The Role of Girls as Mothers in *Harry Potter* Series

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the role of the female characters in *Harry Potter* series. It aims to find out the ways the female characters, Hermione Granger, Ginny Weasley, and Luna Lovegood take a mother role for Harry, whereas they are in their teenage years. Using Barthes' theory on myths, this study identifies that there are two myths that are in operation, the myth that girls are supposed to be mothers and the myth that mothers are supposed to protect, nurture, and educate. As the agents of the myths, the three teenage girls willingly take their role as mothers role that are assigned to them. These three female characters take their roles as mothers to Harry in how they protect, nurture, and educate Harry. In response to this, Harry also succumbs to the position of being protected, nurtured and educated by these three girls. Despite Rowling's claims on her being a feminist when she said that "I've always considered myself as a feminist" (Rowling, 2011), she cannot escape the myths on girls and women. Rowling sees that being a mother is the most powerful role for girls and women.

Keywords: Myths; Girl's role; Mother's roles; Protectors; Nurturers; Mentors.

INTRODUCTION

When we are talking about fantasy genre, the first thing that comes to mind is the *Harry Potter* series. *Harry Potter* series started in 1997, and it received much more attention after its first (out of eight) film adaptation was released in 2001. The films' popularity only caused the fandom to grow even bigger. In 2014, as recorded by Scholastic, the books have been translated to 68 languages ("Meet Author J.K. Rowling," n.d.). Fans' enthusiasm was beyond explosive that bookstores started to hold pre-order events that allowed fans to order the book before it was released. This method turned out to be a huge success, with *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* breaking the pre-order record. It managed to reach 1.000.000 copies of orders during its pre-order week ("Potter Pre-orders Smash All Records," 2007). Now, pre-order system has become a routine for best-selling series. This series tells the story of an 11 year-old wizard named Harry who has to kill Lord Voldemort, his biggest enemy, in order to save the magic world from evil. Throughout his adventure, Harry meets many obstacles, from the constant attack from Voldemort and his followers to the death of his loved ones. With the help of his close friends like Hermione Granger, Ron Weasley, Luna Lovegood, Neville Longbottom, and also his future wife Ginny Weasley, Harry is able to beat Voldemort and brings peace to the magic world.

As Harry is the hero of the series, his friends who help him to accomplish his quest usually is in his shadow, especially the female characters who contribute much to Harry's success compared to the male ones. They are all outstanding wizards; Hermione is extremely smart, Luna is very creative, and Ginny is exceptionally stronger and braver than most of other female wizards. Hermione teaches him spells and tricks to beat Lord Voldemort, and she is even willing to sacrifice herself when she destroys one of Voldemort's horcruxes. Luna is known as Harry's mentor as she often gives him ideas and hints that lead to his success. And the other character is Ginny who is willing to protect Harry at all costs. These three women are very loyal to him that they are willing to sacrifice their lives in order to help Harry win against Voldemort and as of them have their own plans and hopes for their future, but in the end they choose to fight for him. Harry also has close male friends, but they mostly act as equivalent male friends to him rather than fathers. The flaws of the male characters are often more visible and easier to detect than their positive ones. Ron Weasley is often emotionally immature and insecure, though he is able to be mature as the time goes and shows intelligence and bravery, especially during the war against Lord Voldmort. He leads the human chess game in order to help Harry find Professor Quirrell. He accompanies Harry on his missions though he is afraid, and he also destroys one of Voldemort's horcrux. Harry's other friend, Neville

Longbottom, is described as extremely clumsy and slow in learning at the beginning of the story. However, Neville shows the will to solve problems by himself; he tries to stop Harry, Hermione, and Ron from chasing Professor Quirrell because he does not want Gryffindor to suffer from another point deduction, he also insists to follow Harry in his journey to save Sirius Black from Lord Voldemort, and in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* he becomes the leader of the students' rebellion.

In one of her interviews for *Harry Potter & Deathly Hallows* DVD Special, Rowling claimed that she created strong and powerful female characters who were independent, strong, and skilful individuals. Rowling (2011) mentioned that a woman can fight just the same as a man can fight, a woman can do magic just as powerfully as a man can do magic. And I considered that I've written a lot well-rounded female characters in these books . . . . I've always considered myself as a feminist (Heyman, Barron, & Rowling, & Yates, 2011).

