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SEX, GENDER, AND WORK

ON THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SEX

There is perhaps no field aspiring to be scientific where flagrant personal bias, logic martyred in the cause of supporting a prejudice, unfounded assertions, and even sentimental rot and drivel, have run riot to such an extent as here.¹

Psychologists love dichotomies. They love to slice and dice a broader population into two categories.²

Our story begins with a pithy word from the first psychologist to undertake an extensive and systematic examination of the psychological characteristics of the sexes.³ In 1910, Helen Thompson Woolley issued a stinging indictment of research about the topic of sex differences that is quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Since then, many thousands of studies on the topic have been published by scholars around the world. Has anything changed?

Exactly one century later, Susan Fiske, a prominent, modern-day psychologist, offered the humorous take on psychologists who conduct research about sex differences that appears in the second quote above. When psychologists consider the characteristics of two groups such as men and women, they tend to view members of the two groups as opposite in traits. This tendency in turn influences the psychologists' research, including the topics studied, the labels assigned to traits, and the interpretation of results and conclusions reached. It is also exhibited in popular conceptions of how the sexes differ. For example, John Gray's best-selling book, *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*, which spawned a series of books with similar titles (e.g., *Beyond Mars and Venus*), asserted that women and men are so different in personal traits that they might as well be from different planets. Not all people agreed; on a Web site titled *The Rebuttal From Uranus*, Susan Hamson slammed

Gray's book as "a sexist, patronizing, male-centered invective which does little more than perpetuate long-held negative gender stereotypes." However, even if psychologists and other observers are predisposed to believe that sex differences in personal traits are prevalent, this does not necessarily mean that sex differences are absent. Moreover, even if sex differences in personal traits that men and women bring to the workplace are minimal, their experiences in the workplace may differ dramatically.⁴

Women and Men in Management, Fifth Edition, examines the evolving roles and experiences of women and men in the global workplace. Significant changes have occurred over the past several decades in the status of women and men and in their interactions at work. However, sharply different views have been offered about the implications of these changes for the workplace of the future. Some believe that all of the needed changes have taken place and remaining sex-based inequalities in the workplace will continue to erode. According to an **optimistic view** of trends toward gender equality, the inevitable consequence of egalitarian values among parents to provide their daughters and sons with similar opportunities, among citizens to fully support and comply with laws banning discrimination on the basis of sex, and among organizations to offer family-friendly programs such as on-site child care will be equal opportunities and pay for women and men. In short, the day will come when a person's sex no longer matters at work.⁵

However, others believe that needed changes have stalled and remaining sex-based inequalities are now entrenched. According to a **pessimistic view**, although men are doing more housework, they are not exactly embracing the opportunity to take on equal responsibility with their female partners for child care and other household demands. Also, although women have sought access to male-intensive occupations (those in which two-thirds or more of the workforce is male) in greater numbers, fewer men have sought access to female-intensive occupations (those in which two-thirds or more of the workforce is female). Further, the legal mandate of equal opportunities for women and men at work is not equivalent to a societal commitment to ensure that they will be similarly oriented to take advantage of such opportunities.

Not surprisingly, employed women and men tend to see the workplace differently, with women leaning more toward the pessimistic view and men more toward the optimistic view. However, both female and male university students tend to embrace the optimistic view, believing that they will be personally unaffected by or witness any sex discrimination when they enter the workplace. Moreover, female students are more likely to believe that other women will experience sex discrimination than they will experience it themselves, suggesting that they see themselves as personally immune from workplace forces that disadvantage other women.⁶

Although we do not know whether the future will offer greater support for the optimistic or pessimistic view, the evidence about the present state of affairs in the workplace offers more of a mixed picture. The role of women

in the workplace has expanded considerably in recent decades. In the United States, the proportion of women in the labor force (i.e., the proportion of all adults employed or seeking employment who are women), which was 42% in 1980, has risen to 47%. Also since 1980, the proportion of women in the labor force has increased from 36% to 46% in Australia, 29% to 41% in Chile, 7% to 21% in Egypt, 39% to 48% in France, and 12% to 25% in India. Although the current proportion of women in the labor force varies widely across countries, the trend in almost all countries has been in the same direction, toward the increased employment of women.⁷

