

## Section a1. State-of-the-art in the research on violent interactions

This part of the proposal (1) reviews what we know about the use of force in police-civilian encounters and in violent interactions between civilians from research predominantly conducted in the United States (section a1); (2) elaborates my ethnomethodological theory of the beginnings, transformations and endings of interpersonal conflicts (sections a2-3); (3) discusses the methodology of the research program (section b1); and outlines its organization and planning (section b2). The review of the literature focuses on interactionist studies of interpersonal violence and what we can learn from them given the research program's aim to understand how encounters between strangers in urban public space lead to violence, specifically one-sided violence against vulnerable and/or subdued victims.<sup>1</sup>

While the separation of studies of violence committed by civilians and police follows the legal distinction between criminal and non-criminal violence, the proposed research seeks to ground categories of violence on social-scientific rather than legal criteria. Although studies of police-civilian encounters and interactionist work on civilian violence remain sequestered research traditions, they share a fundamental premise derived from the work of the sociologist Erving Goffman. Implicitly or explicitly, both traditions view violent interactions as performances in which individuals aim to present 'face'—a situational identity and claim on how others should value and treat them (Goffman 1967). When antagonists perceive that the other has tried to project a negative identity onto them, for instance by insulting, humiliating, or neglecting them, they may turn to (threats of) violence to 'save face' (Goffman 1967: 5–45; applications to violence include Felson 1982; Felson and Tedeschi 1993; Luckenbill 1977; Polk 1999; Wilkinson and Fagan 2002). Recognition of their identity as authority figures is also crucially important for police officers (Paoline III 2003; Van Maanen 1978) who may resort to violence to establish or protect this identity (Felson and Tedeschi 1993; Terrill 2005).

People also seek face through 'character contests'—confrontations between opponents who stand steady (show character) as they try to save face at the other's expense in sequences of provocations and challenges that can escalate into violence (Felson and Tedeschi 1993: 109; Goffman 1967: 217–8; 239–58). The Goffmanian approach enables us to specify what makes police-civilian encounters different from interactions between civilians. For Alpert et al. (2020: 376–397), the imbalance of authority or power and the importance of police officers' functional status relative to other types of status (age, gender, race, social class) implies investment in maintaining an 'authoritative edge' and civilians' deference to it (Dai et al. 2011: 164; Paoline III 2003; Terrill 2005: 110; Van Maanen 1978). Encounters devolve into an 'authority maintenance ritual' when police officers are primarily focused on (re)gaining authority rather than encouraging voluntarily compliance and cooperation, which increases the probability of police violence and civilian resistance (Alpert et al. 2020: 386).

The importance people attach to face may explain why conflicts are often sparked by seemingly trivial provocations, why police officers use more violence than required to maintain authority, and why civilians attempt to resist the overwhelming power of the police. But what face is there to be gained by continuing to pummel vulnerable victims or former opponents who have already been subdued? I return to this question after reviewing the state-of-the art.

### *Extant research on police-civilian encounters*

Among the most robust and consistent findings of the research on police-civilian encounters is that violence by officers is influenced by situational 'factors'—most notably civilians' resistance to arrest and, to lesser extents, the seriousness of the offense, the number of officers on the scene, the presence of large audiences, whether the encounter was initiated by officers, and whether police intervened in a dispute (see meta-analyses by Bolger, 2015; Alpert, 2015; Alpert et al., 2004; Dunham and Alpert, 2009; Hine et al., 2018; Mastrofski et al., 2002; Terrill, 2003; Terrill and Mastrofski, 2002). Civilian resistance can take the form of impeding officers' attempts to gain information, failing to respond, responding negatively to an officer's commands and threats, or committing violence against officers (Stoughton, 2020: 339; Terrill, 2003: 57). Terrill (2003: 79) finds that initial police violence tends to reappear in more severe forms at later points in the interaction and that such encounters also involve more resistance by civilians. Others suggest that mentally ill, intoxicated, or

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<sup>1</sup> The scope of the research program includes non-predatory forms of violence that emerge from conflicts between strangers in urban public space (thus excluding robberies and extortion under threat of violence). My own work and that of others show that human observers can reliably infer whether individuals are strangers or have a social relationship that precedes the interaction captured on the recording (Liebst et al. 2019, 2021; Weenink, Dhattiwala et al. 2022).

‘emotionally elevated’ individuals are more likely to be subjected to police violence (Alpert, 2015: 257; Terrill and Mastrofski, 2002; but see Bolger, 2015: 469). Mastrofski et al. (Mastrofski et al., 2002: 529) also note that officers look down on civilians who display ‘irrational’ behaviour, which officers may perceive as resistance.

Whereas the relationship between police violence and the individual characteristics of civilians is much less important than their situational non-compliant behaviour, officers are more likely to use violence against lower class, male, and—to a lesser extent—minority civilians (Bolger, 2015; Mastrofski et al., 2002). The effects of minority/race are inconsistent. Bolger’s (2015: 469–70) meta-analysis showed most studies reporting a non-significant relationship, with some studies finding non-whites to be more likely to be subjected to police violence. However, minorities have a relatively much greater chance of interacting with the police, resulting in disproportionately more race-related violence at aggregate levels (see overview by James et al. 2018). Finally, the individual characteristics of officers such as experience, training, gender, and race are only of minor importance although male officers are more likely to use violence (Bolger, 2015: 478, 483).

Most studies of police violence are based on large-scale observations in which trained observers join officers on their shifts (Alpert et al., 2004; Dunham and Alpert, 2009; Mastrofski et al., 2002; Sykes and Brent, 1980; Terrill, 2003). The observers write field notes which are transcribed following standardized procedures, ultimately resulting in numerical codes. The advantage here is that a-priori explanations can be evaluated in multivariable regression models while large sample sizes enable making inferences about all police-civilian encounters (although this claim needs nuance as most studies rely on a small number of neighbourhoods in just a few cities). While this approach has allowed scholars of policing to produce a body of compelling evidence about the importance of what they call situational ‘factors’ (see the overview in Alpert et al., 2004: 477; Dunham and Alpert, 2009; Rojek et al., 2012; Willits and Makin, 2018)—most notably resistance by civilians and disrespect from suspects, especially when the encounter takes place in disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Engel et al. 2000; Reisig et al. 2004; Terrill and Reisig 2003)—it has come at the price of glossing over the sequential building up of bodily gestures and verbal utterances by participants in a (potentially) violent encounter. While research on this temporal unfolding of violence from the perspective of officers has led to descriptions of the stages through which encounters proceed (Sykes and Brent, 1980)—which help to understand how officers orient themselves as they engage with civilians—the stages remain too general to understand how participants bring about the interactional unfolding of the encounter.