Despite this claim, she makes her female characters to focus their lives on the hero's success. Her female characters are put in a position where they are not allowed to chase their own dreams and fight for their own causes. More often than not, they are put in a position to act as Harry's helpers who put Harry's needs above theirs. Not only do they help Harry, but they also protect, nurture and educate Harry. I can safely assume that they take the role of mothers to Harry. This problem is what makes it interesting to discuss how the three female characters, Hermione Granger, Ginny Weasley, and Luna Lovegood, position themselves in their relations with Harry.

In order to discuss this assumption, it is important to understand myths revolving around motherhood. Myth is a concept or an opinion about something that the majority believes to be true (Iswidayati, 2006, p. 4). Roland Barthes, the author of Mythologies explained, "It is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters the message" (Barthes, 1972, p. 107). Myth removes history from language, causing people to believe things are true because "that is the way it is" (Robinson, 2011). Barthes uses Ferdinand de Saussure's two-part model of sign as the base of his theory. Saussure's defines a sign to consist of signifier and signified. Signifier is the form which the sign takes (it can be words, sound, or images) and signified is the concept it represents. The whole association of the signifier with the signified is what we call sign. Myth itself comes from a semiological chain which existed before it: it is a second-order system. A sign in

the first system, becomes a mere signifier in the second (Barthes, 1972, p. 113).
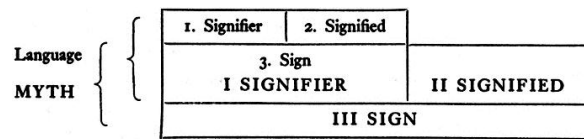
As depicted in the picture above, the first two-part is the Sausserean model. Once a signifier and a signified form a sign, this sign becomes a signifier. It has a new signified and later become a new sign, which is myth.

It must be understood that the female characters in *Harry Potter* series are described as girls in their early teens (eleven to seventeen year old). A girl, according to Oxford, is defined as a female child, a daughter, or a young girl. The word girl acts as a signifier on the first level, and the signified is the mental image of a female child. Girls are young children, but it does not mean that they do not have myths surrounding them. Goodnow (1988) stated that girls have been shown to perform traditionally feminine household tasks (cleaning the house, cooking) more than boys (as cited in Crouter, McHale, & Tucker, 1999, p. 2). There is a social construction that girls should be loving and nurturing, and it is supported by many things like clothes, television shows, and even toys. Girls are given dolls as toys and they are taught to take care of their dolls by feeding them, changing their clothes, and giving them attention. Gonzales-Mena (2006) noted that playing with blocks is considered giving experience in spatial relations and in mathematical concepts, where playing with dolls and dramatic role playing is associated with learning to be a nurturer (as cited in Power, 2011). Cook and Cook (2008) also described that girl soften receive ratings from others, and evaluate themselves, as more helpful, cooperative, and sympathetic (p. 363).

The fact that girls are shaped to be nurturing and to be able to do all things that mothers do makes it impossible not to link girls with mothers. According to Oxford, mother means a female in relation to her children. On the first level, the word mother acts as the signifier, and the signified is the mental image of a woman who has children. From the signifier and signified, we get a sign which is the concept of a mother. However, according to Barthes' theory, the concept of a mother later becomes a signifier that creates another sign which are the myths people believe in. Mother does not only mean a female parent, but also someone who gives the children love, attention, education, and security. The mother portrayed in this ideology is devoted to the care of others; she is self-sacrificing and not a subject with her own

needs and interests (Arendell, 1999, p. 5). A mother has to be able to survive all kinds of harsh conditions for the children, give the children unconditional love, and teach them things they need (Zipp, 2012).

In order to see girls' and mothers' myths more clearly, I have put their myths in the table below.

