Chapter 1

# Gendered Mobilities: Towards an Holistic Understanding

Tim Cresswell and Tanu Priya Uteng



## Introduction

Mobilities[1] have truly become the hallmark of modern times. But how this hallmark is experienced and represented is far from stable. On the one hand it is positively coded as progress, freedom or modernity itself; on the other hand it brings to mind issues of restricted movement, vigilance and control. Through these dimensions of freedom and control, the understanding of 'mobilities' has offered a cohesive way of viewing the highly globalised/mobilised world we inhabit today. As Lash and Urry (1994, 252) put it, 'modern society is a society on the move'. Similar ideas have been professed in disciplines ranging from philosophy, physics and astronomy to film, photography, architecture and urban planning. However, on our overtly optimistic journey towards progress, we have finally come to terms with the reality of our limits. We have no choice but to pay heed to the threats of climate change and its direct linkage with various aspects of mobility. Consumption, and its connections to mobility, needs to be revisited. Given such contradictory outlooks on the theme, mobility has become a most elusive theoretical, social, technical and political construct. In order to deal with it in a systematic way, it is necessary to revisit the implications of mobility in a holistic manner.

Understanding the ways in which *mobilities* and *gender* intersect is undoubtedly complex given that both concepts are infused with meaning, power and contested understandings. The concept of gender does not operate in a 'binary' form. It is never given but constructed through performative reiteration. The resultant interpretations of gender are also historically, geographically, culturally and politically different, enabling a certain slippage between the different realms in terms of how genders are 'read'. This point is central to an analysis of how mobilities enables/disables/modifies gendered practices. We can use mobility both as an *archive* and *present*

1 Urry (2004, 28) emphasises the need to separate out rather carefully the nature of the five highly interdependent 'mobilities' that form and reform social life, bearing in mind the massive inequalities in structured access to each of these:

1. Corporeal travel of people for work, leisure, family life, pleasure, migration, and escape.
2. Physical movement of *objects* delivered to producers, consumers, and retailers.
3. Imaginative travel elsewhere through images of places and people on television.
4. Virtual travel often in real time on the internet, so transcending geographical and social distance.
5. Communicative travel through person-to-person messages via letters, telephone, fax, and mobile phone.

*indictor* of discourses, practices, identities, questions, conflicts and contestations to understand its gendered nuances.

The principle aim of this book is to bring the insights of the current 'mobility turn' in the social sciences to bear on these connections between mobilities and gender. Thinking of mobility holistically, we suggest, allows us to see gender on the move from a different and illuminating angle. It brings research and writing formally held apart into conversation through the connecting strand of mobility, which is but one way of theorising the connections between gender and spatiality.

There are many ways in which gender is spatially produced. Perhaps the most commented on is the binary of public and private which has been mapped on to masculine and feminine, man and woman, in clearly delineated ways and been brought into question by any number of feminist theorists. Here gender is defined, at least in part, spatially – through a geographical image. Another key spatial coding for gender, and the one that lies at the heart of this book, is the dialectics of fixity and flow – of place and mobility. By mobility we mean not only geographical movement but also the potential for undertaking movements (motility) as it is lived and experienced – movement and motility plus meaning plus power. Understanding mobility thus means understanding observable physical movement, the meanings that such movements are encoded with, the experience of practicing these movements and the potential for undertaking these movements. Each of these aspects of mobility – movement, meaning, practice and potential – has histories and geographies of gendered difference. Each of these is in some way constructed in a gendered way and each, in turn, contributes to the production, reproduction and contestation of gender itself. How people move (where, how fast, how often etc.) is demonstrably gendered and continues to reproduce gendered power hierarchies. The meanings given to mobility through narrative, discourse and representation have also been clearly differentiated by gender. Similarly, narratives of mobility and immobility play a central role in the constitution of gender as a social and cultural construct. Finally, mobilities are experienced and practiced differently. Acquiring mobility is often analogous to a struggle for acquiring new subjectivity. This reality is in a continuous state of flux, leading to the changing of contours in the relationships between gender, mobilities and shifting subjectivity. Consider just a few of the arenas in which gender and mobilities intersect.