Recent reviews of the research on police-civilian encounters suggest that we would be well-served by shifting our attention from situational factors to situational processes. Todak and March (2020) point to our inability to capture the moments at which the interaction could have taken a different course, while Rojek et al. (2012: 324) earlier concluded that we need ‘to learn more about these interactions and to find a more sophisticated way to look at them’. Alpert et al. (2020: 385–6) conclude that there is a ‘paucity of non-process variables with adequate explanatory powers’ and that ‘personal characteristics alone have not been successful in predicting police use of force’ (cf. meta-analyses in Bolger, 2015). Alpert et al. (2020: 386) go on to argue that we need data ‘that indicate the sequential order of the events, and they must be analysed to show the effects of actions at one stage of the interaction process taken during subsequent stages’. The proposed research program will provide the data and develop the methodological and theoretical tools to do precisely this.

#### *Extant research on violent interactions between civilians in urban public space*

One strand of the literature on civilian violence in public space perceives ‘character contests’ as a way to defend or aggressively establish masculine identity (Copes et al., 2013; Ellis et al., 2017; Polk, 1999; Winlow, 2014; Winlow and Hall, 2009)—also interpreted as situational compensation for an otherwise threatened masculinity due to structural marginalization in society (see the overview by Taylor et al., 2013).

Another variant of the contest model revolves around acquiring ‘reputation’ or ‘respect’ in unsafe, socio-economically deprived neighbourhoods where a ‘code of the street’ prescribes demeanour that displays immediate aggressive responsiveness and a willingness to use violence (Anderson, 2000; Brookman et al., 2011; Wilkinson and Fagan, 2002). In areas where police forces have withdrawn and criminal economies prevail (Contreras, 2013; Decker and Van Winkle, 1996; Jacobs and Wright, 2006), reputations are thought to provide protective deference in a hostile environment.

Only a handful of studies have sought to examine violent interactions up close. Among the pioneers was Luckenbill’s (1977) study, based on judicial case files, outlining the interactional steps leading up to lethal

violence: (1) one of the parties makes an opening move towards the other party, which is (2) interpreted as a personal affront by the other party so that (3) the situation becomes a contest about saving face. (4) A ‘working agreement’ is reached that violence is an appropriate means to settle the contest (both parties remain engaged in the contest rather than leaving the scene or apologizing). (5) Both parties engage in physical violence and when (6) one party falls or is otherwise subdued, the situation ends. Athens’ (2005, 2015) elaboration of Luckenbill’s model—which posits dominance as the master motive driving violent encounters—has five interactional steps that focus on role claiming, rejection, sparring, enforcement, and determination. But the data available to Luckenbill and Athens—judicial reports, interviews, and (auto)ethnography—did not allow for the fine-grained analysis required to understand how the actions of antagonists emerge as responses to the actions of others, leaving us with mappings of all-too-general stages on the path towards violence. As in police-civilian research, research on violence between civilians tends to gloss over the sequential building up of bodily actions and verbal utterances in (potentially) violent encounters.

### *Making sense of one-sided violence against vulnerable and/or subdued victims*

Given the premise that violence takes the form of a contest and follows on encroachments against police authority, reputation, masculinity, or honour, the research reviewed thus far tends to understand violence against vulnerable and/or subdued victims as an aberration. An early study (Reiss, 1968) framed one-sided violence directed at civilians who do not resist, who were handcuffed and made no attempt to flee or resist, or who were already subdued, as ‘unreasonable violence’. ‘Unreasonable’, however, suggests that such one-sided violence is the anomalous behaviour of individual officers outside the realm of professional policing. In contrast, I frame one-sided violence as the exceptional outcome of tasks that officers are normally expected to fulfil. Among the reasons prevailing approaches are hard pressed to explain violence against vulnerable and/or subdued victims is that their explanations focus on the conditions under which violence emerges rather than on the interactional processes at work in antagonistic and violent situations.

Collins’ (2008) micro-sociological theory of violence does not exclude one-sided violence; in fact it considers vulnerability as a possible condition for violence to emerge. A key premise in Collins’ work is that most people do not easily commit violence as the confrontational tension and fear produced in antagonistic encounters acts as a barrier. Collins (2008, 2013) proposes four ways in which people overcome or circumvent this barrier. In two of them, tension and fear are superseded by a feeling of dominance stemming from situational asymmetries, for instance when a group of onlookers supports one party, or when one party remains passive or is otherwise perceived as weak.<sup>2</sup> If emotional dominance is suddenly and rapidly established after a prolonged period of confrontational tension and fear, assailants may enter a ‘forward panic’ (Collins, 2008 chapter 3). These are episodes in which assailants enter a tunnel of violence (Collins, 2013) in which they seem unable to stop, continuing their assault even when the victim is no longer contesting the assailants’ dominance. My study of youth violence, which used judicial case files to analyse the emotional state of assailants in ‘frenzied attacks’ (Weenink 2014), found that assailants would enter a state of encapsulation—‘rage took over’—in which they continued to hit and kick opponents who no longer posed a threat. Situational asymmetries, such as victims hitting the ground, the numerical dominance of a supportive group, and the presence of relatives in the assailants’ group increased the likelihood of violence to turn into a frenzied attack. However, frenzied attacks appeared in only 30 of the 159 cases studied, which begs the question how exactly these interpersonal conflicts transformed into either frenzied attacks or ended up in what I then called ‘controlled violence’, which comprised the vast majority of cases in the study.

While criticisms have been levelled against its exclusive focus on emotional dynamics to explain violence (Hoebel et al., 2022; Wieviorka, 2014) and the empirical evidence for it remains inconclusive (Weenink 2022; Weenink, Tuma et al. 2022; Whitehead et al. 2018), Collins’ theory takes us closer to the violent action than many other theories. But again, the focus remains on the conditions for violence to occur, leaving the transformations and shifts in the interactional trajectory toward—and of—violence unexplained (see also Bowman et al., 2018).

