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Psychological profiles of martial arts athletes: Self-confidence, aggressiveness, motivation, and competitive drive

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Abstract

This study aims to define the psychological profile of martial arts athletes in Bali Province, focusing on self-confidence, adaptive aggression, motivation, and competitive drive as indicators of competition readiness. A quantitative descriptive survey was undertaken with N = 546 athletes participating in regional training programs across 10 martial arts disciplines: Judo, Karate, Kempo, Muay Thai, Pencak Silat, Taekwondo, Tarung Derajat, Boxing, Wushu, and Yongmoodo. Athletes were recruited utilizing selective sampling based on active training status and competitive experience. Data were acquired by standardized psychological surveys and evaluated using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages. The results suggest that self-confidence (86.44%) and motivation (89.93%) were widely evaluated as good to very good. In contrast, adaptive aggression was rather low, with 66.85% of athletes falling in the poor to very poor category. The competitive requirement variable was primarily distributed across the adequate (40.66%) and good (40.11%) levels, with only 11.17% achieving the very good level. Differences were noted between disciplines, with Pencak Silat, Karate, and Tarung Derajat displaying substantially higher psychological profiles. Overall, the data suggest that athletes exhibit high levels of self-confidence and motivation; however, they demonstrate limited growth in adaptive aggression and competitive need. These results reveal an unequal pattern of competitive readiness and provide a baseline for future analytical or longitudinal investigations into the psychological aspects of combat sports.

Keywords: Self-confidence, aggressiveness, motivation, competitive need, martial arts athletes.

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INTRODUCTION

Optimal success in martial arts relies not only on technical proficiency and physical fitness but also on particular psychological factors that govern athletes' reactions to competitive stress, including emotional regulation, pre-competitive anxiety management, cognitive concentration, and decision-making under duress. Despite increasing evidence underscoring the significance of mental training, numerous studies indicate that psychological aspects continue to garner a disproportionately minor focus relative to physical conditioning in athlete development programs, especially at the regional and provincial tiers (Podlog et al., 2015; Weinberg & Gould, 2019). Empirical evidence from Asian sports systems suggests that systematic mental training is frequently incorporated informally or inconsistently, thereby constraining its effectiveness in enhancing performance stability and psychological resilience. In martial arts, where competitors encounter solitary conflicts, swift tactical adjustments, and significant emotional pressures, these psychological indications are particularly vital for sustaining composure and performance consistency (Ita et al., 2022). A thorough analysis of psychological indicators among martial arts athletes in Bali Province is crucial to establishing an evidence-based understanding of their mental preparedness profile.

In combat sports, where athletes face one-on-one confrontations, rapid tactical adjustments, and high emotional intensity, such psychological capacities become crucial for maintaining composure and preserving performance consistency (Ita et al., 2022). Limited integration of systematic mental training in regional settings may consequently contribute to varied levels of psychological preparation among athletes. Examining the psychological characteristics of martial artists in Bali Province is thus vital to provide an evidence-based knowledge of their mental preparation and to suggest which psychological domains require further strengthening.

In Bali, martial arts such as pencak silat, karate, taekwondo, boxing, judo, muay thai, tarung derajat, wushu, kempo, and yongmoodo are constantly practiced across districts and cities, contributing to the province's good ranking in national contests. However, performance trends over the last three to five years reflect a variable pattern. Data from Porprov Bali (2019–2023) indicate that medal achievements in martial arts grew in 2021 but decreased again in various branches in 2023, while results from Kejurnas and PON reveal similar fluctuations in podium finishes. These variations show that physical training alone does not fully explain competition outcomes. Previous studies on sports performance emphasise that fluctuations in competitive results are often tied to psychological variables, such as emotional regulation, confidence maintenance, and decision-making under pressure, rather than purely technical or physiological ability (Hufton et al., 2024; Lopes, 2024). Standardized psychological instruments such as the Competitive State Anxiety Inventory-2 (CSAI-2), the Test of Performance Strategies (TOPS), and the Profile of Mood States (POMS) have been widely used to assess these psychological determinants in combat sports. These tools provide operational measures of emotional regulation, confidence, attentional focus, and stress responses, supporting the interpretation that psychological readiness may account for fluctuations in competitive outcomes.