To begin with, we might think of the mechanics of human (and animal) reproduction. Emily Martin considers the language of scientific textbooks describing the human reproductive process. In particular she notes how the mobility of sperm has been described with awe while the relatively stationary egg has been equated with passivity. 'It is remarkable how "femininely" the egg behaves and how "masculinely" the sperm. The egg is seen as large and passive. It does not *move* or *journey*, but passively "is transported," "is swept," or even "drifts" along the fallopian tube' (Martin, 1991, 489). This contrasts with the language used to describe the sperm, which are described as fast, mobile, active and streamlined. Only recently has medical science indicated that the relatively stationary egg might be an active partner in the reproductive process (Martin, 1991). Here, as so often, masculinity is coded as mobile and active while femininity is coded as relatively stationary and passive.

Next consider bodily movements. Iris Marion Young, on noting how male and female students used their bodies while engaged in throwing a ball, or walking with books, concluded that they moved in such a way that they focused in on themselves rather than being focused in an outward way on the world (Young, 1990). Boys, when throwing a ball, would use their whole body to launch the ball towards its target while girls would generally use just the arm. The rest of the body would remain stationary. This inhibited mobility, she argued, meant that girls and women were unable to be the phenomenological 'body-subject' of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) but remained a 'body-object'. Or, consider Bourdieu's observations of the different ways in which men and women walked in a Kabyle village in Algeria.

> The man of honour walks at a steady, determined pace. His walk, that of a man who knows where he is going and knows he will get there on time, whatever the obstacles, expresses strength and resolution, as opposed to the hesitant gait (...) announcing indecision, half-hearted promises (...) the fear of commitments and inability to fulfil them. It is a measured pace, contrasting as much with the haste of the man who 'walks with great strides', like a 'dancer', as with the sluggishness of the man who 'trails along'. (Bourdieu, 1990, 70)

Here, as with Young, it is not just a suggestion of women as static and men as mobile that is striking, but the different ways in which mobility is embodied and enacted. Feminine mobilities are different from masculine ones. What's more, this difference acts to reaffirm and reproduce the power relations that produced these differences in the first place.

Similarly, research on gendered travel behaviour patterns have established their spatial variations. Feminist geographers and others have long insisted that analysis of daily travel patterns between home and work cannot be gender blind and that there are very significant differences between the longer distance and more direct daily travel patterns of men in the modern west and the more complicated but shorter distance travel patterns of women who not only go to work but often have to drop children off with schools and childcare as well as dealing with shopping, medical visits and a long list of other, typically feminised, routine events (Law, 1999; Hanson and Pratt, 1995). Studies establish that gender-differentiated roles related to familial maintenance activities place a greater burden on women relative to men in fulfilling these roles resulting in significant differences in *trip purpose, trip distance, transport mode* and *other aspects of travel behaviour* (which includes *different times*, to *different locations* over *different distances*) (Erickson, 1977; Andrews, 1978; Hanson and Hanson, 1981; Howe and O'Connor, 1982; Fagnani, 1983; Fox, 1983; Pas, 1984).

More women than men use public transport, yet this relationship is never explored beyond the domain of transport planning. It has never received attention as an artifact or augmentation as an infrastructure anywhere comparable to that of the car as an object of desire and roads (and other related infrastructure) as a means of catering to freedom. The relationship between men and cars is well known (in the UK there is even a free digital channel called 'Men and Motors'!). Virginia Scharff, in her book *Taking the Wheel*, explored the history of women as drivers, noting the long-standing association between masculinity and driving and the difficulties women faced when taking to the road (Scharff, 1991). Indeed, the early history of

the automobile in the United States was marked by attempts to provide alternative and slower means of automobility for women. Foremost amongst these was the electric car. One automotive columnist, C.H. Claudy, believed that the electric car was perfect for women, offering them a safe vehicle with a limited radius, which was perfect for social and domestic tasks.

> What a delight it is to have a machine which she can run herself with no loss of dignity, for making calls, for shopping, for a pleasurable ride, for the paying back of some small social debt. (Quoted in Scharff, 1991, 41)

Compare this polite and slow feminised automobility to the predominantly masculine representations and practices of driving at the time where 'Cars served as private space. Only in private cars could proper middle-class men swear at complete strangers. Men smoked as they pleased in cars. They rapidly became spaces for sexual conquest. Driving, even in traffic, could be made competitive and aggressive, a false bravado' (McShane, 1994).

