Childfree women remain prevalent among university-based academics in the English-speaking countries. Despite the increase of women in academic positions over the decades, their fertility rates and family/personal lives continue to differ from those of academic men. Academic women have lower marriage and fertility rates than less educated women, and especially those in tenure-stream positions are more likely than men or women part-timers to be single, separated/divorced, childless or single parents. Drawing on the author’s interviews with university-based academics in Canada in 1973 and New Zealand in 2008, the paper argues that despite forty years of changes in gender relations, social policy and institutional practices, integrating teaching and research with childbearing and child raising remains far more problematic for women than for men. The interviews show that many academic women recognize and seek to avoid the challenges faced by their colleagues who combine full-time work with motherhood. The paper concludes that equity advocates need to pay more attention to the perpetuation of gendered families when attempting to close the gender gap.

Having children is often considered to be synonymous with maturity and normality (Morell, 1994; Evenson & Simon, 2005) but highly-educated women with full-time careers are less likely than their male counterparts to reproduce (Hagestad & Call, 2007; Portanti & Whitworth, 2009). Research also shows that parenthood is associated with employment and earnings advantages for men but disadvantages for women (Correll et al., 2007; Zhang, 2009).

This paper focuses on the fertility and child raising experiences of university-based academics, providing an example of a profession where men have higher rates of marriage and fertility than women (Brooks, 1997; Bassett, 2005). The paper is based on a survey of relevant research and my qualitative interviews from Canada in 1973 and New Zealand.
Zealand in 2008. These studies show that despite improvements to the representation of women in academia, the personal/family lives of men and women continue to vary. I argue that these differences contribute to the academic gender gap in job location, rank, salaries, prestige and career longevity.

**Literature Review**

Previous research suggests that a successful academic career requires a life-time of commitment, long working hours, research-related travel, entrepreneurial skills, and sustained research productivity to gain promotion to the highest rank (Brooks & MacKinnon, 2001; Jencks & Riesman, 1977; Lucas, 2006; Mohrman et al., 2008; Sagaria, 2007). Studies also find that academic men are more likely than academic women to find and retain permanent jobs within the more prestigious universities, to feel valued by their institution, to publish peer-reviewed articles, to gain higher rank and salaries, and to enjoy career longevity (Brooks, 1997; CAUT, 2008; Knights & Richards, 2003; Monroe et al., 2008; Nakhaie 2007; White, 2004). Nevertheless, notable changes have been apparent over the past four decades.

Compared to the 1970s, significantly more women now receive doctorates and find permanent university positions (AUUP, 2006; Baker, 2012b; Drakich & Stewart, 2007; Long, 2001; Sussman & Yssaad, 2005; Glazer-Raymo, 2008). In Canada, for example, the percentage of female full-time university teachers increased from 13 in 1970 to 34 in 2008, but 45% of full-time university teachers newly appointed in 2007-08 were women (CAUT 2009, 2010, p. 18). Similar developments have occurred in the other English-speaking countries but despite these changes, only about 20% of senior academic positions are occupied by women in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, United Kingdom and United States (AAUP, 2006; Auriol, 2007; Carrington & Pratt, 2003; Lipsett, 2008; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2009).

Success in an academic career is clearly influenced by the ‘social capital’ brought to the job as well as work-related experiences within the institution. Studies also find that academic promotion can be enhanced or impeded by family circumstances, and that differences persist in the family lives of male and female academics. For example, more men are married with children, while a higher percentage of women are single, childless, divorced and sole parents (Moyer et al., 1999; O’Laughlin & Bischoff, 2005). Partnered women more often find themselves in dual-career marriages with older professionals, while men’s partners are typically younger with lower work attachment (Fox, 2005; Bracken et al., 2006). Despite the low fertility rates of academic women, a greater proportion of women than men report that they are primary caregivers of young children or retain caring responsibilities for relatives.
Furthermore, more academic women than men change jobs for their partner’s career moves and accept responsibility for housework (ibid). Researchers typically agree that family circumstances influence academic women’s career choices and subsequent promotions but also that career choices influence their fertility decisions (Comer & Stites-Doe, 2006; Ferber & Loeb, 1997; Fox, 2005; Grummell et al., 2009; Jacobs, 2004; Mason, Goulden & Wolfinger, 2006; O’Laughlin & Bischoff, 2005). National statistics from the United States and Canada show that combining parenting with employment is more difficult for mothers than fathers, and that motherhood and living with young children is generally associated with a ‘motherhood penalty’ in employment earnings and seniority (Correll et al., 2007; Zhang, 2009). These conclusions also pertain to academia, where fewer mothers than fathers or childless women reach the senior ranks and salaries (Probert, 2005; Bracken, Allen & Dean, 2006; Nakhaie, 2007; Monroe et al., 2008). Particularly sole mothers, who are over-represented among women academics, experience problems combining childrearing with successful careers.