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<sup>2</sup> In the other pathways, assailants avoid mutual antagonistic involvement. This happens when victims are attacked by surprise or stealth, for instance when assailants approach their opponents from behind or afar. This project does not consider such forms of violence.

## Section a2. Conceptual building blocks for an ethnomethodological theory of interpersonal conflict

### *Turn-taking, turning points and trajectories*

Verbal altercations do not automatically lead to physical violence. Even when the antagonists are determined to use violence, they need to move through certain transformative stages together. Prevailing criminological and sociological approaches tend to neglect this transformative process. Treating violence as the outcome variable, they separate it from the interactional sequence from which it emerges (cf. Schinkel 2004).

My theory views violence as sequentially emergent; every bodily movement, gesture, gaze, and utterance forms a potentially transformative step in an interactive process. The theory builds on two ethnomethodological propositions. First, as Garfinkel (1967/1984: 1) famously stated, the methods used by participants in an interaction to produce action are identical to how they render them understandable or ‘account-able’. This means that they jointly construct two things at the same time: action and its meaning context. They produce, contest, maintain, change, validate, question and define their interacting as a meaningful situational order (Heritage 1987: 226, 233, 236; Maynard and Heritage 2023: 176).

Second, persons participating in the interaction take turns. This taking of turns requires participants to identify the completion of the other’s turn and the commencement of their own response. Turn-taking is consequential because each next turn not only retrospectively establishes an understanding of the turn that preceded it, but prospectively shapes the understanding of the next (Sacks et al. 1978; Schegloff et al. 1977). The methodological implication for sociologists (and participants) is that the meaning of a turn can be understood from the re-turn of the other. Turn-taking involves both verbal utterances and bodily action (Goodwin 2018; Mondada 2016; Streeck et al. 2011).

These propositions have two implications for the study of violent encounters. The first is that violence can be understood as a series of actions that emerge in response to the actions of others (who in turn were responding to ego’s actions, and so on). Antagonists in an altercation share an understanding of how their actions project the direction in which the situation evolves, embedding the next action for the other to take. In other words, they expect the other to react to provocations and challenges; know what is appropriate, or obligatory to do in a given situation; and are able to predict the consequences of their actions (for example legal ones). The notion of ‘looming violence’ describes this well, as the antagonists—and bystanders recording the scene—have a sense of where the altercation is headed. Interactional trajectories towards and of violence are thus more than behavioural-observational constructs; they are known to the antagonists as expectations of what will or might happen next (see also Keesman and Weenink, 2022; Weenink et al., 2022).

The second implication is that changes in bodily actions are at least equally and perhaps more important than verbal utterances in the production of turn-taking and turning points within violent encounters. Not all turn-taking foreshadows physical confrontation; there will likely be moments of varying intensity, intermittent pauses, withdrawal, and distraction. Turn-taking sequences are defined by similarities in the mode of interacting, for instance when antagonists engage in a series of provocations and insults. Turning points mark the start and end of such sequences—a change in the mode of interacting. This happens for example when the antagonists draw closer to each other or move further apart, or when one party switches from provoking and insulting to making fighting gestures, issuing commands (‘Walk away’) or posing an ultimatum (‘Touch me’). Turning points may also appear when the form of violence changes, for instance as antagonists move from shoving to punching or from kicking to wrestling. Whatever conflict precipitated the violence—including conflicts about what the conflict is about—violence also produces its own conflicts, notably about what type of violent action will be the dominant mode of interacting and, crucially, when violent actions end. A central question is how confrontational violence transforms into a trajectory towards one-sided violence.

My ethnomethodological take on violence entails two innovations. First, unlike most studies of interpersonal violence, the proposed research *does not stop where violence begins*; team members will trace the transformative steps by which violent actions become the dominant mode of interacting. Second, also contrary to prevailing work in this area, we will not ignore the obvious fact that *physical violence is bodily action*. This allows us to pose two novel questions:

1. *How does turn-taking by antagonists create a meaningful interactional trajectory in situations of interpersonal conflict and violence?*
2. *How does antagonists' turn-taking develop into turning points towards the beginning and ending of violence, notably one-sided violence against already subdued or vulnerable victims?*

Note that the first question assumes that antagonists attempt to render their actions understandable, following the ethnomethodological notion that participants' ways of rendering actions understandable is comprehensive, leaving 'no action uncategorizable' (Heritage 1987: 241). Even behaviour that deviates from what is considered 'perceivably normal' is not considered random or meaningless, but understood in the 'residual category of "insane"' (Heritage 1987: 241) or as somehow socially incompetent.

Our analysis of video recordings of violent encounters between civilians in the United States (Katz and Weenink, n.d.) allow us to specify the first question. We noticed that in conflicts in which violence was impending, would-be assailants often uttered expressions such as 'Touch me', 'Call me pussy again' or 'Apologize!' We call these **violence contingency forewarnings (VCFs)**. Antagonists issuing such forewarnings render their prospective violence as causally contingent on the actions of their opponent while constructing a retrospective justification for it: 'I told you so' (cf. Whitehead et al., 2018: 332–6 who note similar prospective and retrospective accounting for violence in their EMCA video analysis). We also observed that antagonists tended to issue these forewarnings when entering into conflict with strangers, and before an audience of strangers, suggesting that they wished to render the start, continuation, and end of their violence prospectively and retrospectively understandable—to themselves, their opponent, and byscolltanders. If they don't do this and simply start punching and kicking, they risk being seen as, indeed, 'insane'. Antagonists issue forewarnings because once they begin fighting, they must direct their attention and energy to the use of violence. For a VCF to become a turning point towards violence, it needs to be expressed in bodily action.

*H1-1: When violence is impending in conflicts between strangers before an audience of strangers, antagonists seek to render their prospective physical violence understandable by issuing VCFs.*

*H1-2: VCFs indicate turning points towards the beginning and the ending of violence.*

*Q1-1: What kinds of VCFs emerge in conflicts between civilians, and between police and civilians?*

*Q1-2: How are VCFs related to the beginning and the ending of violence?*

We also observed that in some conflicts between strangers in front of an audience of strangers, antagonists did not issue VCFs (Katz and Weenink, n.d.). This happened when antagonists could confidently assume that the audience, given prevailing cultural understandings, would understand their violence as an act of legitimate or righteous self-defence, and when the antagonist had clearly flagged that he was responding to an earlier transgression, be it a physical attack (e.g. a slap in the face), damage to property (e.g. throwing a beer can at his car) or verbal utterances referring to emotionally charged social divisions or traumas (e.g. the n-word in the United States).