GIRLS	MOTHERS
Loving	Loving
Patient	Patient
Nurturing	Nurturing
Helpful	Protective
-	Educating

If we pay attention to the table above, it can be seen that girls and mothers share almost all of their myths.
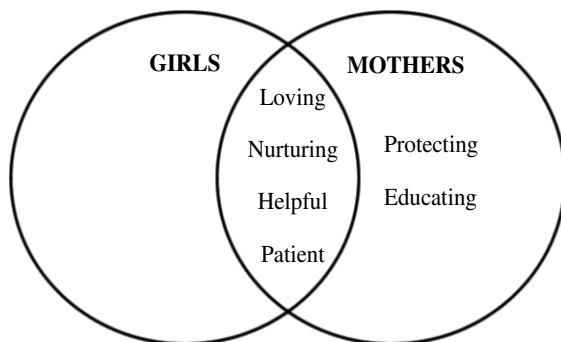
The myth of a girl and a mother, share similar characteristics, even though there is a huge age difference between girls (young children) and mothers (usually adult women), meaning that ever since they are young, girls are already conditioned to be mothers. Being loving, nurturing, or patient are exactly what their mothers do for them, shaping the belief that girls should become like their mothers, then embrace the same role when they grow up. Tarlow (1996) said, "Caring is part of the world of women" (as cited in Arendell, p. 3). McMahon also stated that "Mothering is a primary identity for adult women, and women's gender identity is reinforced by mothering" (as cited in Arendell, p. 4). This concept has been passed from generation to generation; it has been repeated over and over again that people believe is the truth. It becomes easy and natural for girls to take the mother role because they are already used to it ever since they are young. Thus the two myths about girls and mother that are intertwined would be utilized to analyze Hermione Granger's, Luna Lovegood's and Ginny Weasley's relationship with Harry Potter.

AS PROTECTORS

A mother acts as a protector by making sure that her child is not harmed, injured, or damaged. Protection can be shown in the form of sacrificing their relationship with other people and sacrificing their own lives. The first character who acts a protector for Harry is Ginny Weasley, Ron Weasley's little sister. She is described as being very shy around Harry, that she cannot even have a proper interaction because she is unable to carry herself in front Harry. She cannot behave normally and always appears very clumsy. However, when Harry is confronted by Draco Malfoy, she changes into a different person. She glares at Malfoy, "Leave him alone, he didn't want all that!" (Rowling, 1998, p. 53).

This act of protecting means that Ginny feels the instinct and urgency to defend Harry. She is only a little girl, yet she is able to act like a protector when needed. On top of that, she does not think of whom she is confronting and just does what she thinks is right. It can be said that she appoints herself as Harry's protector even though no one asks her to do so, not even Harry. Barthes (1972) stated that "[m]yth has turned reality inside out, it has emptied it of history and has filled it with nature" (p. 142-143). When people unconsciously behave according to the myths surrounding them, they do not think about other possibilities about how things should or should not work. What they do in that moment is what they believe to be true; they do not think of other options or question their choices. Ginny's impulsiveness, naturalness, and urgency, show that she believes in her action of defending Harry. During that short period of time, she forgets the fact that Malfoy is her senior whose family has higher status than hers, but it does not change the fact that she believes her action to be true. As a result of defending Harry and forgetting her "place", Ginny has to bear the consequences of her action. As a result of defending Harry and forgetting her "place", Ginny has to bear the consequences of her action when Malfoy mocked her by saying "Potter, you've got yourself a girlfriend!"(Rowling, p. 53). Berry (2011) stated, "There is a tendency for the male partner to become the child in the relationship, while his female partner becomes the mother". Therefore, Malfoy's attempt to bully Ginny by calling her as Harry's girlfriend shows that as a boy, Malfoy also accepts the myth that a girlfriend is also supposed to act as a mother who protects. Her action of defending Harry is like how a mother will act when she has to protect her child from harm, she will act first and think later. From this proof, it can be concluded that Ginny acts as a mother who protects her child regardless of the consequences for herself. Rowling positions her as someone who is ready to step out of her safe zone in order to guarantee Harry's safety.

Hermione Granger also becomes Harry's protector at the most crucial times as well. Whenever he is in danger, she is usually the first one who tries to save him. Her protectiveness for Harry makes her become an impulsive person while she is not an impulsive person by nature. In *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, Rowling makes it clear for everyone that Hermione hates doing everything that can endanger her position at school. She stood up, glaring at them (Harry and Ron).

> "I hope you're pleased with yourselves. We could all have been killed—or worse, expelled. Now, if you don't mind, I'm going to bed" (Rowling, 1997, p. 129).

