; Spiritualism and mediumship are also comprised of a lot of ritual in the form of chanting and singing to raise the vibration, concentrated meditation or mantra recitation similar to those who practice saying “The Rosary,” the use of incense during the services, prayer, and the spiritual cleansing of the space where the service takes place.

In addition, Catholicism advocates spirit communication with anointed saints which is similar to Spiritualism’s belief in spirit communication—the difference being that Catholics only speak to anointed saints who have been designated by the Church as being holy, and Spiritualists will talk to any benevolent spirit that wishes to make contact. (Leonard, 2005)

The religious traditions and denominations that people indicated were wide and varied including Baptist, Anglican, Methodist, Lutheran, Jewish, Episcopal, Mormonism, Presbyterian, Disciples of Christ, Gnostic, Christian Science, Evangelical Christianity, Theosophy, Wiccan, Agnostic, Rosicrucianism, Atheism, Metaphysics/New Age, Yogic, Unitarianism, Buddhism as some examples.

Seemingly, people moved around to different types of religions before settling down with Spiritualism. In the 2002 study, I coined the phrase “religion hopping” to describe the respondents who were not raised in Spiritualism, but found it later, as adults. The overwhelming majority of respondents in both studies indicated they did a fair amount of experimenting with different religious traditions before deciding to be Spiritualists.

Historically, Spiritualism has not been an evangelistic or missionary religion that actively tried to spread the religion to others, relying primarily upon word of mouth and having active members introduce likeminded people to churches and camps. It has always been a firm belief that people will come to the religion who need to and when they need to, and will follow it for as long as they need

to, with no pressure to join or conform to it. In fact, Spiritualism teaches the truths of all religious traditions and the majority of Spiritualists have some sort of infinity with another religion that they are able to practice side-by-side with their Spiritualist beliefs. So it is not uncommon for someone to identify as a Christian-Spiritualist, or a Buddhist-Spiritualist, etc. Since Spiritualism accepts the truths from all religious traditions that seek enlightenment through love and light, it is not contradictory for Spiritualists to follow and subscribe to another religious tradition in tandem with Spiritualism. The results of this study further prove this hypothesis because the subjects had indicated following many different religions before settling upon Spiritualism.

Mediumship-Related Data

The majority of the respondents indicated they realized their gift of mediumship before the age of 17 (48.11%). The second largest group indicated they realized their gifts between the ages of 40-49 (13.21%). And 11.32% indicated they were between the ages of 50-59. Of these, many indicated they felt intuitive or experienced some sort of paranormal activity, but didn't pursue their gifts until later in life. The age that they formally were certified as a medium was later in life—31% were between the ages of 40-49, and 24% were between the ages of 50-59. So, this data shows that people pursue formal certification in mediumship later in life, which corresponds with earlier studies, making Spiritualism a somewhat “graying religion” in that people are more mature when they seek out certification or ordination.

When asked who was the most influential person used by Infinite Spirit/God in prompting them to pursue mediumship development, 29.81% indicated a Spiritualist medium, and 18.27% indicated a Spiritualist development teacher. A pastor or minister was indicated by 15.38% of the subjects, and 13.46% indicated a family member, with 9.62% indicating a friend. It is likely that the people had an opportunity to get a reading from a medium and this prompted in them an interest to pursue their own mediumship gifts, since nearly 30% indicated they were first prompted by a medium.

When asked what was their most fantastic or memorable experience as a medium, the subjects offered some very interesting stories.

Subject 3

“There are so many; probably when I was reading for a severely handicapped child and family; the child could not talk. I brought in one of his friends [in spirit] who had recently passed away; I was told to tell the living child I was reading for, about the zoo—sitting by the elephants and eating ice cream and candy dots.... The alive child began to smile and move his head, and he said “yes.” His Mom began to cry and said that the zoo was one of their favorite places and that is what they last did together—what I had described.... “

Subject 36

“I was going to counsel my ex-husband because his wonderful mother had passed on 3 days earlier (3 days seems to be the “rule” for me) but before I left, she visited me (and my fiancé—a non-believer until that day!). She wasn't “visible” but we smelled her perfume¹ (we don't use fragrance in our home due his allergies), saw an indent she made in the couch, and she held my hand - I FELT her hand & it was EXACTLY the way it had felt before she passed. My fiancé felt chilled but I felt very warm!”

¹ This is an example of clairgustance—psychic smelling or tasting.

Subject 39

“Standing at Inspiration Stump² for the first time and being able to deliver a message to a young woman who needed encouragement in her career decisions. Bringing through an important member of her family that confirmed her decisions. It is at this point my most memorable experience because I trusted Spirit completely and was able to deliver a message that was needed.”

Subject 46

“Providing a message that was delivered to the police which helped prove the innocence of two falsely imprisoned people. It also helped identify two serial killers who had been practicing their crimes for more than two decades in Buffalo, NY. I have written a book about it. *There’s DNA to Prove It: Message from Beyond*. 2015.”

Subject 51

“My church was contacted to go check out a supposedly haunted house where the owners were seeing things and being bothered. About 6 of us went there and after looking all around (it was an old mansion in the former “millionaires row” in Erie, PA, West 6th St) we finally went to a room where we could sit in a circle and see what we get. It was there I went into trance for the first time ever and channeled some man who explained his story and told who killed him in the basement of the house by strangling and why. The homeowners had some of their friends come too, so there was around 15+ people crammed into that room and at a certain point they could all smell a foul odor from where the man (spirit) said he was standing. We all did our best to send him to the light, and the smell then dissipated after that.”

