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## Religious Fundamentalism and Gender Differences

Herbert W. Helm Jr.,<sup>1,4</sup> John M. Berez,<sup>2,4</sup> and Emily A. Nelson<sup>3</sup>

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*The role of religious fundamentalism and its relationship to shame and guilt was evaluated in 107 students who attend a church-sponsored university. A number of personality measures were given and gender differences were analyzed. The role of externalization was similar for males in this sample to that of earlier studies. However, it was found that females showed positive correlations between externalization and both shame and guilt. For females, more fundamentalistic religious training may help to contribute to an external orientation at the expense of identifying with a personal religion, and appropriate guilt.*

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**KEY WORDS:** religious fundamentalism; gender differences; guilt; shame.

### RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO GUILT AND SHAME

As humans, we usually experience the self in two separate ways: the ideal self and the real self. While our ideal self is how we would like to see ourselves, our real self is how we actually see ourselves. Karen Horney (as cited in Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993) proposed that personal conflicts or crises can be seen as a incongruity between our real and ideal selves. This incongruence can be viewed as a difference between how we see ourselves within our conceptual reality, our ideal self, and how we really see ourselves based on our daily experiences and interactions, our real self. The conflict is thus between who we know we are and who we think we ought to be. As Christians, our ideal

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self might like to believe that we are always kind, loving, self-sacrificing, and so on. However, our real self realizes that we seldom reach these ideals. In reality, one might not give to the worthy charity that knocks on their door, and one might walk to the other side of the road in order to avoid a homeless individual in need. When this discrepancy arises, the way we see ourselves begins to change. We begin to lose faith in ourselves and may experience the emotions of guilt and shame.

It is the proposal of this paper that, by its teachings and dogma, the Christian church may have “unwittingly” created pictures of our ideal selves that are at times unrealistic to obtain. As the Christian church pushes for higher standards, a better ideal self, it may be producing more shameful people. However, since perfection is impossible, the striving for perfection creates a spiral of unrealistic and unreasonable expectations that cause feelings of shame and guilt. While shame and guilt are frequently seen as similar emotions, it is the position of this paper that they have distinctive elements. It is one’s ideal self that causes problems revolving around shame, and it is one’s conscience self (our real self) which leads to feelings of guilt which may ultimately affect one’s self-esteem. Aycock and Noaker (1985) found that conservative Christian groups often make claims about the positive effects of religious experience upon self esteem. However, the mean scores of the Christian subgroups were not significantly different from each other or any general subgroup.

William James (Viney, 1993) saw our self-esteem as the ratio of our success to our pretensions (see Figure 1). For example, if one believes that one is the smartest student in class and yet obtains average scores, this should lower one’s self esteem. The greater the disparity between our successes and pretensions, the lower our self-esteem. This lowered self-esteem may be thought of as the shame and guilt people experience.

This paper examines and strives to integrate three concepts which may act as factors in the perceptions which Christian youth hold concerning themselves: (a) the role of shame and guilt, how they differ, aspects they may have in common, and gender differences which may occur; (b) extrinsic (externalized forces) and intrinsic (internalized forces) components of religious orientation are compared; (c) religious fundamentalism is examined to determine the role it plays in the development of shame, guilt, and the affect of gender on these domains.

$$\text{SELF ESTEEM} = \frac{\text{SUCCESS}}{\text{PRETENSIONS}}$$

Fig. 1. William James’s view of self-esteem.

## What Is the Difference Between Shame and Guilt?

Lewis (1971) has focused on the following differences between shame and guilt:

The experience of shame is directly about the self, which is the focus of evaluation. In guilt, the self is not the central object of negative evaluation, but rather the thing done or undone is the focus. In guilt, the self is negatively evaluated in connection with something but is not itself the focus of the experience. (p. 30)

In guilt, a person accepts responsibility for a behavior that violates internalized standards of religious, moral, or ethical conduct, focuses on condemning the deed, desires to make amends or punish the self, and wishes to personally repair the situation (Tangney, 1993). Guilt draws attention to the wrongfulness of the event and prompts confession, apologies, and reparation of the situation, responses that are conducive to ending the emotion (Lindsay-Hartz, 1984; Tangney et al., 1992).

