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Cultivating Multicultural Competency in Supervision Using an Identity Style Framework

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Abstract
Multicultural competency is a necessary component of counselor supervision. However, when ingrained and unquestioned biases tied to personal identity arise, it may feel impossible to have important conversations in a professional and safe way. The authors propose a conceptual framework that provides a navigational toolkit for these difficult conversations. A brief case example highlights a possible scenario and path to resolution.

The Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD) has emphasized the necessity of enhancing awareness, knowledge, skills, and action when counseling clients from different backgrounds (Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, & McCullough, 2015). Increased attention on the multicultural counseling competencies has directed research and practice towards recognizing and addressing needs of various cultural groups (Ratts et al., 2015; Vera & Speight, 2003). These competencies help researchers, clinicians, and counselor educators to effectively understand and attend to the experiences of individuals who belong to diverse cultures (Ratts et al., 2015). This positive movement has resulted in increased advocacy for clients from underrepresented populations (Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2003), and the understanding that cultural identity encompasses much more than race and ethnicity (Hays, 2008).

The most recently updated multicultural competencies (Ratts et al., 2015) include a structured multicultural and social justice praxis. This praxis includes multiple layers of important considerations, including (a) counselor self-awareness, (b) client worldview, (c) the counseling relationship, and (d) counseling and advocacy interventions. The idea behind this praxis is that attitudes and beliefs influence the knowledge acquired, which determines the skills and skill levels developed, which finally determines the actions that a counselor will take with their clients in advocacy positions. Additionally, clients and counselors will fall in different places on the spectrum of privilege and marginalization, resulting in a variety of experiences, awareness, and understanding of others (Ratts et al., 2015).

However, the emphasis on multicultural competencies should not stop at the client-counselor relationship. Counselor supervision is another setting in which it is essential to consider and ensure the practice of multicultural competencies and advocacy (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). Multicultural interactions occur in many places outside of the counseling relationship, but supervision is an important focus because of the processes that take place

within the supervisory relationship. Bernard and Goodyear (2014) identified the supervisee as the "pivot point" (p. 65) within the triad of counselor/supervisee, supervisor, and client. Therefore, it is likely that what the supervisor models for the supervisee will be implemented within the counseling relationship. Additionally, the phenomenon of parallel process is likely to help the supervisee adopt attitudes and behaviors toward their clients that the supervisor has demonstrated toward them.

Counselor Supervision

Clinical supervision is a well-established and longstanding practice used within counselor education programs and for licensure purposes (ACES, 2011; CACREP, 2016; Lum, 2010). Additionally, supervision is an ethical requirement set forth by the American Counseling Association (ACA, 2014), and an accreditation requirement from the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2016). Supervision is expected to facilitate development, provide opportunity for practice, and provide a space to assess clinical skills (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014).

The supervisory relationship is paramount, as both supervisors and supervisees are required to place trust in the other and communicate openly and honestly throughout the supervision process (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). Full trust, though, can be challenging, as supervision is inherently a power disproportionate relationship. Power dynamics are further highlighted by any dominant or marginalized identities held by either individual. Open discussion of such dynamics are necessary to have an understanding of the perspectives and needs of both parties, and to enable them to work collaboratively to manage issues of power (Murphy & Wright, 2005).

Supervisory Dimensions

Within supervision there are various dimensions to which the supervisor may need to closely attend. Bernard and Goodyear (2014) presented a model of intertwined domains that supervisors may consider addressing. These domains include (a) intrapersonal identity, (b) interpersonal biases and prejudices, (c) cultural identity and behaviors, and (d) social and political issues.

Intrapersonal identity. The intrapersonal dimension holds concepts of identity and a sense of self in relation to other people (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). Identity may be personal or professional, and while it is an intrapersonal dimension, it has origins within interpersonal relationships. Cooley (1902) introduced the concept of the looking-glass self, a theory that highlighted the ways an individual's sense of self is based on the perceptions of others which are reflected back at the individual. Based on this theory, identity values can be developed through interactions and experiences with others. Supervisors can benefit from addressing this domain in themselves and their supervisees.

Interpersonal biases and prejudices. Biases and prejudices are a natural part of interpersonal interactions (Hays, 2008). All individuals develop expectations, positive and negative, of diverse populations based on prior experiences and interactions. These expectations, or stereotypes, help individuals to better understand the world around them, but stereotyped groups may fear being reduced to that label (Steele, 1997). The activation of stereotypes in the brain depend

on past experiences and the learning history of the perceiver, and this happens largely outside of conscious awareness (Krieglmeyer & Sherman, 2012).

Cultural identity and behaviors. This dimension includes the influence of culture on expected social roles. For example, the enactment of traditional gender norms and roles are driven by societal expectation (Hays, 2008). However, if a client, supervisee, or supervisor does not identify with the majority culture and does not adhere to expected social roles, certain interactions with others may hold interpersonal biases. The conversation around cultural identity, and understanding its importance, is crucial for supervisees and supervisors. Not only will this cultivate a better understanding of each other, but it will likely facilitate increased understanding of others as well.

Social and political issues. Social and political issues are rooted in systemic structure, and strongly influence levels of marginalization and oppression (Collins, 2000). Society defines subgroups within the population, often driven by social and political initiatives. The messages that define Westernized ideals for success, beauty, intelligence, and various other adjectives are established through controlling images. These controlling images determine what is and is not acceptable, and they play a powerful role regarding how people act and how relationships are formed and navigated (Collins, 2000; Miller, 2008). Both supervisors and supervisees are subject to such images and the force they exert within daily life, and would benefit from discussion of this influence.

These supervisory dimensions are integral to the supervision relationship.

