

Representation of Women in Bollywood

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Abstract

IN THE INDIAN COMMERCIAL FILM INDUSTRY, THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IS A SUBJECT OF GROWING CONTROVERSY AS MODERN CINEMATIC PORTRAYALS INCREASINGLY CLASH WITH LONG-STANDING MISOGYNIST NORMS. FAMOUSLY KNOWN AS BOLLYWOOD, THE ROLE THESE MEDIA PRODUCTIONS TAKE IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF A SOCIETY THAT PROMOTES INEQUALITY AMONG GENDERS CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO THE ABILITY OF THESE PRODUCTIONS TO FAIRLY AND ACCURATELY REPRESENT A SPECIFIC GENDER AND TO PROMOTE THE POSSIBILITY OF UPWARD SOCIAL MOBILITY. AMONG THE PLETHORA OF FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO A LACK OF FAIR REPRESENTATION, THE MOST UNDISCOVERED FIELD IS ROOTED IN THE ROLE THE GENDER OF THE FILM DIRECTOR PLAYS IN THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN. THEREFORE, THIS STUDY EXPLORES HOW FEMALE-DIRECTED FILMS IMPACT THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY THROUGH (A) THE NUMBER OF SPEAKING FEMALE CHARACTERS AND (B) THE DEPTH OF THEIR CHARACTERIZATION. DEPTH IS OPERATIONALIZED AS A COMPOSITE INDEX CAPTURING INDEPENDENT GOALS, OCCUPATIONAL SPECIFICITY, ARC COMPLETION, DECISION-INITIATING ACTIONS, AND PASSING THE BECHDEL TEST. TO EFFECTIVELY ACQUIRE DATA FOR THIS PROJECT, RESEARCH ASSISTANTS ARE TRAINED TO ACCURATELY CODE THE DATA FROM EACH FEMALE SPEAKING-CHARACTER IN EACH FILM INTO A QUALTRICS SURVEY THAT NOTES CRUCIAL FACTORS SUCH AS CLOTHING, RELIGION, RELATIONSHIPS, EDUCATION, AND BEHAVIOR. EACH CHARACTER WAS COMPLETED BY AT LEAST TWO RESEARCH ASSISTANTS AND WAS THEN PEER-REVIEWED BY EACH OTHER WITH GUIDANCE FROM THE MENTOR. WHILE THE PROJECT REMAINS IN EARLY STAGES OF COMPLETION, THE DATA EXTRACTED FROM THE FILMS TO DATE YIELD HIGHLY THOUGHT-PROVOKING RESULTS REGARDING THE DEPICTION OF WOMEN PRESENTED THROUGH THE DIRECTOR'S CHARACTERIZATION.



Q8 - How many total speakers (male and female) did you count in the film?						
Field	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Responses	Sum
Female Speakers	4.00	30.00	18.67	6.54	402	7506.00
Male Speakers	9.00	75.00	32.15	14.16	402	12926.00

FIGURE 1

Introduction

AT FIRST GLANCE, BOLLYWOOD AS AN INDUSTRY APPEARS EXCEPTIONALLY SUPERFLUOUS IN THEIR FILMMAKING. HOWEVER, CRITICAL SCRUTINY REVEALS A RIGID FRAMEWORK THAT GUIDES ITS CONSTRUCTION—USING MORE FORMULAIC CONVENTIONS TO ESTABLISH CHARACTERIZATION AND PLOT. CENTRAL TO THESE CONVENTIONS IS THE CONCEPT OF A MORAL UNIVERSE SURROUNDING A HINDU IDEOLOGY OF GODS, FATE, CYCLES OF LIFE, DEATH, AND REBIRTH—DESCRIBING THE BINARY STRUGGLE BETWEEN 'GOOD VS EVIL' AND 'HERO VS VILLAIN'. WITHIN THIS FRAMEWORK, THE PERENNIAL TROPE IS ENACTED WHERE THE PLIGHT OF THE PROTAGONIST SHAKES THIS UNIVERSE OFF BALANCE, REQUIRING A RESTORATION OF ORDER BY THE FILM'S CONCLUSION. AS THE PRIMARY ARCHITECT OF THIS UNIVERSE, THE DIRECTOR SERVES AS THE ULTIMATE ARBITER OF CHARACTER DEPTH, HOLDING THE RESPONSIBILITY TO DETERMINE WHETHER A CHARACTER IS GRANTED THE AGENCY TO DRIVE THE NARRATIVE OR IS RELEGATED TO A PERIPHERAL ROLE.