Shame is characterized as a dejection based, passive, or helpless emotion aroused by self-related aversive events. In shame, a person negatively evaluates the entire self, fears scorn, and feels dishonor or disgrace, which is likely to motivate anger or a desire to hide and disappear. Shame can be the result of moral, ethical, or religious transgressions, as well as any action that one would expect a real or imagined “other” to view negatively. The focus of attention is on personal shortcomings, inadequacies, and pejorative qualities. The self comes under painful scrutiny and is found to be lacking and is condemned (Lindsay-Hartz, 1984; Tangney et al., 1992).

Since it is more difficult to remake or recast the entire self than to undo an isolated deed or lapse, guilt prompts corrective actions more quickly than does shame (Lindsay-Hartz, 1984; Tangney et al., 1992). Guilt serves to restore severed bonds and shame protects the self from being identified as a person prone to impropriety. The crux of guilt is its focus on one’s bad behavior, whereas shame focuses on the self as an “anti-ideal.” Because guilt draws attention to the behavior and not to the self as shame does, guilt gives rise to internal, specific, and fairly unstable attributions that are unlikely to have long term effects on the psyche. Any self-related aversive event could potentially lead to guilt or shame as long as it is perceived as violating a standard, rule, or goal. The constructs of guilt and shame are universally acknowledged to be related to negative self-evaluation (Richards, 1991; Lynn, 1993 ).

From adolescence onward, research indicates, females consistently report more guilt than males. In a study of college students, females reported more guilt in response to administering electric shocks and scored higher on indices of guilt than males (Buss & Brock, 1963; Harder & Zalma, 1990; Quiles & Bybee, 1997). Among college students, adolescents and adults, females are more prone to feel guilt in response to eliciting events (predispositional guilt) than

are men (Harder, Cutler, & Rockhart, 1992; Tangney, 1990; Williams & Bybee, 1994).

Bybee (1998) lists some reasons for gender differences in intensity of guilt. Males are less likely than females to blame themselves for their actions and are less likely to experience perpetual feelings of guilt. Parents tend to show less tolerance of misbehavior among females than males and tend to use discipline techniques with daughters that lead to guilt. In addition, females are more willing to concede responsibility for misdeeds and experience more difficulty expelling feelings of guilt, as shown by their higher scores on chronic guilt in numerous studies.

### **Extrinsic and Intrinsic Religious Orientation**

An intrinsic religious orientation is characterized by being involved in religion and internally committed to it as ultimates, because one truly believes in one's faith. It is associated with normal social behavior, personal competence and control, and freedom from worry and guilt (Batson et al., 1993). Some additional characteristics of this orientation include other needs being regarded as of less ultimate significance and they are brought into harmony with the religious beliefs of the individual. Religious beliefs are thus internalized and followed fully by the individual (Allport & Ross, 1967).

A person with an extrinsic religious orientation is characterized as using religion instrumentally or for personal social benefits. It is viewed by some researchers as unhealthy and inversely related to normal social behavior, personal competence and control, open-mindedness and flexibility, and freedom from worry and guilt (Batson et al., 1993). This orientation functions as security, solace, sociability and distraction, status and self-justification. Religious beliefs are lightly held or shaped selectively to fit more important needs. People with this orientation turn to God without turning away from self (Allport & Ross, 1967).

Batson et al. (1993) suggest that extrinsically religious people may be more prone to the emotion of guilt than are intrinsically religious people. Further support comes from Allport (1963), who concluded extrinsic religiousness "resembles a neurosis" and that intrinsic religiousness "makes for health." McClain (1978) found that intrinsically religious people score higher than extrinsic subjects in the areas of personal and social adequacy, stereotypic femininity, and self-control. Achenback and Edelbrock (1981) found that females are less prone than males to externalizing disorders.

In contrast, research conducted by Lynn (1993) suggests persons with high self-esteem operate from an intrinsic place of assessment and are much more sensitive to issues of shame. Additionally, the extrinsically directed person does not appear to perceive the church as a source of guilt and/or shame. However, by applying the theory of cognitive dissonance to this apparent dichotomy, one realizes that

the extrinsically motivated individual will employ whatever defense mechanisms are necessary to keep information consistent with his or her perception of self.