We furthermore noticed that antagonists sometimes presented their prospective violence in terms that were hardly understandable to the audience. In such cases, antagonists were orienting their actions exclusively for members of their own peer group whom they knew would (later) observe the episode. This may apply most to police officers, who are first and foremost oriented towards their colleagues (Paoline III 2003).

*H2-1: Antagonists do not issue VCFs when they enter into conflict with strangers before an audience of strangers if they can assume that the audience will understand their violence as self-defence.*

*H2-2: Antagonists seeking to render their violence understandable as self-defence retrospectively portray the preceding act of the other as a turning point towards the beginning of their own violence.*

*H2-3: Antagonists do not issue VCFs when they enter into conflict with strangers before an audience of strangers if members of their peer group are co-present.*

*H2-4: Antagonists seeking to render their violence understandable to their peer group portray turning points towards the beginning and the ending of their violence in ways only accessible to their peer group.*

*The role of audiences in interpersonal conflict in public space*

Participants in interpersonal conflicts include the antagonists as well as the audiences to whom they orient their actions. Audiences can consist of co-present peers (the antagonists' companions or colleague police officers) as well as unknown bystanders. As members of the audience often film and upload violent incidents on the internet, the antagonists may also be orienting their actions to a potentially massive audience of future spectators (Coenen and Tuma, 2022).

Although earlier interactionist studies have suggested that the presence of bystanders leads to more severe violence between civilians (Collins, 2008; Felson and Steadman, 1983; Luckenbill, 1977; Weenink, 2014) and Bolger's (2015: 479, 483) meta-analysis found that the presence of more officers (but not more civilians) increases the likelihood of police violence, recent work based on CCTV footage has consistently found that bystanders are more likely to take de-escalatory action than previously assumed. Levine et al. (2011) observed that third parties are more likely to engage in de-escalatory rather than escalatory action and did so more often as group size increased. Another study based on CCTV footage of 219 conflicts found at least one bystander physically intervening in 90% of cases, with nearly four bystanders intervening on average (Philpot et al., 2020: 10, 15). My study of collective de-escalation based on 130 phone-recorded incidents found similar prevalence rates of bystanders taking de-escalatory action (Weenink, et al., 2022). This study also found that when third parties positioned themselves in a circular formation around the antagonists, de-escalatory action was more likely. Nevertheless, none of these recent studies have analysed how third-party interventions emerge as a series of bodily actions in response to the actions of others. Hence the hypotheses and question:

**H3-1:** *Bystanders and peer group members support or contest the attempts of antagonists to render their violence understandable (either in the form of VCFs, righteous self-defence or in ways exclusively accessible to their peer group).*

**H3-2:** *Bystanders' and peer group members' bodily actions and verbal utterances affect the antagonists' turning-taking and turning points towards the beginning and ending of violence.*

**Q3-1:** *How do bystanders' and peer group members' bodily actions and verbal utterances affect turn-taking and turning points towards the beginning and ending of violence?*

### **a.3 Comparative analysis: trajectories, encounters, interactional resources, policing practices**

The research program consists of eleven projects. Except for the first, which aims to understand the filming and uploading process of phone camera recordings, all projects will advance comparisons to probe further into the turn-taking and turning points of interpersonal conflict and violence.

#### *Three types of trajectories (projects 2-7)*

Answering the question how interpersonal conflicts in urban public space develop into one-sided violence against vulnerable and/or subdued victims requires comparing such cases with two other possible trajectories: verbal altercations that do not escalate into violence and violent interactions in which both parties actively participate. Ethnomethodologically speaking, the crucial difference is that in the latter two trajectories, the antagonists engage in mutual, interpersonal turn-taking; in one-sided violence, one party seeks to prevent the other from taking turns, thereby dominating the interaction (Katz and Weenink, n.d.). Each PhD project will analyse 7 cases of each type of conflict, resulting in a dataset of 63 civilian-civilian (projects 2-4) and 63 police-civilian (projects 5-7) conflicts.

**H4-1:** *In one-sided violence against vulnerable and/or subdued victims, the assailant seeks to monopolize turn-taking.*

**Q4-1:** *What are the bodily actions assailants use to monopolize turn-taking when they engage in one-sided violence?*

**Q4-2:** *How do assailants begin, sustain and end one-sided violence?*

*Two types of encounters (project 8)*

One-sided violence against already vulnerable and/or subdued victims appears in both police-civilian and civilian-civilian encounters. How does comparing them advance our understanding of turn-taking and the turning points of interpersonal conflict and violence?

Frontline police officers consider gaining and maintaining control over situations as foundational to their work (Alpert et al., 2020; Bittner, 1970; Cockcroft, 2012; Loftus, 2010) and find experience losing control of developing situations as deeply disturbing (Keesman 2022). Police use physical force in only a tiny proportion of encounters with civilians—in around 2% of them in the United States and likely less in Europe (see Harrell and Davis 2020). This undoubtedly has to do with the overwhelming institutional power that backs individual officers. Following Alpert's (2020: 376–397) theory on authority maintenance rituals, it can be argued that officers perceive violence as the most efficacious way to restore perceived infractions against their 'authoritative edge' and to reclaim civilians' complete deference (Alpert et al., 2020: 386). Reformulated in ethnomethodological terms, this implies that police violence is oriented towards monopolizing turn-taking to maintain ultimate control.

Bystanders often intervene to end interpersonal conflicts between civilians in urban public space. They do so verbally and, more effectively, by taking bodily action to de-escalate the situation (Weenink et al. 2022). But in conflicts between police and civilians, bystanders who get physically involved risk being arrested for obstructing law enforcement (also given the importance police officers attach to being in control themselves). Ending one-sided police violence against subdued and/or vulnerable victims thus seems to require intervention by peer officers.

These considerations generate two hypotheses that I will study in a comparative project (8) which, building on the analyses from projects 2-7, will compare the beginnings and endings of one-sided violence against vulnerable and/or subdued victims in police-civilian and civilian-civilian conflicts.