GIVEN THAT THE DIRECTOR'S INTERPRETATION OF A FILM SHAPES THE DEPTH OF THE CHARACTERS, THE GENDER OF THE DIRECTOR EMERGES AS A CRITICAL FACTOR IN CHANGING HOW WOMEN ARE PORTRAYED. HISTORICALLY, MEN WERE OFTEN PROPAGATED AS THE UNIVERSAL PROBLEM-SOLVERS AND SAVIORS, SYSTEMICALLY DENYING WOMEN THE RIGHT TO CONTRIBUTE LEADING ROLES; IN EARLIER ERAS, MEN EVEN PLAYED THE ROLES OF WOMEN, BARRING WOMEN FROM THE INDUSTRY ALTOGETHER. AS THE INDUSTRY EVOLVES, THE QUESTION SHIFTS FROM A PERSPECTIVE OF QUANTITY TO QUALITY OF REPRESENTATION. THIS STUDY EXAMINES HOW FEMALE-DIRECTED FILMS PREDICT A DEPARTURE FROM LONG-ESTABLISHED MISOGYNIST NORMS THROUGH FILM-CODING TO DETERMINE DEPTH OF CHARACTERIZATION FOR EACH FEMALE-SPEAKING CHARACTER.

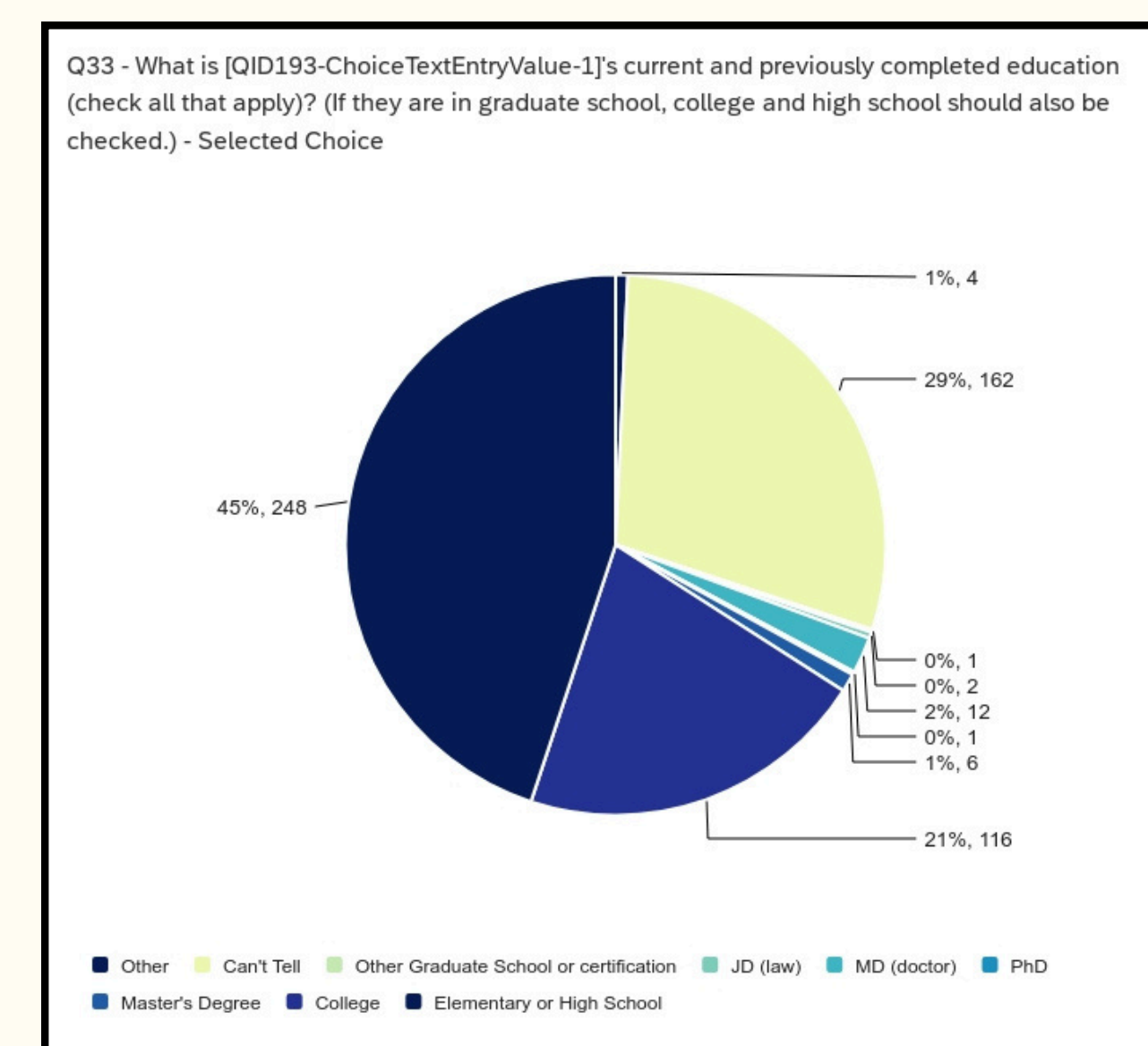


FIGURE 2

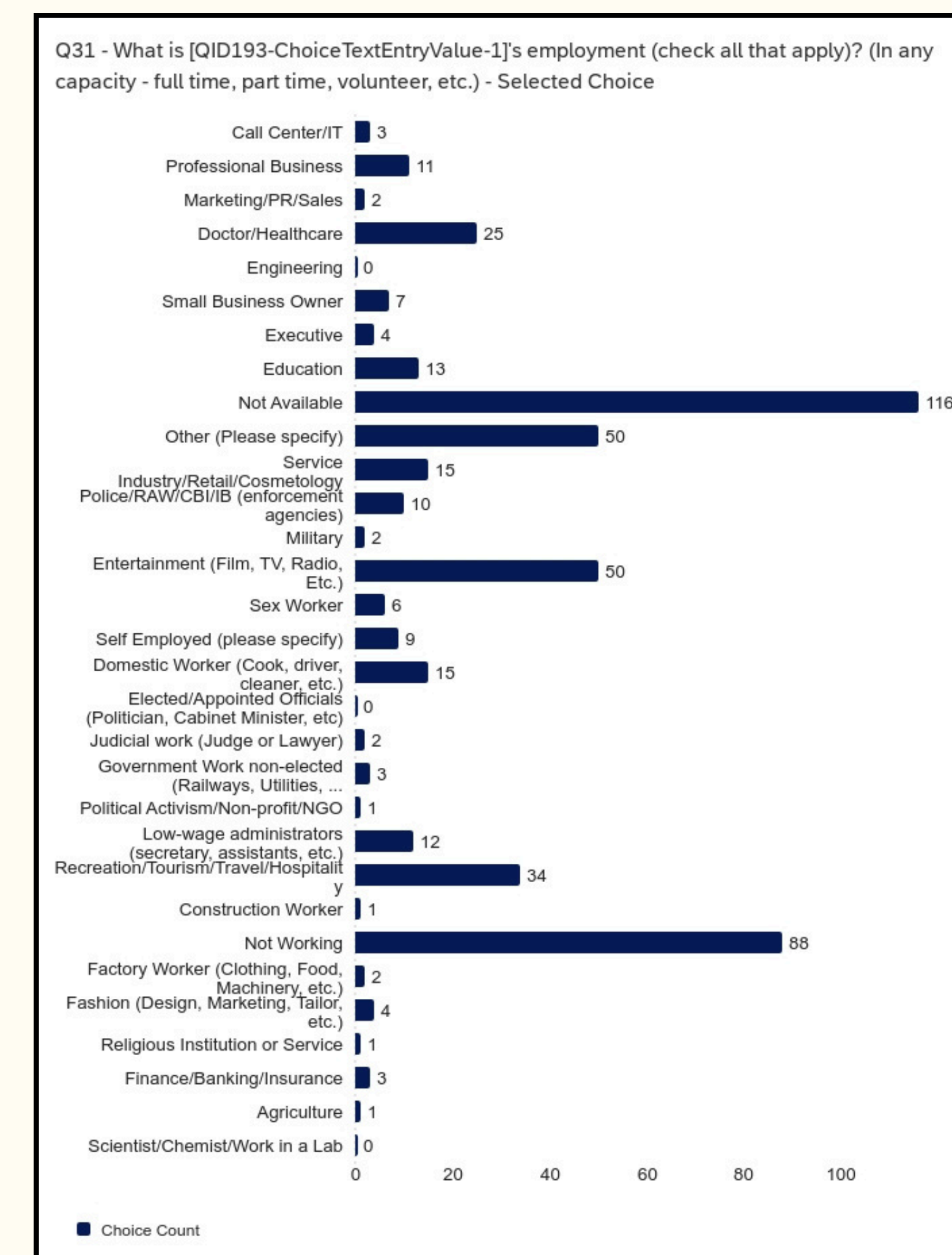


FIGURE 3

Methods

THIS STUDY EMPLOYS AN ANALYSIS OF HOW WOMEN IN THE ROLE OF DIRECTOR IMPACT THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN BOLLYWOOD FILMS RELEASED DURING 1960-2026 WITH AN EMPHASIS ON THE NUMBER OF SPEAKING FEMALE CHARACTERS AND THE DEPTH OF THEIR CHARACTERIZATION. RESEARCH ASSISTANTS USED A SPECIALIZED FILM-CODING TECHNIQUE TO ACQUIRE INFORMATION FROM