### What Is Religious Fundamentalism?

Hill (1995) outlines Ammerman's five central features of fundamentalism:

1) *inerrancy of scripture* (which includes belief in the divinity of Christ and in the efficacy of Christ's life, death, and physical resurrection for the salvation of the human . . .), 2) *evangelism* (of the "lost" world), 3) *pre-millennialism* (a particular prophetic view of the end times that strongly implies the imminent second coming of Christ), 4) *biblical literalism* (even on matters not directly related to central doctrinal issues), and 5) *separatism* (from nonbelievers). Ammerman argues that all of these features must be included in a proper conceptualization of Christian fundamentalism. Any single feature or any combination of features less than these five are simply not fully sufficient defining characteristics. (p. 4)

Thus, Ammerman argues, all five features must be included in a proper conceptualization of Christian fundamentalism.

It is the view of this paper that the Seventh-day Adventist Church operates from a fundamentalist position and that it has passed on this tradition to many of its youth. Many of these central features can be found in the book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (1988). For example, on the issue of *inerrancy of scripture* it notes that, "They [the Dead Sea scrolls] confirm the trustworthiness and reliability of the Scriptures as the infallible revelation of God's will" (p. 11). Traditionally, Adventism has focused on *evangelism* (the second of Ammerman's fundamentalist factors). Adventist evangelism has stressed *premillennialism* (with strong emphasis on a prophetic view of the end time and the imminent second coming of Christ), *biblical literalism* (with beliefs such as a historical six-day creation and the seventh-day Sabbath), and *separatism* (with the message of Revelation 18 to come out of Babylon, or to separate from various apostate religious bodies. This has traditionally been seen as organized churches that refused the Advent light). While not every Adventist may embrace each aspect of fundamentalism, it is probably safe to say that these have been the traditional views of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In addition, there are two popularly endorsed classifications of North American religious denominations which present a continuum of fundamentalism to liberalism. The first classification (Hodge, 1979, p. 185) places Seventh-day Adventists as second highest in fundamentalism. The second classification arranged by Maranell (1974) ranks Seventh-day Adventists as highest in fundamentalism.

Traditionally, fundamentalists have demonstrated a higher internal locus of control scores than liberals. As such, fundamentalists believe everything is controlled by God; luck, chance, and fate are not the controlling factors of their lives (Berry, 1989). However, others may see this as an external orientation due to the external focus on behavior and God. Fundamentalist religions provide biblically

dictated guidelines for things that are right versus things that are wrong (Heise & Steitz, 1991). Thus, it has the ability to meet the external idealistic needs and the developmental stage requirements often attributed to adolescents and young adults, as this is a population that sees the world in concrete terms, and looks externally for conduct controls and validation (Lynn, 1993).

Berry (1989) showed the absence of extrinsic religiosity as the only predictor of fundamentalism among females, as extrinsically oriented people use religion as a means of meeting social needs. Males of his sample were more influenced by the external religious institution and were self-described as interested in more outwardly social situations.

## **Religion and Guilt**

Much research has found that fundamentalist faith groups do serve as the source of negative mental health issues represented by guilt and/or shame felt by individuals. A study by Lynn (1993) showed that fifty-eight percent of the total sample of participants felt that the church was frequently a source of guilt, as compared with thirty-seven percent who felt the church was a source of shame. She also found a modest negative correlation between external locus of control and shame as compared to virtually no correlation found between external locus of control and guilt. Her findings indicate that highly proscriptive faith groups do indeed contribute to levels of perceived guilt and shame present in mental health issues.

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

Students from Andrews University, a Seventh-day Adventist sponsored school, were used as subjects. With their religious background it was felt that they could give a picture of how religious fundamentalism interacts with shame and guilt. There were 107 subjects (37 males, 66 females, and 4 with missing data). They were students in introductory classes in psychology, honors psychology, and sociology. They received minimal credit in return for their participation.

