

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND AT-RISK STUDENTS

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Abstract

This study examined the relationships between emotional intelligence (EI) and the delinquent behaviour of the students. The level of delinquent behaviour reported by the students is categorised under the headings of crime, drugs, vandalism, pornography and sexual behaviour, other misbehaviour and dishonesty. Meanwhile EI is investigated by looking at the level of EI domains, such as self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy, social skills, maturity, and spiritual awareness. Data were gathered from a sample of 300 secondary school students aged 15-18 years old in Selangor. Two instruments, namely, surveys on the "Behaviour of Students" and "Malaysian Emotional Quotient Inventory (R)-Adolescence (MEQI)" were utilised to collect the research data and were analysed using SPSS 19.0. Data showed that the highest delinquency among the adolescents was misbehaviour in school, followed by crime, vandalism, pornography, dishonesty and drugs. Results also revealed a negative linear relationship between EI ($r=-.208$, $n=300$, $p=.001$) and delinquent behaviour, implying that adolescents with better EI had lower levels of delinquency. Multiple regression analysis revealed that EI is a significant predictor of delinquent behaviour and self-awareness is the main factor of delinquent behaviour. This study contributes to the knowledge of the importance of EI in understanding delinquent behaviour.

Key words: *delinquent behaviour, Emotional Intelligence (EI), self-awareness, misbehaviour*

Introduction

In Malaysia, the school population has become increasingly diverse, and includes students from a range of different cultures, languages and socioeconomic backgrounds. This diversity challenges the schools to create environments that are sensitive to the myriad backgrounds. One of the issues that challenge the schools is student delinquency. Student delinquency is one of the most prevailing problems affecting school discipline, not only in Malaysia but also around the world. These students dare to break the rules without feeling guilty or fear of punishment. In fact, they know the consequences they are going to face – warning or suspension. Thus, delinquency in school will result in them eventually dropping out of school which will then lead to various societal problems, such as drug addiction, criminality, and rape.

In this study, delinquent behaviour refers to the set of behaviours, such as crime, taking or selling drugs, pornography and sexual behaviour, dishonesty, truancy and any misbehaviour that is against any established rules or norms. In the context of this study, these delinquent behaviours occur in school and it is believed that the early stage of delinquent behaviour has the potential to cause school failure, impairment in socio-emotional development, peer rejection, delinquency, and adult crime (Moffitt, 1993). According to Loeber & Farrington (2000), the early onset of delinquency significantly increases the risk of serious crime and violence in later years.

It was reported that in 2011, a total of 111,484 students in Selangor were involved in disciplinary cases of which 72,557 were students from secondary schools and 38,927 were from primary schools. Of the cases recorded 17,595 involved crime, 19,545 involved truancy, 3,031 involved pornography, 5,212 involved vandalism and 8,563 cases involved other disciplinary problems. In 2012, a total of 108,650 cases were recorded (Ministry of Education: *Bahagian Pengurusan Sekolah Harian*). These are huge numbers, and within these numbers lies the potential dropouts and those who may fit the criteria of being suspended or expelled from schools; a situation that is very sad.

Sprinthall (1995) also mentioned two broad dimensions of behaviour disorders – internalizing and externalizing behaviour. Internalizing behaviour is directed inward and involves behavioural deficits, such as isolation, withdrawal and depression, while externalizing behaviour is directed outwards and takes the form of verbal and physical aggression, and acts of violence.

As such, delinquency is considered as externalizing problems because they present an “acting out” of problems, whereas emotional difficulties are regarded as internalizing, because problems are turned inward. Problems, such as depression, suicide, stress and eating disorders, are examples of internalizing reactions that increase during adolescence. Those prompted the researcher to find a solution to meet the social and emotional needs of all students, particularly those who are identified with delinquent behaviour.