**H5-1:** *In contrast to civilian violence, all violent bodily actions by police officers seek to monopolize turn-taking.*

**H5-2:** *Whereas bystanders can end one-sided civilian violence against subdued and/or vulnerable victims, only peer officers can end such violence by police.*

*Interactional resources: national differences in imputing superiority and inferiority (project 9)*

The moral regulation of demeanour concerns widely accepted ideas about proper behaviour in public space. My theory considers these ideas as resources that antagonists draw on in their interactions to scold each other about infractions and to generate provocative slurs, insults and humiliations. For instance, Whitehead et al. (Whitehead et al., 2018: 332–334) demonstrate that participants use references to class- and gender-based social asymmetries as interactional resources to initiate conflicts with projected violent outcomes.

Wouters (2007: 217–9) argues that the moral regulation of demeanour in contemporary urban public space has become 'informalised', less structured, and less hierarchical, with overt expressions of one's superiority and others' inferiority seen as offensive, shameful, and taboo. Although beliefs about the differential worthiness, competence, and respectability of social groups based on age, ethnicity, class, and race have hardly disappeared (Fiske, 2010), the 'status processes' that enact and sustain them in social interactions have become more subtle and implicit (Ridgeway, 2014: 5).

The process of informalisation affects encounters between civilians and between police and civilians. Research shows that most complaints about the uncivil behaviour of undesirables in urban public space involve the denial of mutuality and equality (Horgan, 2019), especially when people sense that their movement is being impeded or their personal space is being encroached upon (Phillips and Smith 2006: 894–895). Complaints most often concern people who claim too much space (e.g. bumping into, pushing or blocking others) or too much attention (e.g. prolonged staring), or demean others based on categorial membership (e.g. cat-calling and racial slurs). One ethnographic study found that conflicts arise when the victims of these perceived infractions against civility attempt to restore the moral order (Carole Gayet-Viaud 2022: chapters 2 and 3).

In his study of manner handbooks, Wouters (2007: 135–6) finds that rules ‘to identify and exclude undesirables’ are more rigid in England than in Germany. The prevailing English regime of manners is fraught with the tensions of a hierarchical class-society whose members have been socialized to avoid explicit references to social hierarchy and to be tactful, tolerant, and considerate in public. In contrast, German manner handbooks lack such sensitivity for how to deal tactfully with undesirables. Following Wouters (2007: 107, 115), Germans tend to rely on and more openly express differences in rank in urban public space that otherwise lack clear imputations of superiority and inferiority. It thus seems plausible that forms of behaviour considered civilized in French public space are less likely to be shaped by anxiety about explicit references to social hierarchy than in England, but also less likely to be oriented towards notions of social hierarchy than in Germany.

Tensions and anxieties about the presence of undesirable others are fuelled by often sensational media coverage of unsafe, crime-ridden neighbourhoods where criminal groups follow aggressive street codes that privilege upholding reputations of being able and ready to use violence at the slightest provocation (for England: Brookman et al., 2011; for France: Tévanian, 2003). Comparative studies based on observations of street controls and interviews with civilians in Germany and France have found that French police are more likely to target young males of visible minority—notably Maghrebian—descent (de Maillard et al. 2017; De Maillard et al. 2018; Schwarzenbach 2020). Notwithstanding the public spotlight and attempts to reduce institutional racism in British policing (Rowe 2012), studies of stop-and-search practices in the UK show that minority—notably black—young men continue to be disproportionately targeted (Borooah 2011; Keeling 2017).

In contrast to the UK, where racial and ethnic identities are publicly and institutionally recognized, French state institutions convey a vision of society that negates ethnic and racial minority identities (Amiriaux and Simon 2006; Body-Gendrot 2004, McAvay and Safi 2023). Given the highly visible and disproportionate police targeting of ethnic and racial minorities in England and France alongside prevailing perceptions of dangerous others in these countries, we expect expressions of superiority and inferiority related to race and ethnicity to be more emotionally charged and therefore more consequential in interpersonal conflicts in Paris than in London and, especially, in Berlin. ‘Consequential’ here means that antagonists use these expressions as resources to render their violence prospectively and retrospectively understandable—by issuing VCFs and presenting their violence as legitimate or righteous self-defence, or in terms exclusively oriented to their own peer group.

These considerations generate the following hypotheses on the role of verbal expressions of superiority and inferiority in interpersonal conflicts between strangers in public space. I will test them in a comparative study based on qualitative coding and basic statistical analyses (tests to estimate differences between the countries) of the verbal utterances transcribed in projects 2-7. Project 9 will advance our understanding of how ‘status processes’ sustain social inequality by comparing how social divisions are made explicit in Paris, London and Berlin.

**H6-1:** *Antagonists routinely employ expressions of superiority and inferiority based on broader social divisions to render their prospective and retrospective violence understandable.*

**H6-2:** *These expressions are therefore part of the turning points towards and away from violence.*

**H6-3:** *These expressions are more likely to refer to formal status hierarchies in Berlin than in London and Paris.*

**H6-4:** *These expressions are more likely to refer to race and ethnicity in Paris and London than in Berlin.*

#### *National differences in policing practices (project 10)*

Similar concerns about equality and mutuality in urban public space inform the notion of ‘procedural justice’ in policing studies. In Tyler’s (2006) often-cited study, procedural justice entails officers treating civilians with dignity and respect and allowing civilians to have their say (‘voice’). The concern for procedural justice can be seen as an attempt to reduce authoritarian tendencies within police forces and the perceived hierarchy between police and civilians. In practice, the differences between the countries express themselves in how police interact with civilians, most notably in their ‘stop and search’ practices (Hunold et al. 2016).



A comparative study of French and German police concluded that the former were less likely to explain why they were stopping and searching people on the street; particularly in their interactions with young ethnic minority men, the level of tension—as indicated by officers’ use of force—was higher than in Germany (Gauthier and de Maillard 2023; Hunold et al. 2016: 18; Oberwittler and Roché 2017, 2022). Hunold et al. (2016: 18; cf. de Maillard et al. 2017; De Maillard et al. 2018) conclude that French officers use a more proactive and confrontational style of policing, resulting in tougher encounters with civilians, most notably with young minority men. Trust in the police is thus generally lower in France than in both Germany and Britain (Hough et al. 2013: 11, 12, 15).

Ethnographic studies of how police officers are socialized in France and England have highlighted significant differences between the two countries. Whereas French recruits learn to fight crime in hostile environments and learn to mistrust civilians, the training of English officers emphasizes communication with civilians as a primary resource and the use of force as a last resort (Cassan 2010; cf. de Maillard and Zagrodzki 2021).