This incident describes how thoroughly and carefully Hermione thinks about the consequences she may face before she acts. She explicitly states that getting expelled is worse than getting killed for her and she does not plan to join whatever Harry and Ron are planning to do next. However, when Harry's broom is jinxed during his Quidditch match, she becomes a totally different person.

> "He's doing something—jinxing the broom," said Hermione.
> "What should we do?" asked Ron
> "Leave it to me." . . .
> Hermione had fought her way across to the stand where Snape stood. . . .
> Bright blue flames shot from her wand onto the hem of Snape's robes (Rowling, 1997, p. 152).

An inconsistency also happens in Hermione's characteristics. She is described as a very strict person, but that immediately changes when Harry is in danger. She also lets her instinct take over, causing her to save Harry without thinking about how she may end up being punished or even expelled for directly attacking a teacher.

Instead of Ron, Hermione is the one who impulsively goes to stop the culprit, which is a teacher whom she is afraid of. According to Barthes' theory on myth, a myth occurs only if someone is a true believer who consumes the myth innocently (Robinson, 2011). Ron is clueless, asking "what should we do?" to her, showing the proof that he does consume the myth (that girls are supposed to protect) innocently by not feeling ashamed of his cluelessness. Like Malfoy, Ron also consumes the myth that a girl should take a role of a mother who protects. As Harry's best friend, he does not actively try to save Harry and make his position equal with Hermione's. He shows a sign of dependency on Hermione to take a decision on the best way to protect Harry, and he is not disturbed by his choice of action. Thus, there is a gap between Ron's and Hermione's position. They are facing the same problem, but Ron does not take the role as a father figure who protects.

In comparison to how female characters protect Harry, the male characters also show that they are willing to protect Harry and sacrifice themselves—to an extent. In this incident in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Hermione and Ron get into a fight regarding whether they are staying with Harry or not.

> Ron wrenched the chain from over his head and cast the locket into a nearby chair. He turned to Hermione. "What are you doing?"
> "What do you mean?"
> "Are you staying or what?"
> "I ... " She looked anguished. "Yes—yes, I'm staying, Ron, we said we'd go with Harry, we said we'd help—"
> "I get it. You choose him."
> "Ron, no—please—come back, come back!" (Rowling, 2007, p. 310).

After many fights (mainly with Harry), Ron decides to leave him even though Harry needs all the help and protection he can get. Before they journey starts, Ron has stated that he is willing to be with Harry no matter what, but when problems happen, he wavers. He also lets his personal feelings prevent him from acting reasonably. Hermione, on the other hand, sticks alongside Harry despite the situation (of having to defy Ron whom she has romantic feelings for). Their choices when they are faced with the same situation are once again different. This means that in this story, female characters are more able to protect and think clearly regardless of the situation. They are also more selfless compared to the male since they are willing to sacrifice themselves despite the consequences.

Ginny and Hermione take their role as mothers who protect for granted, in contrast to the male characters. They always protect Harry impulsively as they believe that protecting Harry is what they should do. We can also see that there are two myths that intertwined. The first one is the myth that all girls have motherly instinct and the second one is the myth that mothers are protectors. This concept has also been accepted by people around them, especially the men, since none of them shows discomfort or shame when the girls fight for them or stand up for them in front of the enemies.

AS NURTURERS

A mother acts as a nurturer by taking care and gives attention as well as support to her children while they are growing. Nurturing can be done by feeding,

taking care of, or simply knowing what they want or need. Hermioneacts not only as aprotector but also as a nurturer for Harry is. In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Hermione nurture Harry and Ron by packing up their clothes and other needs.

> "Hermione, we haven't got anything to change into," Ron told her . . . .
> "It's okay, I've got the Cloak, I've got clothes," said Hermione.
> "When did you do all this?" Harry asked as Ron stripped off his robes.
> "I told you at the Burrow, I've had the essentials packed for days, you know, in case we needed to make a quick getaway. I packed your rucksack this morning, Harry, after you changed, and put it in here. . . . I just had a feeling. . . ."
> "You're amazing, you are," said Ron, handing her his bundled up robes (Rowling, 2007, p. 161).