The vast majority of subjects, 79%, were between the ages of 18 and 22, and approximately 99% were single (1.9% of them were single as a result of divorce). Ethnically, within this sample, 57.9% were Caucasian, 13.1% Black, 11.2% Asian, 7.5% Hispanic, and 10.3% were classified as other. In terms of religious affiliation, 95.3% were Seventh-day Adventist, .9% other Protestant denominations, .9% Jewish, and 2.8% other. The sample group reported fairly frequent religious observance: 88% reported regular religious observance (approximately once a week), and 8% attend occasionally (approximately once a month). There was no significant difference in religious observance based on gender.

### Measures

The subjects completed a number of personality measures, including the following: the Test of Self-Conscious Affect (TOSCA); the Internalized Shame Scale (ISS); two scales from the Eating Disorders Inventory, perfectionism and asceticism; the Religious Fundamentalism Scale of the MMPI; the Marist Scrupulosity Inventory; the Irrational Beliefs Test; and Rotter’s Locus of Control Scale.

Two of the above scales measure shame: the Test of Self-Conscious Affect (TOSCA) and the Internalized Shame Scale (ISS). The TOSCA has a series of scenarios for which participants rate the likelihood of their response to a given number of options. The ISS is a list of statements describing feelings or experiences related to shame and placed on a Likert scale. These statements are not dependent on any particular situation or scenario.

The Religious Fundamentalism scale from the Wiggins Content Scales of the MMPI was used as a measure of religious fundamentalism (Wiggins, 1966). Graham (1987) claims that high scores on this scale are indicative of a subject who presents herself as a religious person, who attends church regularly, and subscribes to a number of fundamentalist religious beliefs, such as the literal interpretation of the Bible and the second coming of Christ. They also believe their religion is the only true one and are intolerant of people whose religious beliefs may be different from theirs.

## RESULTS

### Shame, Guilt, and Gender Differences

Table 1 shows the correlations between guilt, shame, and other personality measures. The first grouping shows correlations between the shame and guilt scales. The second grouping shows scales which correlated with shame scales but

**Table 1.** Correlations Between Guilt, Shame, and Other Personality Measures

Personality Scales	TOSCA Shame	ISS Shame	TOSCA Guilt
TOSCA Shame		.43***	.41***
TOSCA Guilt	.41***	.13	
Inferiority	.44***	.96***	.15
Alienation	.37***	.91***	.10
Demand for Approval	.24*	.42***	.01
Asceticism	.26**	.33***	.20*
Anxious Over Concern	.30**	.41***	.20*
High Self-Expectation	.20*	.43***	.19*
Externalization	.44***	.18 ( <i>p</i> = .066)	.05

\* *p* < .05. \*\* *p* < .01. \*\*\* *p* < .001.



not the guilt scale. The final grouping shows scales which correlated with both measures of shame and the measure of guilt.

While earlier portions of this paper looked at differences between shame and guilt, Table 1 indicated that shame and guilt on the TOSCA show a significant correlation of .41. This is quite close to the .45 positive correlation found by Tangney et al. (1992). As expected, the correlation is quite low (.13) between the TOSCA Guilt scale and the ISS Shame scale. The issue of externalization (also presented as extrinsic orientation) of blame may help to explain why guilt correlates significantly with one shame scale (TOSCA) and not another (ISS). As guilt is externally motivated, it would seem incongruous that these two scales—guilt and shame—would correlate. Usually, shame is seen as an internal experience, with the self as the focus of evaluation. However, shame can be externalized. The pain created by it is likely to result in a hostile and defensive maneuver by the subject (such as being angry at others for “making one” have the initial feelings of shame). The type of externalization involved with guilt, however, is an attempt to correct an external behavior. These types of externalization are not the same, however they (TOSCA Shame and TOSCA Guilt) may correlate as the subject evaluates behavioral scenarios on the TOSCA. Therefore, it may be externalized behavior that results in the internal shame process. The fact that TOSCA and ISS shame scales correlate well is to be expected.