Reformulating these insights in ethnomethodological terms yields the following hypotheses about differences in the use of interactional resources between police officers in England, France and Germany. The hypotheses will be tested in a comparative project (10) conducted by myself, based on qualitative coding and basic statistical analyses (tests to estimate differences between the countries) of verbal utterances and bodily actions transcribed in projects 5-7.

**H7-1:** *French police officers are less likely to render their violence publicly understandable to civilians than English and German officers.*

**H7-2:** *French police officers seek to monopolize turn-taking earlier in the interaction than English and German officers.*

Finally, project 11 will compile the main findings of projects 1-10 in a monograph presenting the ethnomethodological theory of interpersonal violence.

## **Section b.1 Methodology: Exploiting the opportunities of phone camera-recorded video data**

### *Video analysis of the sequential emergence of bodily actions and verbal utterances*

Video data allow us to analyse violent interactions in real-life situations. The painstaking viewing and analysis of hundreds of clips of antagonistic and violent encounters for my ERC-funded GroupViolence research (which produced the following publications: Bruggeman et al., n.d.; Mosselman et al., 2018; Myhre Sund et al., 2023; Weenink, Dhattiwala, et al., 2022; Weenink, Tuma, et al., 2022) has convinced me that repeatedly replaying the interaction at different speeds, discussing the footage with a team of researchers, and using precise transcription procedures that can capture the sequential emergence of violence is necessary to yield insightful observations. This is largely due to the complexity of video data. Even short clips contain numerous action sequences, often involving multiple actors engaged in a multitude of behaviours in rapid response to the actions of others. In a matter of seconds, opponents enter into verbal exchanges repeated in intricate variations of tone and volume as they approach and retreat from one another, accompanied by a host of bodily gestures. In my GroupViolence research, I also noticed that as the sequence of actions and responses develops, *there are moments when the interaction could have taken a different turn*. While identifying such turning points is crucial for understanding how and why verbal altercations can devolve into physical violence, it was beyond the scope of my previous project as I lacked the theoretical and methodological tools to adequately and systematically analyse them. The proposed research program develops the methodological and theoretical means to do so.

Researchers have been using various forms of video data such as surveillance camera footage and body-worn camera recordings to study violence in public space, including police-civilian encounters (Myhre Sund et al., 2023; Piza et al., 2023; Piza and Sytsma, 2022; Sytsma et al., 2021; Willits and Makin, 2018), robberies (Mosselman et al. 2018; Nassauer 2018), violent protest marches (Nassauer 2019) and interventions by bystanders (Levine and Crowther 2008; Philpot et al. 2020; Weenink et al. 2022). While these studies have produced a body of compelling evidence about the importance of situational factors—for instance the impact of civilian resistance in police-civilian encounters (Alpert et al. 2004)—these ‘factors’ are constructed by

extracting a set of pre-determined actions from longer interaction sequences. Many of these studies also neglect verbal interactions, often for the simple reason that they rely on surveillance camera footage without sound.

Ethnomethodological/conversation analytic (EMCA) transcription procedures are ideal for tracing the sequential emergence of bodily actions and verbal utterances. Although EMCA procedures were originally developed to analyse audio-recorded verbal exchanges (Goodwin and Heritage 1990; Park and Hepburn 2022; Sacks et al. 1974), scholars working with video data have advanced methods to transcribe bodily actions as well (Heath et al. 2010; Knoblauch et al. 2014, 2015; Mondada 2014, 2018, 2019; Streeck et al. 2011). But to date, only a handful of studies have used EMCA procedures to analyse the sequential emergence of actions and understandings during episodes of interpersonal conflict. This work has either focused on verbal utterances predominantly (Whitehead et al. 2018) or considered both bodily and verbal modes of interaction to study a single (Lloyd, 2016, 2017) or very limited number of violent interactions (Meyer and Wedelstaedt, 2022; Weenink et al., 2022). The full potential of video data to analyse participants' turn-taking in situations of interpersonal conflict and violence has yet to be exploited. As the first systematic application of EMCA to compare different forms of violence in different countries, the proposed research program opens up new territory.

As video data are rich and complex, it can be challenging to determine what is relevant. Following EMCA transcription procedures, the relevance of captured phenomena—gestures, facial expressions, body movements, vocalizations—will not be determined a-priori (as in standardized coding) but will depend on whether they provoke reactions among the antagonists. This 'relevance criterion' (Schegloff, 1968) will guide the textual and visual representation of video data.

As a first step, we begin by transcribing spoken utterances based on the conventions of conversational analysis (Jefferson, 2004; Park and Hepburn, 2022; Ten Have, 2007). The transcription will provide a system of signs to represent how spoken language, paralinguistic elements ('ehm'), volume, tone, pauses and overlapping speech are sequentially produced. As we seek to show how these vocal utterances are generated as responses to the vocalizations of others, the transcription of turn-taking and overlaps will be particularly important.

The next step will add descriptions of transformations in bodily behaviour. These descriptions will then be further analysed by including images in the transcript representing sequences of bodily gestures and movements. The selection of gestures and movements and the transduction of video stills into drawings or other visual representations is part of the interpretative analysis (Goodwin, 2018; Mondada, 2014, 2016, 2018; Streeck et al., 2011). Visual representations allow capturing the specificity of gestures and movements without reducing them to verbose descriptions. A single or series of postures and movements can be represented as embedded in the ongoing stream of action by adding arrows or other forms of annotation in the transcript. As the analysis of bodily action is pregnant with possibilities to advance our scientific understanding of how violence unfolds, we further aim to advance the art and science of visual representation (Van Rompu, 2022; Weenink et al., 2022). To aid the transduction of stills into annotated drawings, the research program will invest in graphic editing software such as Adobe suite.

The video data will be complemented with 60 video-elicitation interviews with experts in the bodily techniques of violence (police scholars and trainers, martial arts trainers) in Berlin, London and Paris. After having transcribed about five videos, each PhD student will discuss the bodily actions captured in this material with 10 experts to refine their transcriptions during 2-month fieldwork stays. My PhD students in the GroupViolence project successfully used video elicitation interviews to generate expert accounts of the bodily know-how involved in violence (Keesman 2022; Van Rompu 2022).