Mason, Goulden and Wolfinger (2006) argued that ‘babies matter’ to women’s academic careers and that childlessness is clearly most notable among tenure-track and tenured academic women. Women who receive doctorates but remain outside the labour force have the highest fertility rate, followed by part-time women academics, and then full-time women in tenured positions (Brooks, 1997; Harper et al., 2001; Mason & Goulden, 2004). Most academics have their children at the beginning of their career, often before they achieve job security, but women who have babies within five years of earning a doctorate are less likely than childless women or academic men to receive job security (Mason & Goulden, 2002). These studies suggest that women entering career-stream academic positions, especially in the research-oriented universities, are either less interested in raising children or they face too many challenges with work/life balance.

Previous research has demonstrated the impact of institutional and performance factors in perpetuating the academic gender gap (Baker, 2009 & 2010a; Brooks & Mackinnon, 2001; Mohrman et al., 2008; Probert, 2005; Sagaria, 2007) but this article deals only with fertility, childrearing and domestic labour, while acknowledging the other contributors. The rest of this paper discusses my two studies of academics, illustrating the gender differences in fertility and family circumstances and discussing their impact on career development. My research shows that despite forty years of social and institutional changes, the family/personal lives of male and female academics continue to differ.
Interviews in Canada & New Zealand

This paper is based on two research projects related to the academic gender gap: one in Canada in 1973 and the other in New Zealand in 2008. Both sets of qualitative interviews focused on perceptions of the impact of gender, marital status, and parental status on academic careers, and participants were encouraged to elaborate on details of their family and academic backgrounds, living arrangements, mentoring experiences, and working environment. The 2008 interviews further noted the influence of university type on career development and satisfaction, as universities are often divided into ‘teaching’ versus ‘research’ universities (CAUT, 2010).

This research was grounded in political economy theories which argue that women’s daily responsibility for household work tends to reduce their employment hours and productivity, especially in competitive workplaces (Grummell et al., 2009). Prevalent marriage patterns, where women partner with older and more professionally-established men, tend to augment the expectations that employed women will shoulder the ‘second shift’ of household labour (Hochschild, 1989; Johnson & Johnson, 2008). I particularly draw on the ‘motherhood penalty’ research showing that the careers of mothers tend to lag behind those of childfree women and fathers (Baker, 2010d; Budig & England, 2001; Portanti & Whitworth, 2009).

The two projects also draw on interpretive perspectives which acknowledge the different subjectivities of equally-qualified workers in the same occupation (Thomas & Davies, 2002). These theories suggest that the meanings associated with actions are socially constructed and that our subjectivities (including priorities and self-image) are shaped by the ways that we present ourselves to others and how they interpret, ignore, resist or reinforce our actions (Butler, 1990). I particularly rely on ‘performance’ theories of gender, suggesting that masculinity and femininity is not what people are but what they do (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Kimmel, 2008). These approaches suggest that life ‘choices’ are shaped by circumstances and opportunities but even when women behave like men, their actions can be viewed, evaluated and legitimated differently (Glazer-Raymo, 2008; Kelan, 2009).

My two studies are integrated into one paper to demonstrate some of the changes in the gender gap over time in countries with comparable university workplaces. Both Canada and New Zealand are former colonies sharing similar policies and laws (except for French Canada) and socio-demographic trends such as gendered patterns of tertiary education, employment and remuneration (Baker, 2006; 2010c). Despite population differences, both countries have experienced comparable increases in women’s educational attainment and representation in academia. For example, about half of new doctorates
are now earned by women and about 20% of the senior academics working in universities in both countries are women (Baker, forthcoming). The nomenclature for the academic ranks differ, as the typical ranks for tenure-stream jobs in Canada are assistant, associate and full professor, while in New Zealand it is lecturer, senior lecturer, associate professor and professor. Gaining job security can also be more rigorous in some Canadian universities. However, in both countries, criteria for university promotion are comparable, university staff incorporate high percentages of foreign-born academics, and post-secondary education is largely publicly funded and subject to similar financial constraints (ibid).