Emotional Intelligence (EI)

Emotional intelligence (EI) involves the capacity to carry out emotional and enhancement of reasoning. More specifically, EI involves the ability to perceive and accurately express emotion, to use emotion to facilitate thought, to understand emotions, and to manage emotions for emotional growth (Mayer & Salovey, 2000). According to Mayer, Salovey, and DiPaolo (1990), EI was described as a type of emotional information processing that includes the accurate appraisal of emotions in oneself and others, appropriate expression of emotions, and adaptive regulation of emotions. While, Weisinger (1998) defined EI as the intelligent use of emotion. He suggested that EI also enables individuals to obtain positive results in utilizing their emotions to regulate their behaviour. In fact, EI is not a trait, but can be nurtured, developed and augmented.

Similarly, Goleman (1999), Mayer and Salovey (2000), described EI as an influential concept that impacts on the education of students in school. This ability allows one to discriminate among one's emotions in order to best guide one's behaviour. According to Goleman (1995), many students who faced emotional challenges manifest unmanageable behaviour and are more vulnerable to school discipline problems. However, he further described students who encountered emotional disturbances as needing to learn to achieve social-emotional skills not only for school but also for general wellness and life. In order to be aware of one's feelings, one can then move more effectively into recognizing the externalizing behaviours, feelings and emotions of others. Thus, the current study establishes a complete profile of EI on delinquent students by determining the level of their EI. This is important as a high level of EI will enable positive relationships with parents and peers to be maintained.

Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Delinquent Behaviour

Several studies have found that EI could have a significant impact on one's life. It was found that higher EI was a predictor of life satisfaction. Additionally, people who are high in EI are also more likely to use an adaptive defence style against deviant behaviour and thus exhibit healthier psychological adaptation. Performance measures of EI have illustrated that higher levels of EI are associated with increased positive interactions with friends and

family. Negative relationships have likewise been identified between EI and problem behaviour. Mayer, Caruso, and Salovey (1999) found that lower EI was associated with lower self-reports of violent and trouble-prone behaviour among college students; a correlation which remained significant even when the effects of intelligence and empathy were partialled out. Lower EI (as measured by the MSCEIT) has been significantly associated with higher use of illegal drugs and alcohol, as well as increased participation in deviant behaviour (example involvement in physical fights and vandalism).

Eramus (2007), indicated that young people who are lacking in social and emotional competence might end up becoming self-centred and unable to empathize and relate to others. Moreover, students with delinquent behaviour often struggle with difficult personal and emotional problems. Psychological factors could be an important factor to provide protection against delinquent and violent behaviour patterns, such as the ability to be flexible during periods of change in school or work schedule, having effective and efficient communication skills, the ability to use humour in deescalating negative situations, and the use of a wide range of social skills (Benard, 1995; Dobbin & Gatowski, 1996).

A longitudinal study conducted by Fortin et al. (2002), showed that delinquent students lack self-control. This causes them to react negatively to criticism and renders them unable to accept the opinion of others. In addition, being unable to control their emotions and moods, will lead them into conflicts with other students and adults. In fact, a child's emotional life has an impact on their behaviour.

In Malaysia, Liau et al. (2003), in his research on EI, found that higher levels of emotional literacy, measured by EI, were hypothesised to be associated with lower levels of internalising problem behaviour, such as academic anxiety, depression, somatic complaints and stress, as well as lower levels of externalising problem behaviour, such as aggression and delinquency.

In this study, EI focused on personal and social competencies. Emotional intelligence consists of seven domains: self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy, social skills, maturity and spiritual. Those were the independent variables used to hypothesise the predictors of delinquent behaviour.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this research are:

- i) To determine the level of delinquent behaviour (DB) reported by students in respect of a) crime, b) drugs, c) vandalism, d) pornography and sexual behaviour, e) other misbehaviour, and f) dishonesty.
- ii) To determine the level of emotional intelligence (EI) among the students with delinquent behaviour in secondary schools.
- iii) To determine the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and delinquent behaviour among students in secondary schools.
- iv) To investigate whether emotional intelligence (EI) predict the level of delinquent behaviour among students in secondary schools.

Methodology

This study utilizes a descriptive correlational research design using questionnaires to collect the data.

Sample.

Participants in the study were 300 secondary school students (200 boys, 100 girls; 178 Malays, 84 Chinese, 40 Indians) aged 15-18 from 10 schools in Selangor. These schools were selected because they were listed as “hardcore schools” in relation to discipline problems obtained from the Schools Division in the State of Selangor. The respondents were identified with the help of teachers and counselors based on their delinquency behaviour represented in their school’s demerit systems.