Producing transcripts that show how participants sequentially produce actions and their understandings requires labour-intensive, meticulous analytical work. As the transcription proceeds, important details reveal themselves which trigger the analyst's theorizing about causal contingencies. The transcription is therefore the analyst's interpretative task and cannot be left to assistant coders or to AI (cf. Knoblauch 2012: 252). It is good standing practice among EMCA-oriented scholars to discuss transcripts in data sessions. Team members will be trained to transcribe videos following extant procedures (Hak and Bernts, 1996). In the first two years of the program, the research team will meet weekly to enhance the quality of the transcriptions. Transcription reliability will be assessed by comparing and discussing transcriptions of the same data. Team members will share and mutually check completed transcriptions.

The 126 transcripts generated in projects 2-7 will ground the analyses conducted in projects 8-11 described above.

*Developing data quality criteria and measures to prevent bias*

The research will rely on 126 mostly phone-recorded video clips retrieved from the internet (facebook.com, youtube.com, dailymotion.com, reddit.com (subreddits), and national media sites such as dailymail.co.uk, focus.de). Compared to CCTV recordings, phone-recorded footage tends to have better detail; crucially for our purposes, they also feature sound. People who record violent incidents on their phones also tend to follow the action, providing better opportunities to observe bodily positioning and movements than police body-worn cameras which tend to focus on one party in the encounter: the suspect (Luff and Heath 2012). Moreover, when wearers of body-worn cameras engage in rapid bodily action, the recording becomes jumbled and confusing (Morrison 2017: 812). Nevertheless, working with mobile phone-recorded footage poses specific challenges.

First, videos uploaded onto the internet may be biased towards spectacular cases. While my previous research unearthed a staggering range of phone-recorded video data available online in terms of severity and noteworthiness of violence—from incidents limited to verbal aggression and a few slaps to ferocious group kickings and machete attacks—it remains unclear which clips end up on the internet and why. This is of particular concern for civilian recordings of police; civilians who organize themselves in platforms such as Copwatch see recording as resistance against police violence, which may result in selection bias towards more brutal incidents. One US study (Farmer et al. 2015) found that college students with previous negative experiences with the police were more likely to record police activity, especially when these students were of minority descent.<sup>3</sup> The prominence of more egregious and racist forms of police violence on social media and in public debate not only distorts the public's view of daily police-civilian interactions, but also distracts attention from more pervasive, non-lethal forms of police aggression (Morrison 2017: 839). Our inclusion of three types of interpersonal conflict—verbal altercations, confrontational violence and one-sided violence against vulnerable victims—should prevent bias towards extreme cases in both police-civilian and civilian-civilian conflicts.

Second, because recorders often begin filming when they perceive something noteworthy is happening, recordings often do not capture the confrontation's onset. The data are thus truncated to an unknown degree. Nor do videos provide information about what happened prior to the interaction, or what the antagonists know about each other and the situation; for instance, the encounter may be part of an ongoing conflict. Police officers often gain such information from dispatchers.

To address these issues, the research team will develop a systematic procedure to evaluate how search terms—'fight', 'assault', 'street violence', etc. and their French and German equivalents—generate different types of clips to assess possible biases embedded in the search terms. This initial evaluation will also consider the scope and variation of situations and locations to be included in the study to furnish useful comparisons between cases and cities. Some initial parameters can be identified: (1) We will only include cases involving adults. (2) In projects 2-7, about half of the cases should include civilians from ethnic or racial minority groups, and 5-7 cases should involve women antagonists, given the aim of studying verbal expressions related to broader social divisions. (3) In projects 2-7, we will include 5-7 clips showing the use of weapons by civilians (clubs, knives, machetes, and improvised weapons such as bottles—guns excepted). (4) Pre-arranged fights will be excluded, for instance when antagonists are wearing protective clothing or a referee is present. (5) Clips involving groups of over five antagonists will be excluded as their analysis takes considerable time and would require additional theoretical and methodological elaboration. (6) In projects 2-7, we will select 5-7 clips of violent encounters where antagonists were joined by peer group members (see hypotheses 2.3-2.4). (7) Studies of policing differentiate police-civilian encounters in various ways (e.g. whether officers initiated the encounter or were responding to a call, whether the situation involves a dispute between civilians, whether civilians are engaging in verifiable criminal activity, etc.). Preliminary searches and the availability of additional online documentation will inform a more precise delimiting of the scope of police-civilian encounters.

Video data, whether it is produced by civilians, surveillance or body-worn cameras, is never an objective record of reality (Morrison 2017: 801). Technically, the camera's perspective only provides a temporal and spatially narrowed vision as we cannot see what happened before and after the recording and what happens

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<sup>3</sup> While civilians who have filmed the police have been arrested for obstruction of justice in the United States, such charges are almost always dismissed in court (Balko 2014). In England, France and Germany, filming the police and disseminating the recordings is legal (in 2021, the French *Conseil Constitutionnel* rejected the government's proposal to enable the prosecution of civilians who disseminate images in which individual police officers can be identified).

above, below and behind the camera. Culturally, the interpretation of video data inevitably requires interpretative work, which implies that there is no single way of understanding video material (Fan 2017: 1662; Morrison 2017: 804, 807). These limitations matter when video footage becomes part of truth claims in public debate or in court. But for our purposes, these limitations are of lesser concern. Our aim is not to interpret encounters from the perspective of outsiders but to analyse them from the perspective of participants to reveal how they attend to the details of actions moment-by-moment in the contingent construction of the interaction (Mondada 2006: 54, 55). This also implies that participant awareness of being filmed is not taken as a form of bias that distorts the ‘natural’ course of events. Instead, the analysts will treat participants attending to the camera as a resource they can exploit in the ongoing interaction (Mondada 2006: 61).

Attending to the camera has become part of naturally occurring interactions in our age of ubiquitous filming in public space. Canadian police officers, for example, report that they are perpetually aware of being recorded and that the possible online dissemination of the recording rather than the physical presence of the civilian camera influences their decision to moderate their use of force (Brown 2016: 302, 304). Their stance towards the presence of bystander cameras is one of ‘resigned acceptance’, not least because they consider their own actions to be in line with their training and legal and professional standards (Sandhu and Haggerty 2017: 86; cf. Sandhu 2019). Although they may chafe under the scrutiny, officers also appreciate the advantages of cameras being present, for example to gather evidence or to challenge false representations of their behaviour (Sandhu and Haggerty 2017: 89). One of my PhD students even found that uploading, sharing and commenting on camera phone recordings of police actions was a common practice among Dutch police (Keesman 2023).