Similarly, although the proportion of women in management in different countries varies widely due to differences in national culture and definitions of the term *manager*, the trend in almost all countries has been toward the increased representation of women in the managerial ranks. However, female managers remain concentrated in lower management levels and hold positions with less status, power, and authority than men. The higher the level of the organization, the fewer women are found. Around the world, a **glass ceiling** appears to restrict women's access to top management positions solely because they are women. Women are not allowed to advance in managerial hierarchies as far as men with equivalent credentials.⁸

Evidence about the sex composition of the top management ranks has been interpreted in sharply different ways. For example, in 1996, one (i.e., 0.2%) of the chief executive officers (CEOs) of *Fortune* 500 corporations was female. At the time of writing, 32 (6.4%) of the *Fortune* 500 CEOs are female. What should be made of this trend? It depends in part on what statistic is used to describe it. On the one hand, the increase in the proportion of female CEOs of *Fortune* 500 corporations since 1996 has been 3100.0% (from one to 32), certainly a large proportion. On the other hand, the decrease in the proportion of male CEOs of such corporations over the same period has been only 6.2% (from 499 to 468). Observers have disagreed over what this trend actually means. When the proportion reached 4.0% for the first time, one observer declared “the dawn of the age of female CEOs” and a real breakthrough for women. However, commenting on the same trend, others argued that it represented “delusions of progress” and the real story was that there are still too few female CEOs. Thus, the same trend in the status of women in top management may be interpreted both optimistically and pessimistically.⁹

In addition, the economic status of women in the workplace remains lower than that of men. The average female full-time worker continues to be paid less than the average male full-time worker. This gap is partly due to the lower average wages of workers in female-intensive occupations than that of workers in male-intensive occupations. Also, women are paid less than men in the same occupation and often in the same job. The ratio of female-to-male wages for similar work is below 100% in all nations for which the World Economic Forum reports data.¹⁰

Further, the global labor force remains sharply segregated on the basis of sex. In recent years, women have shown more interest in entering male-intensive occupations than men have shown in entering female-intensive occupations, which is not surprising because workers in male-intensive occupations are the higher paid. However, women continue to be crowded into a lower-paying set of occupations than are men.¹¹

Overall, differences in workplace status according to biological sex remain strong, even though there have been considerable changes. Is it only a matter of time until the proportions of women and men in all managerial levels and all occupations become essentially equal, until women and men are paid equal wages for equal work, and until individuals' work experiences are unaffected by their biological sex? As we shall see, it will depend on actions that organizations and individuals take.

SEX AND GENDER

In this book, we make a distinction between two frequently used terms: sex and gender. The term **sex** (or biological sex) refers to the binary categories of male and female, which are determined by biological characteristics of individuals such as their physiological properties and reproductive apparatus. The term **gender** refers to the psychosocial implications of being male or female, such as beliefs and expectations about what kinds of attitudes, behaviors, skills, values, and interests are more appropriate for or typical of one sex than the other. Thus, gender is a term used in a social context to refer to the role associated with being male or female.¹²

However, not all individuals fall into the category of being either male or female. An **intersex** person is someone who possesses physical characteristics associated with both females and males. Also, **transgender** individuals, who identify with a sex different from the one assigned at birth, may go through a physical transition such that they become members of the sex with which they identify. Thus, categorizing individuals as either female or male does not cover all people, and being female or male is not necessarily a stable category.¹³

In research reviewed in this book, the study of **sex differences** generally examines how males and females actually differ. In contrast, the study of **gender differences** generally focuses on how people believe that males and females differ. For example, a sex difference in leadership style would exist if female leaders were more considerate of subordinates than male leaders were, whereas a gender difference in leadership style would exist if people believed that female leaders were more considerate of subordinates than male leaders were. However, there could be a gender difference in leadership style without a corresponding sex difference and vice versa.