The myth of a mother as a nurturer is in operation in this incident, when a sign moves from the first to second level, the signifier of the first order is suppressed by the myth when it becomes the signifier of the second order. It is emptied out of meaning then filled in by the second-order concept (Baumann, n.d.). When something becomes myth, nobody pays attention to the first order sign anymore. Its original meaning no longer matters as it is replaced by the myth itself. In this case, Hermione does not see herself as a girl who is a female child anymore, but as someone who behaves according to the traits of caring and nurturing. Her instinct to nurture is triggered by the belief that taking care of the boys' physical state is her responsibility. Besides showing signs of being responsible, Hermione also shows naturalness in taking care of her friends. Ron's reaction also supports the fact that he considers Hermione's action as something natural. Her taking care of them is a belief that has been naturalized, accepted without question. None of them feels disturbed by the attention she gives them; none of them complains. Harry's and Ron's compliment for Hermione means that both of them see her action as something to be expected.

The second character who acts as a nurturer for Harry is Luna Lovegood. If Hermione often nurtures Harry (along with Ron) by taking care of their physical health, Luna nurtures him by becoming a great moral support. In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Luna gives Harry a solitude moment that he needs the most after he defeats Lord Voldermort and ends the wizard war.

> After a while, exhausted and drained, Harry found himself sitting on a bench beside Luna.

> "I'd want some peace and quiet, if it were me," she said.
> "I'd love some," he replied.
> "I'll distract them all," she said. "Use your Cloak" (Rowling, 2007, p.745).

Robinson (2011) wrote that when it comes to believing myth, "people are then convinced that what they've seen is a fact, a reality, even an experience – as if they'd actually lived it". When people already believe in myth, they will believe that their action is something that they have to do although they do not know the exact reason. Like Hermione, Luna also seems to be thinking that nurturing Harry is a part of her responsibility, especially supported by the fact that nobody else, even those who are closer to Harry, understands Harry's emotional turmoil as well as Luna.

Both Hermione and Luna take the role as nurturers, a role that is seen as a mother's. Therefore, they do not only become nurturers, but they also embrace the role as mothers who nurtures. Their actions are mostly fueled by sense of responsibility. Even so, they also show willingness in fulfilling their role, meaning the myth that girls are supposed to be mothers and that mothers are supposed to be nurturing are once again cannot be separated.

AS MENTORS

A mother acts as a mentor by positioning herself as a more experienced person who advises and helps those who are less experienced. Mentoring can be done by teaching things or giving advices when needed. Not only Hermione is a protector and nurturer, but she is also a mentor. She often teaches him spells or lessons and is the first person Harry goes to when he needs to learn. In the fourth book*, Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Harry is chosen as a contestant for Triwizard Tournament which requires him to know more about spells and tricks in order to survive. Hermione is the first person he goes to."Let's just try and keep you alive until Tuesday evening," Hermione said,"and then we can worry about Karkaroff" (Rowling, 2000, p. 220)**.** Hermione reacts to Harry's worry in a very confident way. She directly gives him instructions and sets his priorities straight. If we pay more attention on this incident, it is clear that Hermione positions herself as someone who knows better than Harry. She believes that she has the right to tell him what to do. If we see myths surrounding girls, educating is not one of them since girls are still too young for the task. Therefore, when girls act as mentors, they are taking role as mothers who are seen as their children's educators.

In another incident in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, the role of Hermione as Harry's mentor is further emphasized when he is not hesitant to ask for her help.

> "Hermione, I need to learn how to do a Summoning Charm properly by tomorrow afternoon." And so they practiced. They didn't have lunch, but headed for a free classroom.
> "That's better, Harry, that's loads better," Hermione said, looking exhausted but very pleased (Rowling, 2000, p. 225).

The fact that Harry sees Hermione as his mentor is obvious here since he chooses her to teach him, not Ron or anybody else. He asks her to help him as if it is the most natural thing to do and he is never hesitant that Hermione would be able and willing to help him. Hermione's action of teaching Harry becomes totally appropriate because the society has appropriated the view that girls are usually the smart, calm, and organized ones. This myth is seen as something considered to be the truth as it has been repeated again and again. Nyamidie (1999) stated that, "Women in general are the newborn child's primary caregivers in most societies. The paid nanny, the indulgent grandmother, or an older sister are most likely to watch over the child during its first three critical years. It is during this time that the words, unspoken messages and expectations of the caregiving woman affect and determine the child's future destiny most" (p. 1). This kind of belief only strengthens the myth that girls are better in educating or mentoring.