Procedure.

The researcher first obtained written permission from the Educational Planning and Research Department (EPRD) of the Ministry of Education, Malaysia, for the study. Later, the researcher sought written permission from the State Education Department in order to carry out the research in the school. With the permission from the authorities concerned, the researcher then approached the administrator of the schools to coordinate the data collection. Before the data collection, the researcher approached the school to get permission from the school to set the time and date to conduct the survey. The researcher, with the cooperation of the disciplinary teacher and counsellor, identified the delinquent behaviour students through the merit and demerit system of the respective schools. From each school, 30 Form 4 students were selected for this research. The selected students were of various races and both genders. The researcher arranged to come on the day that had been fixed for the survey. The survey took 2 days in the each schools.

Instrumentation

Two instruments, namely, surveys on the “Behaviour of Students”, and “Malaysian Emotional Quotient Inventory (R)-Adolescence (MEQI)” were utilised to collect the research data and were analysed using SPSS 19.0.

“Behaviour of Students”

This instrument was established by Rozumah, Rumaya, Asnarulkhadi, Amna, Mansur and Tan (2003). Permission to use the instrument was obtained from the author for this study. Rozumah et al. (2003) had reported a reliability of .92 confirming that this instrument has high reliability and is suitable for assessing the behaviour of secondary school students. Meanwhile, the reliability of this instrument in the current study was .73. This instrument comprises 35 items with six subscales to identify the delinquent acts of respondents. The six subscales of this instrument are the delinquent behaviours of students categorised as crime, vandalism, drugs, pornography and sexual behaviour, dishonesty and other misbehaviour. It was used to assess the involvement of students in delinquent behaviour over the eight months immediately prior to when the questionnaires were administered. These 35 items are scored based on a 5-point Likert scale, which is 1 for ‘not very frequent’, 2 for ‘not frequent’, 3 for ‘moderately frequent’, 4 for ‘frequent’ and 5 for ‘very frequent’. The lowest score is 35 while the highest is 175. The higher the score in each category the more frequent the particular delinquent act is committed. Answers to the items cover the following offences: stealing something worth RM50.00 or less, stealing something worth RM50.00 or more, shoplifting, buying stolen goods, selling drugs and discipline problems in school, such as fighting, vandalism, throwing items, verbal bullying, graffiti in school, or threatening or using violence in classroom.

Malaysian Emotional Quotient Inventory – Adolescence (MEQI)

MEQI was developed by Noriah et al. (2000) to assess the EI of adolescents based on the Goleman (1999) model of EI. The instrument has 183 items and measures the seven domains of EI. The seven domains are self-awareness (35 items), self-regulation (40 items), self-motivation (36 items), empathy (45 items), social skills (52 items), spirituality (9 items), and maturity (6 items). MEQI-Adolescence uses a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 for strongly disagree to 5 for strongly agree. The items measure the performance of the respondents to perceive, facilitate, manage and understand their emotions based on the seven domains. Meanwhile, the Cronbach values for the instruments is between .80 and .97. These values confirmed that this instrument is reliable and suitable for secondary school students in Malaysia. Examples of the items are, “*I can be moved by an extraordinary event*”; “*I know when I have negative thoughts about myself*”; “*I can execute what I have planned*”; “*I am aware that anger is bad for my health*”.

Results

i) To determine the level of delinquent behaviour (DB) reported by students in respect of a)crime, b)drugs, c)vandalism, d)pornography and sexual behaviour, e) other misbehaviour, and f) dishonesty

Table 1 shows the overall analysis of the levels for the six delinquent behaviours – crime, drugs, vandalism, pornography and sexual behaviour, other misbehaviour and dishonesty.