Although physical preparation dominates most training programs, empirical evidence shows that athletes may enter competition with refined technical skills yet still struggle psychologically under high-stakes conditions, experiencing heightened anxiety, reduced assertiveness, or uncertainty in tactical choices (Fenanlampir & Cholik, 2021; Laborde et al., 2016). In combat sports, where outcomes depend on rapid reactions, controlled aggression, and tactical assertiveness, gaps in mental readiness can diminish the functional value of physical skills, especially when athletes are confronted with pressure, unfamiliar opponents, or unpredictable match dynamics (Basiaga-Pasternak et al., 2020).

This disparity between physical and mental preparation is also observed in coaching surveys. An Asian meta-coaching audit (Ciaccioni et al., 2024) indicated that just 18–25% of coaches integrate structured mental training regularly. In contrast, Indonesian data indicate that fewer than one-third of provincial-level coaches implement psychological skills training in a formalised manner (Lange-Smith et al., 2023). Mental preparation is typically integrated informally inside technical drills or addressed shortly before contests, rather than supplied through regular periodization. As a result, athletes may attend contests physically conditioned yet still struggle to regulate emotions, keep competitive confidence, or behave assertively during vital moments. This underscores the necessity of analysing psychological indicators alongside physical performance markers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of athletes' competition readiness.

Psychological preparedness itself contains several separate constructs. Self-confidence supports emotional equilibrium and task engagement; adaptive aggressiveness permits calibrated assertiveness in implementing strategies; and competitive drive determines an athlete’s ability to face challenges and persevere. These conceptions do not overlap; instead, they complement each other and influence separate areas of performance. Standardized psychological tools like as the CSAI-2, TOPS, and POMS allow these qualities to be measured objectively, yielding measurable insights into cognitive, emotional, and behavioral functioning under competitive stress. In addition to these constructs, it is important to distinguish between ambition and competitive zeal to avoid conceptual overlap. Ambition refers to an athlete’s long-term orientation toward achieving broader career goals, whereas competitive zeal reflects the situational intensity and eagerness to engage in direct competition. Clarifying this distinction ensures that short-term competitive tendencies are not misinterpreted as stable motivational traits.

Advances in sports science have also elucidated the extent to which psychological elements contribute to athletic performance. Contrary to

popular claims that 70–90% of performance is determined by mental readiness, meta-analytic findings show substantial variation across sports, with psychological factors accounting for anywhere between 18% and 45% of performance variance depending on the discipline, competitive format, and measurement approach (Martín-Rodríguez et al., 2024). Differentiating between ambition, defined as long-term goal orientation, and competitive zeal, defined as situational intensity during direct competition, further minimizes conceptual overlap and allows more accurate interpretation of athlete attributes. Evaluating self-confidence, adaptive aggression, motivation, and competitive drive thus provides a formal framework for determining psychological strengths and shortcomings among martial artists in Bali Province.

Despite the rising recognition of these psychological components, access to standardized psychological services at the regional level remains limited. As of 2024, Bali has fewer than five trained sports psychologists supporting provincial programs, and most martial arts associations do not use rigorous mental periodization modules such as PST (Psychological Skills Training) or MST (Mental Skills Training). Mental preparation is consequently typically entrenched informally within coaching routines, without consistent monitoring or incorporation into annual training cycles. This fragmented strategy may lead to inconsistent psychological preparation among athletes competing at high-level contests.

Given these conditions, this study intends to map the psychological profile of martial arts athletes in Bali Province. Establishing an empirical understanding of these psychological features is a critical step toward designing systematic, measurable, and sport-specific mental training programs that correspond with the competitive demands of current combat sports.