EACH SPEAKING FEMALE CHARACTER AND RECORDED THE DATA USING A QUALTRICS SURVEY CONTAINING CERTAIN CRITERIA THAT RELATE TO THE PORTRAYAL OF EACH FEMALE CHARACTER IN EACH FILM. TO PRESERVE THE INTEGRITY OF THE DATA BEING COLLECTED, THIS CODING METHOD HAS BEEN REFINED AND UPDATED THROUGHOUT THE COURSE OF OUR RESEARCH. SUBSEQUENTLY, EACH FILM AND CHARACTER WAS CODED BY MORE THAN ONE RESEARCH ASSISTANT, THEN PEER-REVIEWED WITH THE MENTOR TO ENSURE ACCURACY. SURVEYS ARE THEN UPDATED AND FINALIZED.

Results/Discussion

FOLLOWING THE CRITICAL ANALYSES OF NUMEROUS FEMALE-DIRECTED BOLLYWOOD FILMS, THE DATA PRESENTED CONTRADICTS THE ASSUMPTION THAT FEMALE-DIRECTED FILMS ARE MORE LIKELY TO PRESENT FEMALES IN A HIGHER REGARD—THUS ALIGNING WITH LONG-STANDING TRADITIONS AND STAGNATING THE POSSIBILITY OF UPWARD SOCIAL MOBILITY. THE RATIO OF MALE SPEAKERS TO FEMALE SPEAKERS THROUGHOUT THIS STUDY IS 1.66:1; INDICATING THERE ARE APPROXIMATELY TWO MALE-SPEAKING CHARACTERS FOR EACH FEMALE-SPEAKING CHARACTER ON SET. FURTHERMORE, THIS STUDY YIELDED THAT 24.4% OF FEMALE-SPEAKING CHARACTERS RECEIVED ONLY SECONDARY EDUCATION AND 39% WERE INDECIIPHERABLE; CONSEQUENTLY, 49.3% WERE PORTRAYED AS UNEMPLOYED. THESE FINDINGS