As we consider the effects of sex differences on work-related behavior, we also need to consider the effects of gender differences. Sex differences

influence how people are disposed to behave in work settings. Gender differences influence how people react to others' behavior in such settings. Further, gender differences can *cause* sex differences. For example, if parents believe that the developmental needs of their sons differ from those of their daughters, they may raise their children in ways that reinforce that belief. In the same vein, if supervisors believe that the skills and interests of their female and male subordinates differ, they may assign tasks to their subordinates in ways that reinforce that belief. In each case, the result is a **self-fulfilling prophecy**—when expectations cause behavior that makes the expectations come true. We identify many workplace situations in which self-fulfilling prophecies are likely to occur.¹⁴

DIMENSIONS OF DIVERSITY

People differ in many ways, some of which are changeable, with others less amenable to change. **Primary dimensions of diversity** are essentially unchangeable (or difficult-to-change) personal characteristics that may exert significant lifelong impacts. Sex is typically classified as a primary dimension of diversity, along with race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, and physical abilities/disabilities. Together, primary dimensions of diversity affect our early learning experiences, and there is typically no escaping their impact throughout the course of our lives.¹⁵

Secondary dimensions of diversity, on the other hand, are more readily changeable personal characteristics. These characteristics are acquired and may be modified or abandoned throughout life. Education, income, marital and parental status, religion, political affiliation, and work experience are some secondary dimensions of diversity of importance to many people. People also distinguish themselves in many other ways, such as in their choices of collegiate fraternities or sororities, hobbies, activities, voluntary associations, clothing and grooming style, and music preferences. Of course, people do not completely determine their secondary dimensions of diversity. For instance, educational background, work experience, income, and marital status are also affected by other people's decisions. However, people generally exercise more control over secondary than primary dimensions of diversity in their lives.

Dimensions of diversity, both primary and secondary, affect your basic self-image and sense of identity. To illustrate this point, try the following exercise:

Draw a “pie chart” that identifies group affiliations that have some importance in your self-identity. These affiliations may be based on any of the primary or secondary dimensions of diversity mentioned above or on some other personal characteristic that is particularly important to you (e.g., cat or dog lover, fan of particular sports team or musical act). Indicate the

approximate importance of each group affiliation by the size of the slice of pie that you assign it.¹⁶

Now review your pie chart. It indicates the specific group affiliations with which you most identify, which are likely to be numerous and unique to you. As Jaye Goosby Smith put it, “We are all messy mashups of identity!”¹⁷ Taylor Cox concluded from his experiences with using this exercise in diversity courses that people tend to be highly aware of the group affiliation that most distinguishes them from the majority group in a particular setting. For example, women in male-dominated settings are more likely than men in such settings to emphasize their sex in their pie charts, and Blacks in White-dominated settings are more likely than Whites in such settings to emphasize their race. Thus, your pie chart and the identities it displays may be influenced by the setting that provides your frame of reference when you draw it—but not necessarily so.¹⁸

Dimensions of diversity pertain to group memberships that may be visible or invisible and sometimes present individuals with choices to make. For example, people with a **visible disability** face a decision about whether to acknowledge it to others and, if so, how. Acknowledgment strategies vary from claiming the visible disability (i.e., accentuating its positive aspects and making it part of one’s identity) to downplaying it (i.e., minimizing its negative aspects and redirecting attention from it); these decisions are likely to be based on anticipated reactions to the form of acknowledgment if any. People with a visible disability also vary in whether they request a workplace accommodation for the disability.¹⁹

In contrast, **sexual orientation** represents a dimension of diversity that is not necessarily visible to others. In environments in which heterosexuality is assumed unless information is provided to the contrary, **lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals** face decisions about whether to “come out” to others and, if so, to whom; these decisions may be based on anticipated reactions to the potential disclosure. However, people may infer others’ sexual orientation even when it is not disclosed.²⁰

Visible or inferred dimensions of diversity may have a greater impact on how others see and react to you than on how you see yourself. For example, sex is a highly visible characteristic that is important to most people when forming their impression of someone. People have little choice about “coming out” as or acknowledging their being female or male. The psychologist Sandra Bem once asked audience members if they had ever known anyone personally without noticing that person’s sex; few could answer yes. Even if sex is not important to a person’s own sense of identity (i.e., left out of his or her pie chart), other people are often influenced by their beliefs and expectations associated with that person’s sex.