The 1973 study was situated in a ‘research’ university in Western Canada and began with an analysis of contributors to the gender gap and academic practices in North American universities (Baker, 1975). This decade coincided with the second phase of the feminist movement and several investigations of women’s status, including university-based studies and a royal commission. Many women at the Canadian university had migrated from the United States to take up positions (or accompany husbands) during the 1960s expansion of the university sector. This suggests that geographic mobility was important to the academic profession even then.

The Canadian study consisted of 39 qualitative interviews with women in male-dominated departments at a time when women formed 13.5% of full-time permanent academics. In 1973, nearly all departments had a majority of male academics while some contained few or no women. I contacted the women by telephone and asked to interview them in their offices. The sample consisted mainly of full-time academics from assistant professor to full professor but also included temporary lecturers, doctoral students and former students who recently withdrew from the doctoral program. The project focused on the inconsistencies between university discourse about academic merit and the realities of ‘particularism’ experienced by these participants. It also explored their experiences of being a woman in a male-dominated occupation, as well as their role models and mentors, career trajectories, and personal circumstances.

The 2008 study included qualitative interviews with 30 male and female academics working in two universities on New Zealand’s North Island. One is a large research university that prides itself on its research and postgraduate education and enjoys a high national and international reputation. The second is a newer teaching university that is more oriented to undergraduate teaching, has higher class contact hours, slightly more women in senior positions, and a lower national/international profile. The participants were personally contacted by e-mail, invited to be interviewed, and the interviews were
digitally recorded and later transcribed. The sample included men and women with doctorates and permanent positions in all of the full-time academic ranks (lecturer, senior lecturer, associate professor, and professor), and I focused on the humanities and social sciences to keep constant the workplace culture. Participant views and experiences were compared by sex, rank, university type and family circumstances. These interviews were not meant to form a systematic comparison of academics working in different jurisdictions and eras, as the study designs and samples varied slightly. Instead, the rich and subjective verbatim comments from the participants are used to enhance wider research findings and to illustrate the extent of change—and stability—in gendered academic careers. The rest of this article focuses on my findings, beginning with reproduction and child rearing.

**Having & Raising Children**

*Children & Academic Careers: 1973*

The female sample for the 1973 study was based mainly on rank at a time when marriage rates were high and couples typically married in their early twenties (Baker, 1975). Nevertheless, nearly half of the participants (17/39) were unattached and one third (13/39) were never married and childless. The high percentage of unmarried childfree women illustrates the persistent view at the time that women had to make a choice between marriage/children or a professional career. Many participants spoke of problems balancing their academic work with their family life. In 1971, the federal government had instigated a fifteen-week paid maternity leave for all eligible employees under the Unemployment Insurance Program, but the university where the interviews took place offered no additional paid maternity leave (Baker, 1995, p. 89). This university also retained an anti-nepotism rule that prevented many married interviewees from securing full-time academic jobs if their male partners were already employed there.

Mothers were typically expected to care for young children at home in the early 1970s, and some participants did this for years before beginning or resuming their academic careers. In addition, many had relocated to Canada from the United States and seldom had family members living close by to share the care work. Few public childcare services were available in Western Canada at the time, but some mothers managed to develop successful academic careers through efficient household management, hard work, partner support, and hired help. However, these women were not always seen as positive role models by their younger female students and colleagues, as they had to work so hard (Baker, 2012).

In the 1973 study, several mothers reported that their attention had become divided between university work and children, which other
participants viewed as a reason to avoid motherhood. For example, a childfree associate professor in education made a typical comment when she said: “Teaching university is a very full-time job. If I had children, something would get lost in the shuffle. Can you really have both and do it well (ibid, 178)?” The mothers who maintained a traditional division of labour at home generally held lower ranking jobs, including part-time or temporary positions.