INDICATE THAT FEMALE DIRECTORS MAY STILL BE OPERATING WITHIN—OR CONSTRAINED BY THE PERPETUAL MALE DOMINATION OF THE FILM INDUSTRY. ALTHOUGH THESE FILMS MAY BE FEMALE DIRECTED BEHIND THE SCENES, THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN ON-SCREEN IS STILL ASSOCIATED WITH LOWER SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS—FAILING TO PRODUCE THE DEPTH OF CHARACTERIZATION THAT IS INDICATIVE OF UPWARD SOCIAL MOBILITY.

AS THE STUDY CONTINUES, SURVEYS USED TO CODE THE FEMALE-SPEAKING CHARACTERS IN EACH FILM ARE REFINED TO REFLECT ANY NEWFOUND KNOWLEDGE THAT CAN APPLY TO THIS RESEARCH. NATURALLY, THIS COULD LEAD TO MINOR DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN CURRENT AND FUTURE DATA; JUST AS IT COULD ALSO PROVIDE GREATER INSIGHT INTO THE MYRIAD OF NUANCES SURROUNDING CHARACTER AGENCY. TO DRAFT A POINT OF COMPARISON, IN THE FUTURE, THIS STUDY MAY BE OPENED TO CODING MALE-DIRECTED FILMS; THUS, PROVIDING A WELL-ROUNDED FOUNDATION TO ASCERTAIN AND ESTABLISH THE TRUE NATURE OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIRECTOR GENDER AND THE RATIO OF QUANTITY TO QUALITY OF FEMALE REPRESENTATION.

References

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