From this incident, it can also be seen that Hermione feels proud when Harry does well. She looks "very pleased" even though she has to sacrifice her time and energy for him. Hermione's response shows how she does not position herself as Harry's friend when she is teaching him, but as a mother who educates. Therefore, Hermione sees Harry's success as her success as well because she takes part in it. The fact that she does not hesitate to show her satisfaction means that that she sees the act of mentoring him as something she is glad to be doing.

If Hermione often becomes Harry's mentor in terms of teaching him spells and tricks, then Luna acts more as a mentor who shares information and gives suggestion about how to solve a certain problem. In *Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix*, Harry and his friends are trying to sneak into the Ministry of Magic without getting caught and Luna guides them.

> "Well, it doesn't matter, anyway," said Harry through gritted teeth, because we still don't know how to get there –"...
> "I thought we'd settled that," said Luna maddeningly. "We're flying!"

Harry whirled round.
> "Yes!" he whispered, moving towards them (Rowling, 2003, p. 639).

In this incident, Luna immediately takes the lead. It is clear that the mission they are trying to complete is actually Harry's, and Harry is supposed to be the leader. However, she naturally takes over his position; she immediately expresses her idea and directly decides things for them, while none of the male characters does so. This means that like Hermione, Luna also feels it to be her responsibility when it comes to giving Harry tips or guides. Like what Hermione experiences, Luna also does not see herself as a girl who should follow, but as a girl who is supposed to lead. That is what makes her and also the others, especially Harry, justify her action. Harry's reaction toward Luna's guidance also strengthens the fact that he regards her as a mother who mentors.

Hermione and Luna take their roles as mothers who mentor. They position themselves as people who know more than Harry, as people who are superior to Harry in terms of knowledge while teaching or guiding Harry means that they are comfortable with their role as mentors. Harry (and other male characters) also shows an incredible amount of trust and obedient toward the girls, especially Luna. These findings prove that the two myths that girls are good mentors and that mothers are the ones who educate are intertwined.

CONCLUSION

Hermione Granger, Ginny Weasley, and Luna Lovegood have all taken the roles as mothers throughout the story, by becoming protectors, nurturers, and mentors. It can be concluded that the female characters in *Harry Potter* series do possess motherly characteristics. By assigning these female characters their roles as mothers in a very young age, J.K. Rowling shows that she cannot escape the myths surrounding girls and mothers despite wanting to make her female characters hold the same amount of power as her male ones. The girls in her story are still placed in feminine roles, and being a mother is the most basic and traditional role for them. She positions the girls as "mothers-to-be", and mothers are supposed to protect, nurture, and mentor their children. Her female characters are positioned as the ones who help the men to succeed; their strength and skill stand out the most when they are acting as mothers for Harry, not when they are trying to achieve success for themselves.

Rowling's inability to escape the myths does not mean that she fails to write independent, strong, and

skillful female characters. Hermione Granger, Ginny Weasley, and Luna Lovegood have all of these positive traits, but all of their skills are focused on Harry's well-being and not on themselves. In comparison, the traits that stand out from Harry's male friends are mostly their negative traits, at least at the beginning of the story. These characters are portrayed to be less mature and skilled than the female characters, and this shows that they are not necessarily positioned as fathers for Harry (as opposed to the female friends who are already pictured as the strong ones). When they do help Harry, the purpose of their decision is mostly for themselves, or for a bigger cause, especially in Neville's case. He is one of the main figures of the wizard war in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, but he does it for everybody's sake, not solely for Harry.

Rowling sees that girls and women are the strongest and the most admirable when they become mothers. For her, being a mother is the strongest and the most powerful position a girl or a woman can take. Many of the female characters in the story are mothers, and they are always portrayed as the symbol of safety and life. Positioning her young female characters as mothers can be seen as her attempt to give them a very strong power. Therefore, it is in this context that Rowling has created strong and independent female characters.

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