In order to focus on family responsibilities, some mothers consciously requested part-time work until their children were in school but they mistakenly assumed that they could easily upgrade to permanent positions later. Others successfully managed to obtain tenure-track positions. For example, a woman full professor mentioned her slow career start after she completed her doctorate when she had been given a temporary appointment and one-third of the salary her husband received without a doctorate. However, she quickly added: “I wanted a part-time job until I was sure that I could handle a full-time job and my baby”. Despite working the equivalent of full-time hours, she felt that her salary “seemed reasonable at the time” and eventually worked her way into a permanent position (Baker, 1975, p. 136). Some of these comments sound outdated, as women’s presence in the workforce is now much stronger and equity issues more prominent.

Children & Academic Careers: 2008

In the 2008 study, more participants cohabited without legal marriage but they typically postponed parenthood until they obtained doctorates and found permanent positions. As in the earlier study, the sample was selected mainly by rank but only fifty-six % of the women were married or cohabiting compared to 100 % of the men. Furthermore, only 56 % were mothers, with half of them sole mothers, compared to the 67 % who were fathers, all living in two-parent households. Several women noted the absence of senior women who are mothers in academia and who could serve as positive role models. For example, a young mother at the research university lamented: “One of the things I have been looking for is role models of women who’ve had families and been successful in academia. I’ve been trying to seek some of those people out but sometimes have been discouraged by their experiences and the difficulties they’ve faced.”

Several academic women openly mentioned that remaining single or childfree was a career advantage. For example, one unmarried lecturer in her mid-thirties said: “I think not being married and not having commitments and not having children means I’ve been able to focus on my career a lot more than some people”. Another woman senior lecturer in her late 30s implied that remaining childless was not an
explicit decision yet childbearing appeared to obstruct women’s success in academia:

I love kids, it’s just that circumstances have meant that I’ve not had kids, but I’m sure that those circumstances have a lot to do with my choice of career... I hear these stories about how you have to coincide your pregnancies with the summer break (laughter) ... and about the pressure if you have to make a decision to take time off to be a mum. Will you be able to pick up, will you be left behind?

Although both men and women usually saw having children as desirable and normal, the women more often viewed them as career obstacles.

Several participants weighed the advantages and disadvantages of having a child or another child, such as this young mother: “We’re feeling — well [child] is so great maybe we would like to have a second one... but one of the big things is for me feeling like this has had a big impact on my publishing career and would a second child... be sort of exponential?” The men also talked about children slowing the pace of their publishing and promotion but they tended to view them as a mixed blessing. For example, a male (full) professor who was also a father said: “Having children is the greatest sacrifice you can make... it’s also the greatest blessing in some ways. It prevents you from being a single track workaholic”.

Several male participants mentioned the work and child raising experiences of their female partner. For example, this comment from a male lecturer at the research university, who recently came from the United States, illustrates some of the dilemmas that working women face when they marry career-oriented men and want to provide the best environment for their children. This man spoke of his wife, who used to be a teacher but is now a housewife:

Her career aspirations in many ways have been secondary... and they’ve become less pronounced over time... at some point down the road... she figures she’ll probably go back to work, but she’s not quite sure what that will look like... Well, the 3rd child [which was an unexpected pregnancy] has postponed any of those decisions because she’s still of the mind that ‘I want to be home when my children are home, till they get to an age where they’re socially ready to go off and interact with other kids...

Clearly, many women are caught between personal and social expectations of motherhood and the desire to develop a career.
Several women in the 2008 study explicitly reported that they had chosen not to reproduce. For example, an associate professor in her early fifties justified her rapid career progress when she said:

*The fact of not being married... may have been an advantage in the sense that I think sometimes couples are trying to juggle the demands of two careers and that can be a problem. The thing that I think has been most instrumental is not having children. I think that has made a very big difference... I've never, ever in my life, ever wanted children.*

Only one man among the twelve in the study talked explicitly about remaining childfree and he was cohabiting with a female academic:

*Being childless allows us a little bit more freedom to burn the candle at both ends when we need to – to take the appropriate amount of down time when you need it. I see colleagues with children and when I look in the mirror I see the same rings around my eyes as they've got around their eyes, but the rings around my eyes indicate that I'm tired because I was doing something to do with work. The rings around their eyes often indicate that they were up last night because their daughter was ill or something like that. ... I've got a great amount of admiration for anyone who has children in this particular game because I think it is an extra burden, I think it is harder.*

The women participants worried that children would truncate their career with the sheer extent of caring work. A childfree woman (full) professor articulated this very clearly: “Academic couples that I know with children, it's still seemed to be more the mother that takes on the responsibility... My sense is that having children has a much bigger impact on the mother... in terms of career.” A female lecturer at the teaching university reinforced this when she said: “I know that parenting is both of our responsibilities... but as the mother realistically I feel the pull more than he does to be at home and you know be the main nurturer in our family”.