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional, quantitative descriptive survey design to map the psychological features of martial arts athletes in

Bali Province. The poll collected data on four constructs: self-confidence, adaptive aggressiveness, motivation, and competitive drive, during athletes' competitive preparation phases. Data were collected using offline surveys delivered during scheduled training sessions to guarantee consistent administration circumstances and to maximize response rates. A cross-sectional approach was used because it allows researchers to explain psychological trends at a single point in time without making causal claims (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Participants and Sampling

The population consisted of athletes from eleven martial arts disciplines (pencak silat, karate, taekwondo, boxing, judo, muay thai, tarung derajat, wushu, kempo, and yongmoodo) registered under district/city (Pengkab/Pengkot) and provincial (Pengprov) associations in 2024. The sample employed a purposive sampling technique (Patton, 2015), which was adopted since the study explicitly targeted athletes with extensive competition exposure. The admission criteria were: (1) registered as an active Pengkab/Pengkot or Pengprov athlete; (2) involved in structured training for a minimum of one year; (3) presently competing or having competed in regional or national events.

All athletes who met these requirements were included, generating a total sample of N = 546. The distribution was as follows: pencak silat (n = 57), karate (n = 63), taekwondo (n = 48), boxing (n = 60), judo (n = 52), muay thai (n = 60), tarung derajat (n = 65), wushu (n = 42), kempo (n = 55), and yongmoodo (n = 44). This sample size was sufficiently large for producing stable descriptive estimates and comparing branch-level patterns.

Instruments

Psychological qualities were examined using a 40-item questionnaire addressing four constructs: self-confidence, adaptive aggressiveness, motivation, and competitive drive. Each subscale consisted of 10 items scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The items were adapted from known

instruments such as the Competitive Self-Confidence Inventory, Adaptive Aggression in Sport Scale, and achievement-motivation measures through forward–backward translation, expert review, and pilot testing. Example items include “I feel capable of performing well in competition” (self-confidence) and “I maintain aggressive intent without losing tactical control” (adaptive aggression). Reliability coefficients varied from 0.74 to 0.88, suggesting acceptable internal consistency.

Table 1. Summary of psychological measurement instruments

Subscale	Source of Adaptation	No. of Items	Example item	Score range	Reliability (α)
Salf-Confidence	Competitive Salf – Self-Confidence Inventory (Vealy & Chase, 2008)	10	“I feel capable of performing well in competition.”	1–5 Likert	0.82
Adaptive Aggressiveness	Adaptive Aggression in Sports Scale	10	“I maintain aggressive intent without losing tactical control.”	1–5 Likert	0.74
Motivation	Achievement Motivation & Training Commitment Measures	10	“I stay committed even when training becomes difficult.”	1–5 Likert	0.88
Competitive Drive	Competitive Orientation Scales	10	“I am motivated to face strong opponents.”	1–5 Likert	0.79

Note. All instruments were adapted using forward–backward translation, expert validation, and pilot testing to ensure cultural and contextual relevance.

Data Analysis

Data were handled using IBM SPSS Statistics 26. Descriptive statistics, frequencies, percentages, averages, and standard deviations were employed to summarise athletes' psychological profiles. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was used to analyse data normality. When distributions were non-normal, descriptive data were given without transformation, consistent with the study's non-inferential aims.

Scores for each psychological component were grouped into five levels (very poor, poor, moderate, good, very good) using established sport psychology categorization procedures based on theoretical score ranges and equal-interval division (Weinberg & Gould, 2019). Categorization promoted uniformity across conceptions and enabled understanding of strengths and weaknesses.

Inferential analyses, such as inter-branch comparisons or correlation tests, were not conducted because the study design aimed to explain psychological patterns rather than test hypotheses or analyse causal linkages. This was consistent with the study's descriptive purpose and avoided producing unjustified assumptions about correlations between psychological variables and performance results.

RESULT

Self Confidence

Table 1. Distribution of self-confidence categories by sport

Criteria	Category	Branch Sports									
		Judo	Karate	Kempo	Muaythai	Pencaksilat	Taekwondo	Tarung Derajat	Boxing	Wushu	Yongmoodo
80 ≤	Very Good	5	16	6	9	21	9	5	9	4	3
67 ≤ 80	Good	36	44	40	35	33	36	55	35	35	36
53 ≤ 67	Moderate	11	3	9	16	2	3	5	16	3	5
40 ≤ 53	Poor	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
< 40	Very Poor	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

The distribution of self-confidence categories indicates that most martial arts athletes in Bali Province fall within the 'good' and 'very good' classifications across all disciplines. However, the current results remain purely descriptive, as no statistical comparison was conducted to determine whether differences between sports branches are statistically significant or merely reflect differences in sample size. While Pencak Silat, Karate, and Tarung Derajat show higher frequencies in the very good category, these findings cannot be interpreted as evidence of superior psychological development without between-branch analysis such as ANOVA or Kruskal–Wallis testing.