One of the most significant forms of mobility in the modern world is tourism. The roots of modern western world tourism in the renaissance 'Grand Tour' are well known. This tour was a thoroughly masculine endeavour and elements of that masculinity remain in tourist mobilities that are often conceived of as frontier-like activities of exploration and conquest. The feminist scholar, Cynthia Enloe, has commented on the masculinity of tourism (even when conducted by women). She has also underlined the central role of women in an industry where 75% of workers are underpaid and female and which has long been associated with sex and prostitution.

> It is not simply that ideas about pleasure, travel, escape, bed-making and sexuality have affected women in rich and poor countries. The very structure of international tourism *needs* patriarchy to survive. (Enloe, 1989, 41)

Enloe also notes the long history of women travelers in the pre-tourist age. Privileged travelers like Mary Kingsley who set off from England to Africa in 1892 and traveled throughout the continent, for much of the time without a male escort. Many male explorers felt that their world was being trespassed but Kingsley became extremely popular on the lecture circuit between her travels. While she was breaking gendered codes of mobility she was simultaneously reproducing imperialist codes of mobility as she recounted her travels in the 'dark continent' (Blunt, 1994). Gender and mobility are inextricably linked with other formations of power including class, ethnicity and imperialism.

Consider research. Feminist geographic studies of migration reveal that women's migration decisions and experiences are distinct from men's in that women weigh both reproductive and productive labour demands (Silvey, 2000; Radcliffe, 1991; Chant, 1992; Lawson, 1995). A review of immigration literature reveals that scholars who do not place women's subsistence work at the centre of their analysis construct home/host dualistic arguments that oversimplify women's experiences from transnational mobilities. Kibria (1990) further notes that although some scholars do acknowledge that the migration experience does not seriously challenge

patriarchal domination, much of their argument is still framed around the idea that host societies provide greater freedom for women than their home countries. The market/family dichotomy seems to be implicit in the home/host binary framework when scholars argue that, because it provides more paid work opportunities, the host society offers women more freedom than the home country (Lamphere, 1986). Both dichotomies do not fully consider the complexity of women's experiences and cultural differences. Morokvasic (1993) demonstrates the disadvantaged position that immigrant and minority women occupy in the European labour markets. 'While migrants, both male and female, often experience a decline in their occupational status, with migration to Europe, women's position is generally worse than men's. This reflects the restructuring of female-dominated employment sectors, involved as unpaid workers in family businesses, limited employment opportunities due to their legal status as 'dependants', and employers' perceptions of their skills' (Willis and Yeoh, 2000, xiv). Such analysis leave us with questions relating to women's capacity for empowerment as amplified or jeopardised in an era of rapidly intensifying global interdependencies and transnational mobility. We are yet to see a clear exposition of how gender and mobilities intersect to create shifting subjectivity from the perspectives of spatial mobility.

It is also important to bear in mind, however, that these general observations have been constantly contested. Women have always been on the move. Mary Kingsley's explorations in Africa, however complicated by class and imperialism, remind us that women have constantly upset gendered expectations about who moves, how they move and where they move. This is perhaps summed up by a bumper sticker that Cynthia Enloe noticed stuck to the backs of cars around the United States which read: 'Good girls go to heaven, bad girls go everywhere.'

Even this very brief wander through different scales and forms of mobility reveals how gender both constitutes mobility and is constituted by mobility in a myriad of ways. This happens both through the opposition of relative flow and relative fixity, where masculinity is coded as mobile and femininity as static, and through the construction of different kinds of mobility that exist in relation to one another (the tourist and the domestic servant for instance). It should be clear from the different realms of research outlined above that many people, in different disciplines, have something to say about the relationship between gender and mobility. What is less clear, however, is if connections have been made across different instances and scales of movement to consider mobilities more generally. The recent mobility turn, or new mobilities paradigm (Sheller and Urry, 2006), in the social sciences and humanities provides a framework to correct this oversight. While transport studies, or history, or migration theory, for instance, all have something to say about things and people on the move, they have tended to fix on particular kinds of mobility without considering mobilities itself in the wider context. One purpose of this book is to bring these approaches into conversation.