Academics tend to use childcare services during working hours but they also need substitute care in the evenings and weekends, when the child is sick, and especially during conference or research trips. Particularly mothers talked about childcare dilemmas. For example, a sole mother at the research university, who had come to New Zealand from United States, talked about her need to travel to the capital city to do archival research for her book:
Another sole mother, who also came from the UK, wondered out loud why she ever accepted the job in New Zealand because of the high cost of travelling for research purposes while raising a child alone: “Taking a child as a solo mom to the UK to do research on this salary as senior lecturer, it’s impossible... I don’t know that I could be an international expert specialising in my area and be here...”

In the 1973 study, many women participants had remained single and childfree. Those who had children typically took several years off work but mothers who worked full-time insisted on the importance of efficiency in managing their careers. Most viewed child care and housework as women’s duty although they also hired sitters and home cleaners, and were assisted by their mothers. In the 2008 study, a high percentage of academic women continued to be unattached, childfree or single parents. The younger mothers took shorter parental leave and returned to work by using public childcare services but finding suitable care remained a major concern for mothers in both eras and countries.

One female lecturer in the 2008 study summed up the impact of marriage and reproduction on academic women’s careers when she said: “Guys might say that when they apply for a job being married is seen as a good thing that they’re seen as a long term. I don’t know if that’s the same for women that you might be seen to be a bit risky if you’re married, because then you might want to have children.” The interviews suggested that many academic managers and colleagues view pregnant academics and young mothers as ‘extra work’ because they require leave and teaching replacements, they could be less available for meetings early or late in the workday, and could experience childcare crises that interfere with university work. This relates to the fact that the household division of labour typically becomes more gendered after childbearing (Bassett, 2005; Fox, 2009). Clearly, producing children alters women’s careers less than raising children and taking responsibility for the additional household labour that they create.

The Household Division of Labour

The 1973 research contained only female participants, permitting no male comparison. In order to provide a clearer picture of the gender divide in the 2008 study, I have considered the women’s views on household work separately from the men’s. In this section, the
household division of labour includes child care responsibilities, emotional labour and domestic work.

Women's Views

In the 1973 study, the 22 out of 39 female participants who were married typically reported traditional households with gendered divisions of labour. Particularly the mothers said that they had to work harder than their male colleagues to integrate their academic and domestic duties. Many mothers also had temporary, part-time or low-ranking jobs and few reached the rank of full professor. One woman spoke of the problems that mothers experience when trying to move up through the ranks: “Society is set up in such a way to give women a double load. The more conscientious they are about bringing up their families, the more they are penalized” (ibid, p. 180). An assistant professor who was also a mother stated that she had to work “one-and-a-half to two times as hard as a man to keep everything going... My husband has a traditional view of women and doesn’t help out at home (ibid, p. 177).

The women in the 2008 study also reported that they shouldered most of the housework and many complained about an uneven household division of labour. Even women with retired or semi-retired partners claimed to take responsibility for most household chores. To explain this, women said they had ‘higher standards’ or reported their partner’s long work hours or his unwillingness to share. The single women also did most of their own housework, including those who shared a home with relatives. One woman who lived with her frail mother and elderly uncle reported that she had to do all the housework because her mother was too ill and her uncle feigned lack of knowledge of the cleaning equipment. Several women implied that an inequitable domestic workload was a major factor in their marital separation, such as this woman from the teaching university: “That was one of things that led to our separation... I realised we’d both come home from work together and I went into the kitchen and started doing (the dinner) and he sat and read the paper.”