Importantly, the interpretation should avoid attributing high self-confidence to the success of training programs, as no data were collected regarding formal mental training interventions, duration, or evaluation periods. The findings indicate a generally high level of confidence among athletes; however, the underlying mechanisms, such as coaching style,

competition exposure, or psychological skills training, remain unexplained and require further investigation.

Aggressive

Table 2. Distribution of aggressiveness categories by sport

Criteria	Category	Branch Sports									
		Judo	Karate	Kempo	Judo	Pencaksilat	Taekwondo	Judo	Tinju	Wushu	Judo
60 ≤	Very Good	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
50 ≤ 60	Good	2	5	2	8	3	0	2	7	3	0
40 ≤ 50	Moderate	18	11	14	19	17	14	16	19	17	2
30 ≤ 40	Poor	32	39	31	28	33	27	46	28	15	27
< 30	Very Poor	0	8	8	5	3	7	1	5	7	15

The aggressiveness variable presents a contrasting pattern, with most athletes classified in the poor and moderate categories. Only a very small proportion of athletes reached the good or very good levels, indicating that adaptive aggressiveness is underdeveloped across most disciplines. However, the interpretation of “low aggressiveness” requires clarification, as the results do not distinguish between maladaptive low aggression and controlled or regulated aggression, which may be culturally reinforced in certain martial arts.

In addition, Table 2 contains labelling inconsistencies, with several branches (e.g., Judo and Boxing/Tinju) appearing repeatedly or misaligned across columns. These inconsistencies must be corrected to ensure accurate interpretation. Furthermore, statements linking aggressiveness to socioeconomic conditions are unsupported, as no socioeconomic variables were measured in this study and should therefore be removed from the results narrative.

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Motivation

Table 3. Distribution of motivation categories by sport

Criteria	Category	Branch Sports									
		Judo	Karate	Kempo	Judo	Pencaksilat	Taekwondo	Judo	Tinju	Wushu	Judo
60 ≤	Very Good	12	26	17	18	25	19	20	17	12	1
50 ≤ 60	Good	34	32	24	35	29	26	45	36	25	38
40 ≤ 50	Moderate	6	5	11	7	2	2	0	7	5	5
30 ≤ 40	Poor	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
< 30	Very Poor	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

The motivation variable demonstrates a highly favorable distribution, with the majority of athletes classified in the good and very good categories across disciplines. Nevertheless, the current analysis does not differentiate between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, limiting the interpretive depth of these findings. Without examining motivational indicators separately, it is unclear whether high motivation stems from internal mastery orientation, external rewards, or structural factors such as competition frequency.

Notably, Kempo and Yongmoodo exhibit greater variability, including the presence of athletes in lower motivational categories. This variation warrants contextual explanation, such as differences in training intensity, competition level, or institutional support, which are not addressed in the present results.

Need Competition

Table 4. Distribution of need competition categories by sport

Criteria	Category	Branch Sports									
		Judo	Karate	Kempo	Judo	Pencaksilat	Taekwondo	Judo	Tinju	Wushu	Judo
60 ≤	Very Good	6	12	4	12	9	1	1	12	4	0
50 ≤ 60	Good	28	19	26	17	27	23	35	17	19	8
40 ≤ 50	Moderate	13	24	21	28	18	24	26	28	15	25
30 ≤ 40	Poor	5	8	1	3	3	0	3	3	4	11
< 30	Very Poor	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

The distribution of competitive need reveals a balance between the good and moderate categories, with a smaller proportion of athletes reaching the very good level. Although this pattern suggests generally adequate competitive drive, the term "good and sufficient balance" should be interpreted cautiously. The absence of a dominant, very good category

across branches indicates that competitive drive has not yet reached an optimal level for many athletes.