Subject 83

“I have brought through soldiers killed in Iraq for their grieving families with lots of evidence. I think this has been the most fulfilling for me as a medium, and it’s been a great healing experience for these families. I also was able to connect with a teenager who had taken his own life after being bullied for his sexual orientation. He gave lots of evidence and it really gave comfort to his family.”

Subject 85

“Giving messages in the Lily Dale Auditorium in front of a lot of folks. I brought in “Jim” to a person near the front row who couldn’t recall any Jim and looked puzzled. I then described him...no recognition.. I offered more details, still shaking his head no. Meanwhile I am thinking I am looking foolish in front of all these folks and they may think I am “fishing,” yet I persisted on with the common name. Finally, I got the impression he was a friend of the family who often came over to play cards with their mother. All in unison almost that entire row (who must have been all family and relatives) said: “Oh, THAT Jim!” and the audience gasped in amazement, as I wiped nervous sweat off my brow.”

² Inspiration Stump is at Lily Dale, New York, the largest Spiritualist Camp in the world. They have an “open mic” sort of event where mediums can give messages to those in attendance. The medium doesn’t have to be a Lily Dale resident-medium to work at Inspiration Stump.

Mediumship Tools

When asked what sorts of tools they may use to assist them in their mediumship work, a variety of answers were offered. Some used regular playing cards to focus their energy, others a tarot deck, some used astrology or numerology to connect to the person's energy they are reading for, others maintained they just dive right in and connect to the energy to give messages. Some associations and churches frown upon any use of outside tools and expect those training to become a medium to just use their gift of clairvoyance, clairsentience, clairaudience, or clairgustance³ to connect with the spirit to relay the message. In fact, a large number of mediums and ministers indicated they didn't use any tools to connect with energy other than their own mediumship.

Subject 10 offered the following:

"I use the Bible to start the reading and provide scripture verses for the person to take with them to read, usually a 7-day set of Bible verses to read over the next week. I have also used a pendulum which shows how Spirit energy moves through my physical body so they can see the movement of that object as it interacts with my own energy. Because it is onyx and quite a heavy pendulum, it makes an impression on the person receiving the reading. (In fact, this pendulum picked me by swinging toward me while on a "T" display rack at the store, The Sacred Circle in Alexandria, VA.) I do not question, I just accept what God has me use for validation and confirmation of Spiritual Truth."

Subject 3 was very forthright in her opinion about using tools: "No, I say a prayer prior to my reading and also when closing. I am a Spiritualist who is also a medium. Somebody who has to use props, as such, is not a true medium. They may be psychic, but not a medium."

The majority of the subjects indicated that they did some sort of ritual before giving readings, usually clearing the space of any negative energy through burning sage, or raising the vibration of the space with sound, and nearly everyone indicated they said some sort of prayer to set the space with the client before giving a reading.

Conclusion

This study had obvious limitations, one of which was the sampling of the subjects which needed to be larger. Having 138 respondents was very good, but a more diverse sampling of mediums and ministers from more countries and ethnic backgrounds would have made the results more enriching.

In addition, one medium called me out regarding my own potential bias. Subject 17, offered this observation:

"It seems that you think that people study or sit in circles so they can achieve certification. There are many of us who sit in circle with the sole intention of being one with spirit. To me, certification is in no way any indication of excellence in mediumship. I've seen many certified mediums who shouldn't even be working and others who aren't certified but who excel nonetheless. I love being a minister with my church and a registered Lily Dale medium (which required a very extensive testing process). But I pursued both because of my love of spirit and the community that I want to support."

³ Clairvoyance = clear seeing; clairsentience = clear feeling; clairaudience = clear hearing; and clairgustance = clear smelling or clear tasting.

It is true that I focussed on “certified mediums” and “ordained ministers” because I needed to have some sort of baseline criteria to measure and interpret the data. I am aware that there are very renowned mediums who have not had formal training, but for this particular study, I felt I needed to focus solely on those who had some sort of formal training and guidance.

Being a Spiritualist medium and/or ordained minister requires a certain level of dedication and not mere dabbling. Hence why I was so strict about the research criteria, only allowing certified mediums and ordained ministers to participate in this study. I found that those who did participate in this study were very sincere and genuinely dedicated to being a good medium and an effective minister. I was especially impressed with the detail in which the respondents answered the questions, offering wonderful responses for both the quantitative and qualitative questions that were rich in scope and depth.

This ethno-religious study of Spiritualist mediums and ministers does offer new research into mediumship, and when compared to my earlier studies, adds to the existing research already done, which at times contradicts and other times reinforces previous data points on the topic. In the end, it is hoped that this additional study on Spiritualist mediums and ministers offers new insights and data regarding the religion of Spiritualism and the study of mediumship. As evidenced in this paper, for Spiritualist mediums and ministers, their work is not a game or some form of entertainment, but instead a very serious calling that allows them to use their gifts to assist, comfort, and help others. For the majority, it is a way of life and they dedicate themselves to offering evidentiary messages to those seeking comfort and consolation to know that their loved ones are around and are all right. A future comparative study including a larger number of subjects from different countries and ethnic backgrounds where Spiritualism is practiced would offer even more insight into the religion, as a whole, and the ministers and mediums who practice mediumship around the world.

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