Table 1

Level of Delinquency Categories

Category of Delinquency	M	SD	Median	Range	Minimum	Maximum
Others Misbehaviours	2.42	.61	2.42	2.71	1.00	3.71
Crime	1.95	.56	1.91	3.67	1.00	4.67
Vandalism	1.77	.06	1.66	2.67	1.00	3.67
Pornography & Sexual Behaviour	1.63	.63	1.60	2.80	1.00	3.80
Dishonesty	1.45	.43	1.33	1.83	1.00	2.83
Drugs	1.17	.54	1.00	3.50	1.00	4.50

Among the six categories of delinquency, it was found that ‘other misbehaviour’ was the highest ($M=2.24$, $SD=.61$) compared to other categories. ‘Crime’ ($M=1.95$, $SD=.56$) ranked second and ‘vandalism’ ($M=1.77$, $SD=.06$) ranked third. This was followed by ‘pornography and sexual behaviour’ ($M=1.63$, $SD=.63$) and ‘dishonesty’ ($M=1.45$, $SD=.43$). The last category was ‘drugs’ ($M=1.17$, $SD=.54$). The highest delinquent behaviour committed by the respondents was ‘others misbehaviour’ ($M=2.24$, $SD=.61$). Among the acts of ‘other misbehaviour’, “*truant because working part-time to earn extra money*” and “*skipping class for no reason*” were the acts frequently done by the respondents. The second delinquent behaviour committed by the respondents is ‘crime’ ($M=1.95$, $SD=.56$). Among the criminal acts, “*involved in gangsterism or fight*” was the highest. The least frequent was “*tried to steal or actually stolen money or things worth RM50 to RM100*”. The categories of delinquent acts not frequently committed by the delinquent students were “vandalism”, “pornography and sexual behaviour”, “dishonesty” and “drugs”.

ii) To determine the level of emotional intelligence (EI) among the students with delinquent behaviour in secondary schools.

This section is to determine the level of EI among students with delinquent behaviour. Table 2 shows the mean score of the seven domains – self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy, social skills, spirituality and maturity.

Table 2

Mean Percentage of EI Domains

EI Domain	Mean %	SD	Level
Self-Awareness	59.39	16.24	Low
Self-Regulation	67.86	9.73	Average
Self-Motivation	70.28	13.72	Average
Empathy	70.52	9.53	Average
Social skills	68.51	11.29	Average
Maturity	68.25	13.24	Average
Spirituality	70.45	13.71	Average

Note. Low Level = <60; Average= 61-80; High = 81-100.

Based on Table 2, among the seven domains, self-awareness ($M=59.39$, $SD= 16.24$) was the lowest. This was in the low level. Followed by self-regulation ($M= 67.86$, $SD= 9.73$), maturity ($M= 68.25$, $SD= 13.24$), social skills ($M=68.51$, $SD= 11.29$), self-motivation ($M= 70.28$, $SD=13.72$), spiritual ($M= 70.45$, $SD= 13.71$), empathy ($M= 70.52$, $SD= 9.53$). The empathy domain was the highest among the seven domains.

iii) To determine the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and delinquent behaviour among students in secondary schools.

In order to determine the relationship between EI and delinquent behaviour (DB); Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to determine the significance of the correlation between EI and DB.

Table 3

Pearson's Correlation between Emotional Intelligence and Delinquent Behaviour

OVERALL EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE		DELINQUENT BEHAVIOUR
	Pearson Correlation	- .208**
	Sig (2 tailed)	.001
	N	300

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The findings, as depicted in Table 3, show there was a significant negative correlation between EI and delinquent behaviour ($r = -.208$, $n=300$, $p = .001$). The negative correlation coefficient of 0.208 indicates that as the score of EI increases, the delinquency will decrease considerably. Table 4 showed a correlation between EI domains and delinquent behaviour

Table 4

Pearson's Correlation between the EI Domain and Delinquent Behaviour

EI Domain	Delinquent Behaviour	
	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Self-Awareness	-.158*	.01*
Self-Regulation	-.069	.27
Self-Motivation	-.136*	.03*
Empathy	-.095	.14
Social skills	-.108	.09
Maturity	-.077	.23
Spirituality	-.132*	.04*

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The correlation between EI domains and delinquent behaviour was investigated using the Pearson product moment correlation coefficient. There were seven domains: self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy, maturity, and spirituality. As shown in Table 4, there was a significantly negative relationship between self-awareness and delinquent behaviour ($r = -.158$, $n=300$, $p < .05$). The negative correlation coefficient indicates that as the score of self-awareness increases, the delinquency decreases considerably.