Researchers often ignore the ways in which individuals’ sex combines with other dimensions of diversity to influence their identities and experiences. **Intersectionality** refers to the notion that multiple identities intersect

or overlap to affect individuals' experiences in complex ways. As an example of how intersectionality has frequently been ignored in research, many studies of sex or gender differences have not reported or examined the influence of the racial or ethnic group of the individuals who were the focus of the study. By ignoring issues of race and ethnicity, such studies reflect an underlying assumption that sex and gender differences are similar across all racial and ethnic groups. That is, White women, Black women, Hispanic women, Asian women, and women of other racial and ethnic groups are assumed to have similar identities and experiences, as are White men, Black men, Hispanic men, Asian men, and so on. Factor in other dimensions of diversity that might have been reported and examined but were not (e.g., socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, age, etc.), and the list of assumptions about the similarity of sex and gender differences across members of different groups grows. We need to guard against making such assumptions ourselves.²¹

STEREOTYPING, PREJUDICE, AND DISCRIMINATION

People may engage in stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination according to how they literally “see” others in terms of dimensions of diversity. **Stereotyping** consists of having a set of beliefs about the personal attributes of a group of people. It is a cognitive activity, related to thinking, learning, and remembering distinctions among groups of people. Stereotypes may be accurate or inaccurate, and positive or negative, in their depiction of the average group member, but they seldom fully characterize a particular individual within a given group. In contrast, people who display **prejudice**, or a negative attitude toward members of other groups, are engaging in an emotional activity. Stereotyping and prejudice may both be learned in childhood, which we will discuss in Chapter 3. Finally, **discrimination**, regarded as a behavioral activity, is exhibited in how people treat members of other groups and in the decisions they make about others.²²

However, given today's technology, discrimination may also be a digital activity. For example, in an experimental study, researchers found that Google exhibited discrimination in the ads it showed to men versus women. When simulated men visited employment-related Web pages, Google displayed ads for a career coaching agency that promoted jobs with high salaries more frequently than when simulated women visited the same Web pages. A different study found that online ads for providers of arrest records were more likely to be displayed when searches were conducted for real names that were most associated with Black people than for real names that were most associated with White people, even if the individuals searched for had no actual arrest record. These studies suggest that discrimination may be exhibited by computer software and algorithms as well as people.²³

We have reason to be concerned about stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination in the workplace. All of us may be targets of these phenomena as well as engage in these phenomena. In this book, we focus on stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination on the basis of sex, but sex represents only one of many personal characteristics that may influence individuals' experiences in the workplace.

People may be subjected to “isms” other than sexism on the basis of other visible dimensions of diversity such as race and age. **Racism** may be directed by members of any race toward members of any race. However, what “race” exactly means is debatable, and how it is used to distinguish members of one racial group from another is questionable. As Audrey and Brian Smedley stated, “Race as biology is fiction, (but) racism as a social problem is real.”²⁴

Ageism may be directed toward both older workers and younger workers, subjecting members of either group to negative stereotypes, prejudice, or discrimination. Curiously, discrimination against older workers is illegal in most countries, but discrimination against younger workers is perfectly legal.²⁵

People may also be subjected to “isms” according to whether they disclose less visible dimensions of diversity, such as sexual orientation, or this information is revealed or inferred about them by others. **Heterosexism** refers to negative stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation specifically directed toward LGBT individuals. Depending on the country, or the state or municipality within a given country, workplace discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation may be legal or illegal. When it occurs, it provides a less welcoming and inclusive environment for LGBT employees that may affect workplace matters ranging from whether family photos are displayed in an office setting to who gets rewarded and how much.²⁶

People often compare the effects of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination on the basis of different dimensions of diversity and offer conclusions about which “ism” (e.g., sexism, racism, ageism, heterosexism) has worse consequences. This oversimplifies the complex issues involved and ignores how “isms” may intersect. It seems more reasonable to acknowledge that sex as well as a host of other dimensions of diversity, solely or in combination, may be used as the basis for stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. We need to guard against all “isms” in the workplace and not be distracted by comparisons of their strength.