The next set of scales are those which are significant with shame but not with guilt. Such high correlations between the ISS and the Inferiority and Alienation scales are to be expected; they are scales of the ISS (Cook, 1990). Alienation (feeling estranged from society) and Inferiority (feeling less adequate or worthy) are designed to measure internalized shame levels. However, this internalization (also presented as intrinsic orientation) of shame is also correlated significantly with the TOSCA shame scale. The Demand for Approval takes desirable conditions for love and raises them to perfectionistic needs for love and approval by those who are important to that individual. However, as the Jones's Irrational Beliefs Handbook (1985) notes, “over concern with being loved inhibits and almost bars the creative, self-actualizing involvement in loving others.” The reason these three scales hang together with shame and not guilt is that they have a strong focus on the self and the evaluation of the self. They also have a strong externalization component as the self seeks outside validation to determine these elements.

The third scale group includes scales of Asceticism, (Garner, 1990), Anxious Over Concern, and High Self Expectation (Jones's Irrational Beliefs Handbook, 1985). Asceticism can be defined as looking for virtue through such spiritual ideals as self-denial, self-sacrifice, self-discipline, self-restraint, and the control of bodily urges. Anxious Over Concern is not realistic anxiety or fear, but a maladaptive reaction which keeps one dwelling on and exaggerating the occurrence of a dreaded event. High Self Expectation takes a reasonable demand for achievement and turns it into overly high expectations. High Self Expectation increases feelings

of worthlessness as one’s value becomes extrinsically oriented in the outcome of their comparison with others. It is often combined with unrealistic views of being thoroughly competent. These scales can be seen as reactions to concerns of short comings, and are related to both shame and guilt.

**Extrinsic and Intrinsic Orientation**

Externalization is our attribution of cause to another person or situation. Shame and guilt involve some type of internal attribution of the self. We would therefore expect a negative correlation between both shame and guilt and externalization. However, Tangney (1993) asserts that most studies conducted by she and her associates have resulted in a strong positive correlation “between externalization and shame, and negative or negligible correlations between externalization and guilt,” regardless of whether the population studied were adults, adolescents, or children.

What seems highly significant is that our sample substantiates Tangney’s findings for males, but not for females. In our sample, the males demonstrated a correlation of 0.35 ( $p < .05$ ) between externalization and the TOSCA Shame Scale, and  $-0.25$  between externalization and the TOSCA Guilt Scale. Females in our sample showed positive correlations of 0.46 ( $p < .001$ ) between externalization and TOSCA shame, 0.28 ( $p < .01$ ) between externalization and ISS Shame, and a correlation of 0.20 between TOSCA guilt and externalization. Thus, females in our study showed externalization on both guilt and shame measures.

Table 2 looks at other gender differences found in this study. Females displayed more dependency, guilt, shame, and frustration reaction. Frustration reaction is a reaction of “how terrible things are when they don’t go my way,” an attitude that leads to passivity. Males, on the other hand, were higher in Detachment/Unconcern scale. Tangney (1990) notes that “a Detached/Unconcerned orientation appeared conducive to pride responses, both in connection with the entire self (alpha pride) and in connection with behavior (beta pride)” (p. 107). Tangney’s findings are consistent with this study’s findings: the more detachment, the greater the pride in the entire self and behavior (alpha and beta pride).

**Table 2.** Gender Differences Among Various Personality Scales

Personality Scales	Male		Female		2-Tail Sig
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Dependency	5.37	1.66	6.18	1.42	.017
Guilt (TOSCA)	56.32	6.75	59.47	6.51	.024
Shame (TOSCA)	40.05	7.31	45.30	8.51	.001
Frustration R.	4.54	1.63	5.30	1.60	.028
Detachment	32.59	5.82	29.85	5.67	.023

**Table 3.** Gender Differences Among Scales Which Correlate with Externalization

Male		Female	
Shame (TOSCA)	.35*	Shame (TOSCA)	.46***
Detachment	.41*	Shame (ISS)	.28*
		Asceticism	.25*
		High Self-Expectancy	.36**
		Locus of Control	.37**

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

It appears that females in this study have difficulty separating external forces from feelings of shame and guilt, which leads to higher frustration levels. To determine whether this explanation is accurate, Table 3 looks at gender differences in externalization. As expected, shame correlates with externalization for both genders. Once again, males in our sample seem to be able to detach. In contrast, the females showed higher demands toward their behavior (as seen in asceticism and high self expectancy scales) and maintain an external locus of control. The question that arises, since religious subjects are being studied, is whether religious fundamentalism could have factored into these findings?