However, there was a significant negative correlation between self-motivation and delinquent behaviour ($r = -.136$, $n=300$, $p < .05$). The negative correlation coefficient indicates that as the score of self-motivation increases, the delinquency decreases considerably.

Finally, there was a significant negative correlation between spirituality ($r = -.132$, $n=300$, $p < .05$) and delinquent behaviour, whereby the negative correlation coefficient indicates that as the score of spirituality increases, the delinquency decreases considerably.

Hence, the findings show that (1) there was a significant negative relationship between the overall EI and delinquent behaviour; higher EI will decrease the delinquent behaviour, (2) there were also significant negative relationships between self-awareness, self-motivation and spirituality, and delinquent behaviour.

iv) To investigate whether emotional intelligence (EI) predict the level of delinquent behaviour among students in secondary schools.

Table 5 displays the answer to the 4th research objective. A stepwise multiple linear regressions was conducted to determine the predictors (self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy, social skills, maturity and spirituality) of delinquent behaviour among the respondent.

Table 5

Model Summary of Emotional Intelligence Construct for Delinquent Behaviour

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Change Statistics				
				R ² Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
Self awareness	.16 ^a	.03	.02	.03	6.12	1	290	.01*

Note. * Significant at $p < .05$, ** Significant at $p < .01$, ***significant at $p < .001$
 Dependent variable: Delinquent Behaviour.

The results reported that only one of the EI domains that is self awareness predicted delinquent behaviour. Table 5 shows that 3.0% ($r = .16$) of the varians in the criterion variable were explained by the predictor variable, that is self-awareness.

Table 6

Results of ANOVA for Emotional Intelligence Domain for Delinquent Behaviour

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	3.51	1	3.52	6.12	.014 ^b
Residual	137.81	290	.57		
Total	141.33	291			

Note. *Significant at $p < .05$, ** Significant at $p < .01$, ***significant at $p < .001$.

The results from the ANOVA analysis in the regression model are presented in Table 6. The results show that self-awareness was a significant predictor variable of delinquent behaviour [$F(1, 291) = 6.12, p < .05$].

Table 7

Standard Coefficients for Predictors on Delinquent Behaviour

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	8.435	.18		47.49	.00***
Self-awareness	-.007	.003	-.16	-2.47	.01*

Note. *Significant at $p < .05$, ** Significant at $p < .01$, ***significant at $p < .001$
 Dependent variable: Delinquent Behaviour.

The data in Table 7 indicate that the self-awareness ($\beta = -.16, p < .05$), were significant factors of delinquent behaviour. The self-awareness contributed 3.0% ($r = .16$) on delinquent behaviour [$F(1, 291) = 6.12, p < .05$]. The other EI domains do not contribute to delinquent behaviour.

Discussion

The findings of the present research show that the majority of the respondents were involved in the category of 'other misbehaviour' ($M = 2.24, SD = .61$). Among such misbehaviour, most of the respondents played truant because of working part-time to earn

extra money. In addition, they also skipped class for no reason. These types of misbehaviour were very common among the students and in line with the study by Shamsul Azhar et al. (2012), who reported that truancy happened in every school. Students who stated that they often skipped classes, would be engaged in at least one form of delinquent related behaviour.

This result is also consistent with the findings of Norlizah (2008) concerning adolescent delinquency; in that the level of the adolescents' delinquent behaviour did not achieve 10%. According to Norlizah (2008), 98.9% of the adolescents' delinquency is at a low level with only 1.1% adolescents at the high level. This implies that the level of delinquency in Malaysian schools is controllable. Moreover, in the study on violence among adolescents, Lee et al. (2007), found that 10.7% had been involved in a physical fight with other people, theft (4.3%), vandalism (2.7%) and had carried a weapon (2.4%). Although all these types of behaviour in the school are still controllable, with only a small percentage involved in delinquency, it is still alarming as these could lead to more serious forms of delinquency and social ills.