A domestic division of labour in which women did the ‘lion’s share’ was especially likely among older participants, parents with young children, and couples where the wife was employed less than full-time. However, not all academic women who reported doing most of the household work seemed to view this as a problem. One senior professor from the research university said: “I don’t mind [doing 80% of the housework]... It really is a question of competency,” suggesting that she was more efficient and skilled at cooking and cleaning. Several women also reported a stronger sense of responsibility to provide care, such as this mother in a junior position at the teaching university: “I think there’s
a perception that when a child becomes a teenager they don’t need their parent any more. I find it’s quite the opposite. She actually needs me more in different ways so I’m constantly thinking about those type of things. That’s my main responsibility.”

Many mothers (but no fathers) cited the sheer amount of household work as a reason for lower research productivity or for reducing their employment hours. The single and childfree participants (all women) explicitly mentioned that their family circumstances provided better opportunities for research productivity and academic travel, which many universities now prioritise.

**Men’s Views**

Although few male academics in the 2008 study reported equally-shared housework, several mentioned that they did a considerable amount of domestic work and more than ‘most men’. These academics were typically childfree and/or lived with women professionals but their statements about equal sharing were usually modified after further discussion. Many men also suggested that they experienced partner disagreements over housework. For example, a senior childless man, living with a senior academic woman, said: “We share the housework 50/50 but I don’t do the washing because I’m incompetent at it [laughter]. I might wash the wrong colours together so she’s quite happy to do all of that.”

Other men mentioned that they chose which tasks they preferred. A childless man cohabiting with an academic woman claimed to share the housework but also said that he had done little cooking since starting a new job. When I said: “So are you suggesting then that you divide the household tasks fairly equally?” he answered: “No, I’m suggesting that I do the things that I like doing and [partner] does the rest (laughter)... I think [partner] does something along the lines of 65% and I do the rest. She would probably say that it’s more like 75%.” Both sexes reported that a difference of opinion existed about how much housework the men actually did, and when and how it should be done. For example, a senior lecturer father married to an academic woman reported that he did more housework than most professional men:

_In terms of housework, we’re both involved although I would say she probably does a majority, but I don’t think it’s a great majority. Compared to most professional couples, I think I do more housework than your average male partner does... We do have some issues which probably many couples have. At times, her tolerance for clutter is less than mine, you know?_
Most men in the 2008 study reported that his female partner did more housework than he did, such as this lecturer father married to a homemaker: “Ah, she carries the lion’s share of it. The responsibilities that fall to me are typically, um, well when I get home, I get home shortly after five, and I then take the children, she works on the preparation for the meal…” Especially fathers living with female homemakers or part-time workers were unlikely to report equal sharing but there was a certain amount of nervous laughter from men relating to the housework questions, implying that their partner might not agree with their answers.

CONCLUSIONS

Women are now marrying and producing children later than in the 1970s, and more are gaining tertiary qualifications and pursuing academic careers. However, a disproportionate percentage of academic women continue to remain childfree, partly because the timing of reproduction conflicts with gaining a doctorate or job security, but also because women tend to shoulder the household work. Although many mothers complete doctorates after their children are in school, this pattern usually means that they cannot reach the senior rank by retirement age. My two studies combined with the wider research suggest that gendered living arrangements and household workloads contribute to low fertility among academic women but also make an important contribution to perpetuating the gender gap.

Despite four decades of changing gender relations, more academic men than women continue to reproduce and live in two-parent households with younger partners who have lower work attachment. Furthermore, academic women who are married mothers with young children are much more likely than fathers to work in part-time, temporary jobs or junior positions (Bracken et al., 2006). Women who combine full-time academic work with motherhood continue to face tremendous challenges in terms of working hours, stress levels and work/family conflict, especially if they become sole mothers (Monroe et al., 2008). Shouldering the burden and pleasures of family activities may enrich women’s lives, but it also limits time and energy to devote to career advancement and personal leisure. Heavy care responsibilities could either reduce women’s ambition and productivity, or require them to develop very efficient work habits.

Other than offering campus childcare services and family-related leave, few universities have provided women employees with formal assistance to counteract the career impact of gendered families, especially when so many are preoccupied with corporatization and international competition (Baker, 2012). Therefore academic women
themselves need to discuss the implications of their household arrangements with partners, friends and mentors. This includes the personal satisfactions as well as the potential career ‘penalties’, as the research clearly shows that having and raising children while shouldering the domestic workload matters to women’s careers. Meaningful change in family trends and practices will require both complex negotiations between partners and determination by women themselves to reduce the gender gap, but institutional equity programs are also important.

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