This book builds on a need for an exposition of how theories, social norms, technologies and policies come together to carve out differentiated mobilities. This book, by no means, covers all the diverse perspectives needed to generate a coherent picture of gendered mobilities. However it is an ambition to bring the insights of the mobility turn to bear on the question of the processes of gender production

in the mobile world in four distinct ways. The first way it does this is to consider different mobilities in different contexts alongside each other. This allows us to see the interactions of gender and mobility at different scales. The second way is to consider different aspects of mobility. Mobility involves the physical movements, which are observable and representable in maps and models. These are the kinds of mobilities traditionally considered by transport planners and migration modelers. Mobility also involves the meanings associated with movement – the narratives and discourses that make movement make sense culturally. These are the aspects of mobility usually considered by philosophers, literary theorists or academics in cultural studies. And mobility involves practice – the embodied and experienced aspects of moving explored in, for instance, performance studies. The third way is through a combination of styles of research that include theoretical, largely empirical and more applied and policy orientated contributions. There is much to be gained from bringing these approaches into dialogue.

The final way is through the diversity of contributors to this book. They come from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds and consider the interactions of gender and mobilities at many scales, from the body to the globe. They also represent a geographical diversity of scholarship, much of it from beyond the Anglo-American world. There is, perhaps, a tendency to see mobility as a high-tech achievement, a tendency that reflects the production of knowledge in the western, and particularly Anglo-American, context. Looking into mobilities in a wider context is a useful corrective to this.



## Dialogical reflections

The book is divided into three parts. The first part delves into theoretical constructs evolving from gendered patterns of mobilities. The chapters presented in this part cover a wide range of issues and highlight the complexity of mobility. Ranging from motherhood and risk mobilities on the one hand to misguided spatial models on the other, this part provides a theoretical palate of diverging points of view. David Kronlid's insights on the relationship between mobility and 'moral agency' from a feminist philosophical standpoint in Chapter 2 compel us to question the unexamined facets of the Capability Approach propounded by the Nobel Laureate, Amartya Sen. David Kronlid argues that we should regard social/spatial/existential mobility as a distinct capability, which will have important consequences for research concerning justice and gender in a number of research areas. Sheela Subramanian frames Chapter 3 around the issues of racialised and gendered mobilities and warns us that any laxity in considering spaces and bodies as themselves constituted through race and gender runs the risk of reproducing the very oppression that we attempt to destabilise when we write about them. She borrows from the writings of Judith Butler and Frantz Fanon to explore the recent works on racialised and gendered mobility by anti-racist feminist Canadian scholar, Sherene Razack. The power and politics of mobilities and how space intersects in shaping them is once again reinforced by the arguments of this chapter. Chapter 4 brings a refreshingly new outlook on the intersection of motherhood, risk and everyday mobilities. Lesley Murray highlights how the

mothering culture and risk experience are dependent on mobilities as the mobile society is shaped by gender and risk. She further argues that cultures of mothering are not only determined by ideology but through everyday risk and mobility practices. She captures the hidden nuances of how motherhood and automobility intersect in producing 'good' and 'bad' mothers:

> Within some white middle class cultures the car is a coping strategy, a way of overcoming risk and a symbol of good mothering. For others the only way to avoid risk is to remain relatively immobile, thus complying with local cultures of mothering predicated on risk aversion. There can be little doubt that mothering, along with other aspects of gender, is definitively shaped by mobility and its riskiness and in turn that changing intensities of mobility are determining what it is to be a mother.

Michaela Fay explores in Chapter 5 how mobility is experienced, reflected upon and created in the construction of togetherness and belonging in feminist online networks. Based on her research findings of a cyber-ethnographic analysis of the International Women's University and its participants, she argues that such networks, as well as the body of feminist theory, can be seen as a useful tool in order to understand contemporary mobility, which, especially in the context of the academy, increasingly spans geographical movement as well as the crossing of established theoretical and political boundaries. She underpins how an analysis and further elaboration of the interplay between these two modes can have a fruitful input into understanding the concept of mobility itself. Nadine Cattan in Chapter 6 highlights the importance of considering gender in the construction of spatial concepts and the interpretation of spatial behaviour of populations. She further shows how by conveying a conception of space in movement, fluid, unbounded and unfixed, the concept of mobility deconstructs the classical perception of distance and scale. The conclusions are based on an assessment of spatial theories and case studies of student mobility in Europe and home-workplace mobility in the Paris metropolitan area. In the concluding chapter of this section, Anette Jerup Jørgensen intervenes in the discussion on automobility through a challenging and new perspective. She investigates the gendered distinctions in the context of how drivers relate to one another and to legal regulation in traffic. She concludes that male and female drivers have different approaches to automobility and its risks, to the negotiations of what is morally acceptable behaviour, and also to automobile communication in traffic interaction, which is to a great extent dependent on socially constructed gendered ideas in the society.