WATCHING OUT FOR BIASES

People tend to have strong beliefs about whether there are fundamental differences between the capabilities of females and males. In fact, speculation about such differences is a universal phenomenon. People seldom wonder

whether children who differ in eye color or height also differ in personality, behavioral tendencies, or intellectual abilities. However, they do care if there are such differences between girls and boys.²⁷

Researchers may bring either of two types of bias to the study of sex differences: alpha bias and beta bias. **Alpha bias** consists of the tendency to exaggerate sex differences. **Beta bias** consists of the tendency to minimize or ignore sex differences. Either type of bias can lead to a distortion of how the researcher sees reality.²⁸

Such biases may be the result of the personal prejudices of researchers. If the researcher's goal is to prove that traditional stereotypes of the sexes are inaccurate and that females and males are essentially equivalent in their personalities, behavioral tendencies, and intellectual abilities, he or she is likely to demonstrate beta bias by concluding that any sex differences that are found are trivial. On the other hand, if the researcher's goal is to prove that one sex is superior to the other in some way or to justify a status quo in which women and men are seen as naturally suited to different roles and thereby deserving of different treatment, he or she is likely to demonstrate alpha bias by concluding that sex differences in personal characteristics are large and fundamental to human functioning.²⁹

For example, one critique of modern neuroscience (the study of the structure and functioning of the nervous system and brain) is that it is inappropriately used by some neuroscientists with alpha bias to advance the notion that female and male brains are essentially different in ways that justify gender stereotypes, a notion that has been labeled as **neurosexism**. A counter-critique is that some neuroscientists are reluctant to acknowledge any sex differences that exist because they fear being inappropriately labeled as neurosexists by other neuroscientists with beta bias. If alpha or beta bias prevails regardless of the research evidence, Helen Thompson Wooley's quote at the beginning of the chapter does not seem so far-fetched.³⁰

Also, as Susan Fiske suggested in the opening quote, the mere presence of a two-category system leads psychologists as well as other people to view the two categories as opposites. For example, parents with two children tend to describe each in contrast to the other (e.g., "Tom is more of a leader and Joe is more of a follower"). However, parents with three or more children tend to focus on the unique aspects of each child (e.g., "Kristin enjoys rooting for her favorite baseball team, Melissa likes to produce school plays, Rob likes camping, Will enjoys photography, and Nate likes to bang the drums"). Similarly, anthropologists who have done fieldwork in only two cultures tend to emphasize the differences between these cultures, whereas anthropologists with wider field experience are more aware of the diversity of human experience. The same phenomenon may occur for sex. Because most people fall into one of two categories, there is little opportunity for researchers to gain "wider field experience" with a third or fourth sex. As a result, people tend to focus on the differences between males and females, thereby reinforcing alpha bias.

Almost every researcher of sex differences belongs to one of the two groups being examined. Researchers may be more likely to report sex differences that reflect favorably on members of their own sex. Moreover, the popular media tend to exhibit alpha bias in their choice of which research results to publicize. Findings of sex differences are glamorized and magnified, whereas findings of sex similarities receive much less media attention.³¹

Fundamentally, people may be naturally inclined to focus on information or opinions that support their particular worldview, which explains why biases arise but not what to do about them. People may adopt cognitive strategies to reduce or eliminate their biases such as by asking themselves to consider the opposite point of view before acting or reacting; this strategy encourages them to consider contrary evidence they would otherwise ignore. However, they first need to recognize that they are biased and then work toward becoming “debiased,” tendencies that do not appear to be present in many commentators on sex similarities and differences.³²

Overall, it seems realistic to expect that some sex differences will be small to nonexistent, others will be moderate, and still others will be large. However, we need to be aware of the possibility of biases, both in researchers and in media accounts of research on sex differences, that affect what research findings are reported and how they are interpreted. We also need to guard against two dangerous assumptions that may be made about the results of research. First, if a sex difference is found in some aspect of human behavior, this does not mean that all males do something and all females do something quite different. Second, sex differences that are found are not necessarily biologically based and therefore automatically present and not subject to change. Indeed, the behavior of females and males is highly subject to social influences, as we shall see throughout the book.³³

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The book begins its analysis of the transition in female/male work relationships by looking back in time. Chapter 2 provides a historical perspective on the economic roles of women and men. It examines influences such as the occurrence of two major world wars, the passage of equal employment opportunity laws, a women’s liberation movement, and concerns over sexually oriented behavior in the workplace. The economic status of women and men in today’s workplace is described in terms of sex differences in labor force participation, occupation, and pay.