Differences between sports—such as the higher competitive orientation in Tarung Derajat compared with Karate or Boxing—should be interpreted in light of branch-specific competition culture and match intensity, rather than as uniform psychological tendencies. These distinctions are descriptive and not statistically tested.

Analysis of Martial Arts

Table 5. Overview of four psychological variables in martial artists

Criteria	Category	Self Confidence		Criteria	Category	Agresive		Criteria	Category	Motivation		Criteria	Category	Need Competition	
		Total	Percentage			Total	Percentage			Total	Percentage			Total	Percentage
80 ≤	Very Good	87	15,93	60 ≤	Very Good	2	0,37	60 ≤	Very Good	167	30,59	60 ≤	Very Good	61	11,17
67 ≤ 80	Good	385	70,51	50 ≤ 60	Good	32	5,86	50 ≤ 60	Good	324	59,34	50 ≤ 60	Good	219	40,11
53 ≤ 67	Moderate	73	13,37	40 ≤ 50	Moderate	147	26,92	40 ≤ 50	Moderate	50	9,16	40 ≤ 50	Moderate	222	40,66
40 ≤ 53	Poor	1	0,18	30 ≤ 40	Poor	306	56,04	30 ≤ 40	Poor	3	0,55	30 ≤ 40	Poor	41	7,51
< 40	Very Poor	0	-	< 30	Very Poor	59	10,81	< 30	Very Poor	2	0,37	< 30	Very Poor	3	0,55

The combined analysis shows that self-confidence, motivation, and need for competition are predominantly classified as good or very good, whereas aggressiveness is concentrated in the poor and moderate categories. However, the results do not include correlation analysis to examine relationships between variables, such as whether high motivation coexists with low aggressiveness or whether confidence moderates competitive drive.

Additionally, the basis for score categorisation (cut-off values) is not explained in the results section. The rationale for thresholds such as “80 = very good” should be clarified in relation to the scoring scale and validation framework. Without this explanation, categorical interpretations remain descriptive rather than analytically grounded.

DISCUSSION

The pattern of aggressiveness revealed in this study looks notably different from the trends normally documented in full-contact combat sports. More than half of the athletes scored in the low group, although

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this trend should not be taken as a straightforward deficit. In many Balinese martial arts communities, trainers encourage discipline, emotional restraint, and respectful conduct throughout training. Such cultural norms naturally impact how athletes display aggressiveness in training and competition. Evidence from Southeast Asian martial arts traditions also demonstrates that cultural norms emphasizing harmony and self-control often moderate overt expressions of hostility in sport settings (Azam et al., 2021; Kurniawan, 2021).

Crucially, the measure utilized in this study examines adaptive aggressiveness, defined as deliberate, controlled, and task-oriented assertiveness rather than unrestrained anger. Therefore, low scores represent a socially reinforced desire for emotional regulation rather than psychological underdevelopment. This explanation coincides with recent findings suggesting that athletes from cultures with strong collectivist or harmony-oriented norms tend to demonstrate reduced overt aggressiveness but higher strategic discipline during competition (Lafuente et al., 2021; Rukmana et al., 2024).

Competitive format further explains this profile. In semi-contact or point-based systems such as Karate WKF, Taekwondo WT, and Wushu, excessive violence typically results in penalties or reduced scoring efficiency. Studies repeatedly reveal that athletes in semi-contact disciplines exhibit significantly lower levels of competitive aggressiveness compared to competitors in full-contact sports (Ambroży et al., 2024; Basiaga-Pasternak et al., 2020; Vega et al., 2025). This trend reflects the tactical needs of the sport rather than a lack of psychological preparation.

Without separating athletes based on contact level, the present data should be considered as representing varied competitive orientations. In short, the lower aggressiveness ratings reported among Balinese athletes are likely moulded by a combination of cultural training norms, sport-specific rule structures, and strategic demands, not merely a psychological deficiency.