## How and why are mobilities gendered?

The second part of the book looks into case studies drawn from around the globe to answer the questions of how and why mobilities are gendered. It is well accepted now that the production of some kinds of mobilities (that is automobility) often creates immobilities for others (that is public transport users with limited supply, frequency etc.). We are inundated with facts and data regarding the mobility-poor, socially excluded groups of people. Such reports are often restricted to answering how such

groups are mobility-poor but only a few digress to touch the messy question of why they are mobility-poor. Restricting ourselves to looking into the gendered aspect of mobility differentiation, the chapters in this section attempt to answer both 'how' and 'why' questions. In the first chapter of this section, Elisabeth Scheibelhofer looks into how gender still matters and to a great extent dictates the mobility aspirations of European scientists working abroad. She compares the personal relations of mobile women from a developed country with the pitfalls associated with the mobile lives of women from developing countries revealing differences as well as similarities: the family's economic well-being or personal-political freedom is not the most pressing motivation to lead a mobile life, as is frequently the case in transnational mobility from developing countries. Prima facie, mobile scientists from Western European countries are in general less restricted by visa regulations, economic hardship or discriminatory practices. However, the gendered care for social relations still ascribed to women can play a key role when looking at mobilities of women from Western Europe, as her study demonstrates. Chapter 9, titled 'I'm more sexy here...', looks into the ethnographies of travel illuminating the specificities and complexities of how women assert a sexual identity and agency through contemporary touristic mobilities. Susan Frohlick's analysis of the narratives of Western female travellers in Costa Rica highlights nuances of gendered mobilities in which sexual agency and desire give new meanings to the intersection of place, image, norms, moral agency and mobilities. Her concluding sentence entices our view of gendered mobilities 'multiple travel mobilities incite the expression of a "mobile sexuality", where one can feel "more sexy" on one side of a border than the other'! From here on, we follow a string of four chapters dedicated to analysing different facets of interaction between transport and gendered mobility patterns. From the 1960s onwards, research in transportation and planning carved out a new and focused direction under the umbrella of 'gender and transport'. Attention to transport offered a way to link discussions of gender relations, transport systems, public and private spaces, accessibility, and the spatial and temporal organisation of human activity (Law, 1999, 567). However, Law (1999) notes that the field is still largely defined in terms of travel behaviour and policy, eventually stagnated by a relatively limited range of themes (primarily a singular focus on women's typically shorter worker trips). Could this have occurred because of a biased comprehension of mobilities of which transport is just the revealed part?

The understanding that eluded transport planners and geographers equally for a considerable period of time is that the frame within which 'transport' operationalises lies in the broader context of mobilities. Though transport and mobility are very often used in a synonymous manner, they have distinct connotations. Mobility is a contextualised phenomenon whereas transport is just the revealed part of it. The concept of mobility entails the 'potential aspect' thus possessing an inherent knowledge of the potential trips that are/were *not* made due to constraining factor(s) (social, cultural, technological, infrastructural, political and financial). Concurring with the way Law (1999, 568) envisages it, a better way to address 'gender and transport' is through reframing the issues of transport as part of a larger project, namely, analysing the social, cultural, technological, infrastructural, political and financial geographies of mobility. Chapters 10, 11, 12 and 13 have attempted to