The findings of EI are consistent with Mayer, Caruso, and Salovey (2000), who found a negative relationship between EI and problem behaviour. A lower EI was associated with lower self-reports of violent and trouble-prone behaviour among adolescents, a correlation which remained significant even when the effects of intelligence and empathy were partialled out. Lower EI (as measured by the MSCEIT) has been significantly associated with the higher use of illegal drugs and alcohol, as well as increased participation in deviant behaviour (i.e. involvement in physical fights and vandalism).

Self awareness was found to have a significant relationship with delinquent behaviour. The result shows the delinquent students paid less attention to emotions or feelings. This lack of emotional awareness means that delinquent students are unable to connect their feelings with their thoughts (Goleman, 1999) and their feelings, such as anger or frustration. Therefore, if the students are aware of their emotional states, and their strengths and weaknesses, they will become aware of their values and goals in their life. Self-awareness will make them mindful that they have to accept criticism and feedback regardless of whatsoever happens.

Based on the findings in Table 4, motivation was found to have a significant relationship with delinquent behaviour. Motivation is an emotional tendency that guides or facilitates towards goals achievement. Under the motivation domain, are three motivational subdomains such as achievement drive, commitment, initiative and optimism. Students who have self-motivation would strive to excel in their undertakings and have high self-esteem. Delinquent students lack the motivation to learn and have limited ability to focus and maintain a positive sense of self-worth while being confronted by daily school challenges (Lopes, 2003). They do not have the determination to achieve a goal and to excel in their work.

Spiritual awareness was found to have a significant relationship with delinquent behaviour. One of the elements in the social control theory is belief. According to the theory of Hirschi (1977), if a person has strong beliefs in society's norms then the individual would avoid delinquency or criminal behaviour. Those people who are deeply engaged in religion, would be less likely to be involved in crime and deviance. However, a study by Mapp (2009) concerning the role of religiosity and spirituality in juvenile delinquency reported a negative and significant relationship between religion and spiritual, and marijuana use. Hence, this study supports the study by other researchers.

The findings of the study as shown in Table 7 clearly shows self-awareness is one of the EI constructs that predicts delinquent behaviour. The inability to understand emotions in

oneself and others, including understanding how emotions can be changed and how people react to different emotions, would contribute to delinquency. According to Liao et al. (2003), in their research on EI, higher levels of emotional literacy, measured by EI, were hypothesised to be associated with lower levels of internalising problematic behaviour, such as academic anxiety, depression, somatic complaints and stress, as well as lower levels of externalising problem behaviour, such as aggression and delinquency.

Based on the results, the relationship between delinquent behaviour and the set of predictor variables can be characterized as relatively weak. Total contribution by the combined set of predictors: EI accounted for 3% of the variance of delinquent behaviour. Eron, Gentry and Schlegel (1994) argued that no single factor explains much of the variance in delinquency but that it is the combination of the identified risk factors that makes the difference.

Conclusion

After the discussion on each variable, this study has documented considerable knowledge for all walks of society in understanding delinquent behaviour. This study contributes to the knowledge of the importance of EI in understanding delinquent behaviour. EI can be used to identify and discriminate emotional skills among those adolescents who exhibit delinquent behaviour. In this study, the deficiencies of certain EI domains of the delinquent students are highlighted. These are emotional awareness, accurate awareness, self-confidence from the self-awareness domain; trustworthiness from the self-regulation domain, and influence and conflict from the social skills domains. As such, these delinquent students need to be guided and given the opportunities to build up those competencies. This study has documented a complete profile of EI on delinquent students.

The study also provides a realisation that delinquent adolescents do have their own strengths whereby their EI domain of empathy is higher (Table 2). They are motivated, innovative, and have the tendency to initiate or manage a change of situation. Sadly, we often label them and only see their weaknesses. Opportunities should be given to these adolescents to show their potential and personal abilities, as these delinquent adolescents can happen to be future leaders that can make changes in a group or organization. Further, emotional knowledge can be improved through education practices, perhaps training children and adults in EI can lead to more adaptive behaviour.

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