Motivation appeared as the strongest and most consistent psychological quality across the sample, with more than 90% of athletes put in the good or very good categories. Even so, great motivation should not be understood as a homogeneous psychological state. The markers utilized in this study such as dedication to training, desire for development, and tenacity during challenging sessions reflect merely general motivational tendencies. They do not discern whether athletes are pushed largely by internal motivations (e.g., personal mastery, enjoyment) or extrinsic mechanisms such as scholarship programs, selection procedures, or the dense competition calendars typical of Pencak Silat, Karate, Tarung Derajat, and Muay Thai. Recent research in combat sports has demonstrated that motivational levels generally rise in situations characterised by regular internal tournaments, transparent selection systems, and institutional reward mechanisms (Mojtahedi et al., 2023; Wulf & Lewthwaite, 2021). This structural influence likely adds to the considerable motivation reported in these branches.

By contrast, the somewhat lower competitive need in Yongmoodo and Kempo is driven by a different set of environmental and internal causes. Beyond the limited number of annual tournaments, these branches often encounter less exposure to high-calibre opponents and typically maintain lower training intensity, especially in terms of sparring volume, compared to full-contact sports. Sport-specific cultural norms also play a role: Kempo emphasizes technical perfection and kata-style training, while Yongmoodo prioritizes grappling sequences and controlled throwing rather than continuous conflict. These traits may generate athletes who are technically competent but less inspired by competitive conflict. Studies in Japanese and Korean martial arts reinforce this pattern, revealing that sparring intensity and contact level highly predict athletes' competitive attitude and readiness to engage in high-pressure bouts (Mojtahedi et al., 2023; Pulungan et al., 2024).

The combined psychological profile of high self-confidence and desire, moderate competitive drive, and comparatively low adaptive

aggressiveness highlights clear distinctions within martial arts disciplines. This underscores the necessity for inter-branch statistical comparisons, such as ANOVA or the Kruskal-Wallis test, to evaluate whether observed differences are statistically significant rather than solely the result of uneven sample distributions. Correlation analyses between variables (e.g., motivation, aggression, confidence, and competitive drive) would also provide deeper insight into whether particular patterns naturally cluster within various combat sport ecosystems. Without these analytical procedures, interpretations should remain descriptive.

It is also crucial to remember that dependence on self-report instruments includes the potential for desirability bias. This form of bias not only inflates self-confidence and motivation scores but may also skew the relative comparisons between variables, making psychological qualities appear more aligned or more divergent than they actually are. Therefore, the correlations among confidence, motivation, and aggression must be viewed cautiously.

Moving forward, discipline-specific interventions are needed, particularly for the characteristics identified as weakest: adaptive aggressiveness and competitive need. Evidence-based programs could include high-intensity competition simulations for full-contact branches (e.g., Tarung Derajat, Boxing, Muay Thai), arousal-regulation and emotional control modules from Psychological Skills Training (Weinberg & Gould, 2019), and assertiveness-based tactical drills for point-based sports such as Karate and Taekwondo. Structured competition-exposure programs such as systematic participation in regional open tournaments may help boost competitive drive, especially in Kempo and Yongmoodo. Tailoring these therapies to branch-specific demands corresponds with current recommendations in combat sport psychology, which emphasize that mental preparation must mirror the technical and tactical realities of each discipline (Ambroży et al., 2024; Chiu et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that martial arts athletes in Bali Province display high levels of self-confidence and motivation, yet adaptive aggression and competitive drive remain comparatively poor. Moreover, 86% of athletes scored in the good to very good range for confidence and motivation, although over 56% showed poor adaptive aggression, and competitive drive clustered mostly at moderate levels. This discrepancy implies that psychological preparation is unequal and that strong confidence does not necessarily translate into assertiveness or competitive involvement.

Given these findings, technical and physical preparation alone cannot properly represent competition readiness in combat sports. Although disparities between martial arts disciplines show the influence of training conditions and competition exposure, the descriptive design and reliance on self-report measures limit causal inference.

Overall, the results provide a clear baseline of psychological strengths and vulnerabilities. A significant result is the necessity for focused psychological interventions, particularly to increase adaptive aggressiveness and competitive drive so that these weaker components can develop alongside athletes' existing confidence and desire.

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