move in this direction. In Chapter 10, Sumeeta Srinivasan uses the travel diary data for Chengdu, China and Chennai, India to highlight the differences in spatial patterns of accessibility of low-income women and men. Writing against the transport planners' most sought-after solution of constructing new roads or overpasses as a way of lowering overall travel times, she emphasises the need to improve local accessibility through neighbourhood level planning. She reinstates the imperatives drawn from environmental, social and economic perspectives, stating that a primary goal of transport planning should be to improve the accessibility of low-income households and women, who have to walk or bike for both work and non-work activities. Nite Tanzarn, in Chapter 11, explores ways in which gender structures women's and men's mobility patterns in metropolitan Uganda. She further examines how transportation structures and systems create, reproduce and sustain systemic differences in material circumstances between women and men and reinforce women's exclusion and subordination. She gives voice to similar problems afflicting the entire developing world where the knowledge that improving women's mobility and access has the potential to transform the prevailing unequal gender relations is finally gaining ground. The chapter also argues that whereas space is not intrinsically gendered, the inequitable positioning of women in society structures women's and men's utilisation of urban space over time often resulting in exclusion based on gender. In Chapter 12, Petter Næss broaches upon the influences of urban structure on travel. In the widely discussed sustainable city models, this aspect has not been given adequate attention and needs further detailing. Petter Næss highlights that the attempts made in the 1980s to open a gender equality debate within the field of transportation was pioneering, as the 'feminine' urban model emphasised proximity between the different facilities of the city as a strategy where the inhabitants would not have to choose between a high car dependency and constrained opportunities for choice. He concludes that both from a feminist and sustainability perspective, such an urban developmental path should be encouraged. Chapter 13 presents some insights from Norway on the problem which Doreen Massey frames in the following way: 'every time someone uses a car, and thereby increases their own mobility, they reduce both the social rationale and the financial viability of the public transport system – and thereby also potentially reduce the mobility of those who rely on that system' (Massey, 1994, 150). Through touching various related issues ranging from environment and space allocation to distribution of household responsibilities, Randi Hjorthol concludes that the study of men's and women's daily travel patterns can be seen as a 'barometer' of the degree of equality between men and women in society. She adds that even if the number of trips has increased for women during the period of analysis so this is now on the same level as for men, women have a much more limited 'space of action' than men in Norway, which might restrict their choice in the labour market and thus retain the differences.



## Seeking grounds for future policies

The third and concluding part of the book attempts to highlight some interdisciplinary ideas that have high relevance for policy making. Policies governing information

technology and transport as well as urban planning and design can have a direct and immediate impact on the gendered access to opportunities and consequently carve out sustainable mobilities. In Chapter 14, Tommi Inkinen takes us through the interaction of gender and technology executed through a backdrop of Finnish information society policy. The chapter examines the ways in which the social dimension has been taken into account and its intersection with gender issues in the latest policy documents. His reality check confirms the hypothesis concerning the invisibility of gender in information society strategies. His assessment reveals that the present information society needs a constant involvement with the dimensions of work-life conditions, social equality resulting in safer environments and appreciation of everyday practices, as well as recognition of 'small' things in the creation of policy guidance. From Finland to another Scandinavian country, Sweden, in Chapter 15 Merrit Polk reviews the last five years of 'ineffectual' attempts to mainstream gender in the Swedish transport sector. The chapter gives us a flavour of the pitfalls in the process and the finer details to be borne in mind while undertaking similar policy making efforts. Touching upon the issue of politics and power of mobility, she advises that within transport policy, structural and organisational distributions of power must be analysed and dealt with separately from differences in individual needs and values. She underlines that the goal is to understand the practical repercussions of the masculinity/technology black box on the empirical context of the transport sector and technology as such, and analyses what impact this has for achieving gender equality. The chapter concludes by identifying the gaps in the theoretical and empirical research that is needed to achieve this end. In Chapter 16, Clara Greed revisits the concept of sustainability and emphasises the need to take gender considerations into account in all aspects of urban and transportation planning policies. The chapter weaves its conclusions through taking myriad examples predominantly drawn from the Anglo-American tradition of urban planning. The chapter reinstates the direction shown by Petter Næss in Chapter 12 which points towards the 'city of everyday life', which can be defined as the city of short distances, mixed land uses and multiple centres as the ideal objective that would fully take into account gender considerations. She contends that such a city structure would reduce the need to travel, be more accessible and sustainable, whilst creating higher quality of urban environment for all. In the Epilogue, Mimi Sheller recapitulates mobilities by touching upon its gendered discourses, geographies and technologies. She asserts the importance of gender in the planning, design, and practice of sustainable mobilities. Reverting back to the limits of our consumption, she posits that the solution to contemporary problems of mobility will not be found without sustained attention to women's and men's differential mobilities, to the gendering of design and planning processes, and to the gendered underpinnings of discourses of mobility.



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