### Religious Fundamentalism

When comparing gender and religious fundamentalism there was no significant difference (males  $M = 9.4$ ,  $SD = 1.75$ ; females  $M = 9.3$ ,  $SD = 1.95$ ). These scores give males a T-score of 59 (for a score of 9) and females a T-score of 57 (for a score of 9). Therefore, this sample has scores that are approximately one standard deviation above the mean. It should be noted that there are only twelve items on this scale and the maximum T-score for males is 69 and for females, 68. While mean and standard deviation is similar for males and females in this sample, further correlations indicate that the scales which correlate with religious fundamentalism differs depending on gender.

Table 4 reveals a trend similar to that previously discussed of females being more externally oriented and males more internally oriented to religious

**Table 4.** Gender Differences Among Scales Which Correlate with Religious Fundamentalism

Males		Females	
Guilt	.50**	Alpha Pride	-.30*
Perfectionism	.35*	Alienation	-.26*
Asceticism	.34*	Dependency	.34**
Frustration	.41*		
Locus of Control	-.50**		

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

fundamentals. Females have negative correlations with both alpha pride and alienation. A negative correlation with alpha pride suggests that as religious fundamentalism increases, pride responses to the entire self decreases. However, as religious fundamentalism increases, females show lower alienation scores and increased dependency. This grouping of scales seems highly suggestive of an external orientation.

Males show the following positive correlations to religious fundamentalism. The scores on the scales Asceticism and Perfectionism are indicative of the high standards of performance one expects from themselves and others. (Guilt, as noted before, does not attack our core sense of identity or self-concept and is a focus on a specific behavior and our failure to deal with that situation.) Locus of Control Scale (Rotter, 1966) assesses whether an individual attributes rewards as due to internal or external causes. On this scale, the score is the number of external choices, thus the negative correlation is indicative of male subjects believing that their behavior or personal characteristics are what effects the events in their life. This clustering of scales, therefore, suggests an internal orientation.

## DISCUSSION

One of the more important findings in this study is how Adventist females show externalization to both shame and guilt, while Adventist males in our sample show externalization only with shame. How does socialization contribute to this finding?

Lewis (1992) notes that parents have different attributional styles for sons compared to daughters. When the task was focused, mothers' and fathers' specific achievement comments, such as "That's a good job" or "That's the way to do it," were greater for sons than for daughters. Fathers used the most specific self attributions with their sons, while mothers were often observed saying to their daughters, "You're really good" or "What a good girl!" He then makes the following conclusions: a) both parents are more likely to make more negative self attributions for their daughters, b) that the nature of socialization is likely to account for sex differences in global vs. specific attribution, and c) that males not only receive more specific self attributions, they use it more as adults. Therefore, females are more likely to make global self attributions of failure than men.

The nature of socialization, global for females vs. specific for males, is likely to result in females being less able to develop an internalized self core identity. This may be complicated by a fundamentalist church that has typically given females a second class standing, thus likely to help develop a stronger external orientation. While fundamentalism may supply part of the core identity, it may do so at the expense of creating dependency to externalized structures. This makes appropriate guilt and the motivation to repair situations less likely. There is no significant difference in alpha pride (pride in the entire self) or beta pride (pride

in one's behavior) between males and females in this study. However, there is a difference in alpha pride in relationship to religious fundamentalism and gender. For females, an increase in religious fundamentalism is associated with lower pride in one's self (alpha pride). Again, externalization may play a role in this. For males we should evaluate whether our religious training helps to contribute to the perfectionism, asceticism, and the frustration reaction that can accompany it.

While other samples should be taken in order to evaluate the generalizability of these results, the implications of these results should be considered. For females, it should be evaluated whether religious training helps to contribute to an external orientation at the expense of identifying with a personal religion, and appropriate guilt. For males, the role that fundamentalism may play in producing perfectionism should be evaluated. As William James (Viney, 1993) pointed out, "the greatest burdens are lifted sometimes by adjusting pretensions downward" (p. 264).

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