Chapter 3 examines sex and gender differences that affect the behavior of women and men in the workplace. This chapter reviews some of the major findings of psychological research on sex differences. Key concepts such as gender stereotypes, gender roles, gender identity, and sexism that are critical to understanding male/female interactions are introduced. The

ways in which parents, schools, and media convey gender role expectations to children, as well as the limitations of strict adherence to gender roles in adults, are explored.

Chapter 4, coauthored with Laura Graves, considers how individuals and organizations make decisions about establishing employment relationships. For individuals, these decisions entail choosing which job opportunities to pursue and which job offers to accept; for organizations, they entail choosing which applicants to hire. The chapter describes how differences in men's and women's job search strategies and reactions to specific jobs and organizations lead them to seek and obtain very different employment opportunities. It also examines sex discrimination in organizations' hiring decisions, including how and when sex discrimination occurs and who discriminates against whom. Recommendations are offered for reducing sex and gender effects on the employment decisions of individuals and organizations.

Chapter 5, also coauthored with Laura Graves, considers the effects of sex and gender on behavior in diverse teams. The chapter analyzes differences in how men and women behave and are evaluated in mixed-sex teams. It also examines how the sex composition of the team influences the experiences of male and female team members and the team's effectiveness. It suggests that mixed-sex teams are susceptible to a host of problems, the severity of which depends on a number of situational factors. The chapter concludes with recommendations for actions that team members and leaders may take to facilitate the functioning of mixed-sex teams.

Chapter 6 examines the effects of leader preferences and stereotypes in relation to gender stereotypes on how leadership is exhibited in organizations. Despite the increased proportion of women in management, leader stereotypes continue to reflect the beliefs of "think manager—think male" and "think manager—think masculine." Sex differences in actual leader behavior and effectiveness are examined to determine whether there is any basis to these stereotypes. Barriers to women's attainment of top executive positions are also discussed. Organizations are urged to take actions to ensure that capable leaders regardless of their sex have equal chances to be chosen for leader roles at all levels and succeed in these roles.

Chapter 7 explores issues pertaining to the presence of sexually oriented behavior in the workplace, including sexual harassment (unwelcome sexual attention directed toward others) and workplace romance (mutually desired relationships between two people at work). It examines the causes and consequences of both types of sexually oriented behavior. Actions are recommended for both organizations and individuals to deal with sexual harassment and to minimize the disruption caused by workplace romances.

Chapter 8 considers what it takes for individuals to achieve a sense of work-family balance in their lives. It examines sex differences in how people define and measure personal "success." It reviews the increasing diversity of family structures. It describes how individuals' experiences of the

work-family interface may be both positive and negative, depending on the extent to which they segment or integrate these two roles. It considers sex differences in how individuals take family factors into account in making important work decisions. It also considers how different types of dual-career couples make decisions about each other's involvement in work and family activities. The chapter concludes with actions that organizations may take to enhance employees' work-family balance as well as actions that individuals and couples may take on their own behalf.

Chapters 1 through 8 identify numerous issues related to sex and gender that arise in today's workplace. Chapter 9 offers solutions to these problems. It argues that organizations gain from promoting nondiscrimination, diversity, and inclusion on the basis of sex as well as other job-irrelevant personal characteristics. It details the laws and regulations with which organizations must comply to avoid legal charges of discrimination as well as the costs of discrimination whether illegal or not. It also presents the business case for promoting diversity (i.e., representation of members of different groups in all jobs and levels) and inclusion (i.e., acceptance of members of all groups in the organizational culture). Numerous actions are outlined for organizations to achieve nondiscriminatory, diverse, and inclusive cultures.

In summary, *Women and Men in Management, Fifth Edition*, covers a wide range of topics. It describes female and male work roles in the past and present. The effects of sex and gender on childhood development and adult behavior are considered. It examines how sex and gender influence individuals' experiences as job candidates, team members, managers, and family members. Issues associated with the expression of sexuality in the workplace are explored. Finally, this book offers concrete recommendations for individuals and organizations to ensure that all people feel successful according to their own definition of success, whatever their sex may be.

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