We will use and further develop the following quality criteria to work with video data. We will select clips that: (1) have sufficient picture clarity to allow the precise transcription of bodily gestures, movements, and verbal utterances; (2) are unedited and show a continuous interactional process; (3) allow determining what the initial conflict was about. The recording should start before the actual physical harm-doing begins and continue until it stops. For police-civilian encounters, the recording would ideally start when officers arrive on the scene; (4) the location of the incident should be known to retrieve information about the neighbourhood; (5) there must be additional information on the incident in the form of police reports, media coverage, or other sources. Preliminary internet searches by myself and my current team of research assistants indicates the availability of a sufficient number of recordings of civilian-civilian and police-civilian encounters that meet these criteria.

To gain further insight into the production of the video data and their possible biases, the six PhD candidates will each conduct 10 short online interviews with people who uploaded their recordings of violence onto the internet (project 1). These interviews will cover their motivations to record the violence, the moment when they began recording, whether and how they modified the recording before uploading, their reasons for uploading a particular clip, and on which site. Interviewees will be approached via the comments section on uploading sites.

A research assistant will support the PhD candidates to find and register the video clips, systematize and register the search terms, set up a joint database, and recruit interviewees for the online interviews with the filmers and uploaders of phone camera recordings.

## **Section b.2: Organization and planning**

### *Host Institution*

The research program will be hosted at the Department of Sociology at the University of Amsterdam. The Department ranks among the world’s leading departments of Sociology (cf. QS global ranking), has renowned senior colleagues to co-supervise the six PhD students, and offers a stimulating academic environment for young scholars. The UvA’s graduate school, the Amsterdam Institute of Social Science Research, offers solid PhD training and excellent administrative support.

### *Projects*

The research program consists of 11 projects.

Project 1 seeks to understand the production process of online phone camera recordings and the motivations of people who film and upload recordings of interpersonal conflict in urban public space. The data are 30

online interviews conducted by the PhD students, assisted by a research assistant. I will analyse these data and take the lead in writing a team-authored article.

PhD projects 2-4 are guided by hypotheses 1-1 until 4-1 and related questions. They aim to understand the emergence of one-sided violence by comparing three kinds of interactional trajectories (leading to verbal altercations without physical violence, two-sided and one-sided violence) between civilians in urban public space in Berlin (project 2), London (project 3) and Paris (project 4). The data are transcriptions of 21 phone camera recordings per project. Each project will generate a doctoral thesis and two refereed academic articles. Although the projects are organized around the hypotheses, the content of these publications will be determined by the PhD students, who will be encouraged to further develop their projects in ways that fit their scholarly interests and ambitions.

Hypotheses 1-1 until 4-1 and related questions also offer guidance to projects 5-7, which aim to understand the emergence of one-sided violence by comparing the three interactional trajectories between police and civilians in urban public space in Berlin (project 5), London (project 6) and Paris (project 7). As in projects 2-4, 21 phone camera recordings per project will form the empirical basis of three doctoral theses and six scientific publications.

To understand the differences and similarities between the trajectories of police-civilian and civilian-civilian conflicts, I will test hypotheses (5-1 and 5-2) by analysing the 126 transcripts generated in projects 2-7, resulting in an article.

Project 9 aims to understand how ‘status processes’ sustain social inequality by comparing how social divisions are made explicit in antagonists’ verbal utterances in Paris, London and Berlin. I will use the 126 transcripts generated in projects 2-7 to pursue qualitative coding and basic statistical tests to estimate differences between the countries (hypotheses 6-1 and 6-4) and report findings in an article.

Hypotheses 7-1 and 7-2 revolve around differences in the use of interactional resources between police officers in England, France and Germany. I will test these hypotheses in project 10, based on qualitative analyses of the bodily actions transcribed in projects 5-7.

Last but not least, I will compile the main findings of projects 1-10 in a monograph presenting the integrative theory in project 11.

#### *First year, months 1-6*

- Team meets weekly to discuss literature to further develop the project’s theoretical and methodological grounding, exchange results of internet searches and discuss transcriptions in data sessions
- Team develops data quality criteria and procedures to retrieve and register video material from the internet
- PhD students attend course in EMCA transcription procedures
- PhD students compile video corpus, assisted by research assistant
- PhD students each conduct 5 short online interviews with people who record and upload footage of interpersonal conflict on the internet, assisted by research assistant (project 1)
- PhD students transcribe and analyse video clips
- Team presents preliminary work and proposals at workshop or conference

#### *First year, months 7-12*

- PhD students each conduct 10 video-elicitation interviews with experts on violence during two months of fieldwork in Berlin, London and Paris
- After fieldwork, team meets weekly to discuss transcriptions in data sessions
- I analyse the online interview data, take the lead writing article on project 1
- PhD students transcribe and analyse video clips, each PhD student has produced 8 transcriptions by month 12

#### *Second year, months 13-24*

- Team meets weekly to discuss transcriptions in data sessions
- Team submits joint article on project 1

- PhD students continue to transcribe and analyse video clips, resulting in 18 transcriptions in each project by month 24
- PhD students start writing their first articles on projects 2-7
- I start the analysis of project 8, supported by research assistant
- Team presents work at workshop or conference

*Third year, months 25-30*

- I meet the PhD students individually every two weeks to discuss progress, as each project may encounter different issues requiring specific guidance
- PhD students continue transcribing video clips until they have reached 21 transcriptions
- PhD students submit their first articles on projects 2-7
- PhD students start writing their second articles on projects 2-7
- I continue the analysis of project 8

*Third year, months 31-36*

- PhD students and I meet individually every two weeks
- PhD students submit their second articles on projects 2-7
- I write an article on project 8
- Research assistant starts coding project 9
- Team presents work at workshop or conference

*Fourth year, months 37-42*

- PhD students and I meet individually every two weeks
- PhD students write doctoral theses
- I submit article on project 8
- I start writing an article on project 9
- Supported by research assistant, I start analysis for project 8

*Fourth year, months 42-48*

- PhD students and I meet individually every two weeks
- PhD students write doctoral theses
- I submit article on project 9
- I start analysis for project 10
- Team presents work at workshop or conference

*Fifth year, months, 49-60*

- PhD students submit their doctoral theses
- I submit article on project 10
- I write monograph project 11
- I present work at workshop or conference

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