Supervisors need to be sure that all of these dimensions are attended to throughout the supervision process, as they help cultivate awareness of issues from the intrapersonal self to the greater culture surrounding the individual. Additionally, discussion of these dimensions helps to generate greater understanding of others' experiences.

Common Challenges in Supervision

Common challenges may arise out of the supervisory dimensions. Challenges may be around intrapersonal identity, interpersonal interactions, cultural expectations, or social and political happenings. Most likely, challenges will involve some combination of these dimensions.

Blind spots. Many students and supervisees struggle to be aware of their own blind spots, particularly when addressing issues of power and privilege (Hays, 2008; Jordan, 1991, 2001). Privilege is often invisible to the person who has it, as it is obtained through situations in which social identity is normative and is not questioned by others in the same group environment (Hays, 2008). However, both supervisees and supervisors must be prepared to work with individuals who are different from themselves in a variety of ways.

Professional-personal identity incongruence. Personal identity begins developing early, and often has a solid foundation by the time an individual reaches the point of graduate school and counselor training. Personal identity may be rooted in family values, cultural foundations, personal experiences, and issues of power and privilege (Berzonsky, 1989; Hays, 2008; Marcia, 1966). Professional identity, though, is first cultivated during a few short years of

graduate school, and may not always align with personal values. Despite potential misalignment, personal values must be set aside during interactions with clients and supervisees, and professional values must take precedence. This prioritization of professional values is often easier said than done, and being able to move personal values to the periphery is a skillset that must be learned in training and reinforced throughout supervision.

Unaware of presentation and perception. Some individuals may struggle to look outside of themselves and see how they present to, and are perceived by, others. This may be a particular challenge for those who have typically identified with a privileged population and not had many, if any, experiences with marginalization or discrimination (Hays, 2008). Thus, they are accustomed to seeing their status as the norm. However, when confronted with educators, supervisors, or supervisees who are situated in a marginalized space, this status quo can be perceived as arrogance or a stance of power-over rather than power-with (Jordan, 1991, 2001). The lack of awareness surrounding power differential and privilege can be problematic in a variety of ways, but especially so when developing a strong therapeutic relationship between client and counselor, and a strong working relationship between supervisor and supervisee.

Difficulty seeing "–isms" as systemic issues. Issues of racism, sexism, ageism, heterosexism, ableism, and other "-isms" are all systemic problems (Hays, 2008). However, some individuals struggle to take this perspective, thinking that if they do not directly contribute to the problem that it does not have an effect within their life. If, within a supervisory relationship, one party does not view these marginalizations as part of a systemic framework, there is a high risk for defensiveness when encountering such issues.

Supervision pairings. A final challenge within supervision is the supervisor-supervisee pairing. Pairs who come from opposite ends of the privilege spectrum may struggle to understand each other or communicate with one another effectively. Understanding the other's worldview, just as the multicultural counseling competencies ask the counselor to understand the client's worldview, is essential to an effective working relationship (Hays, 2008; Ratts et al., 2015). Just as problematic is when two individuals come from the same perspective. The risk in this relationship is that they may not venture outside of their scope of the world without intentionally developing ways to do so. While there are challenges within each of the pairings, potential benefits may also emerge.

All of the common challenges identified are rooted within self- and other-awareness, and many involve the usurping of personal identity over professional identity. Professional identities develop later in life, and overlay already established personal identities and values. Ideally, professional and personal identities dovetail easily, with differences that are complementary rather than conflicting—but this is not always the case. In some instances, professional identity and values and may be at odds with personal identity, creating internal dissonance for counselors-in-training and presenting a great challenge for educators and supervisors.

If supervisors and educators are able to understand which identity style the supervisee is working from, they are likely to have greater insight regarding the

supervisee's awareness and understanding of self and others. Understanding identity style development may provide a useful framework for addressing deficits in multicultural counseling competencies within the supervisory setting. Effective interventions can be crafted to meet the supervisee where they are in their identity style and begin instilling multicultural competency.

Identity Style Theory

An understanding of identity style and development may assist counselor educators and supervisors in development of interventions or approaches to address common challenges that can arise within the supervisory relationship. Multicultural researchers have long placed an emphasis on the importance of identity development (i.e., Cross, 1971; Sue & Sue, 2013) and the challenges faced by individuals as they work through various stages of conforming, resisting, and integrating their own cultural identity. It makes sense that counselors-in-training are likely to struggle with the possible dissonance between their own personal identity and their new counselor identity. Berzonsky (1989, 2011) posited identity style theory, which includes three primary identity styles that individuals adopt. It is important to note that while individuals are likely to assume a dominant style, everyone moves through these three styles in different situations and environments.

Diffuse-Avoidant

An individual who is using a diffuse-avoidant identity style will often put off making any major decisions about identity until environmental pressures force them to do so (Berzonsky, 1989). This style demonstrates a positive relationship to

Marcia's (1966) concepts of identity diffusion and identity moratorium. Identity diffusion is an identity stage in which an individual has not yet explored nor committed to any areas that may begin to define identity or sense-of-self (Marcia, 1966). Identity moratorium is a crisis stage of identity development in which an individual is exploring options for identity, but is not making any commitments. This moratorium is often accompanied by a great deal of anxiety as the individual attempts to create predictability and organization of their intrapersonal world (Marcia, 1966).

Individuals using a diffuse-avoidant style are prone to using immature defense styles, and tend to paint dramatically distorted pictures of reality in an attempt to alleviate their own anxiety. Similarly, they are likely to utilize avoidant coping mechanisms when confronted with problems and stressors (Berzonsky, 1989). Pointing out blind spots, while necessary to the training and supervision process, may evoke a sense of failure for someone working from this position. This can lead to rationalization or self-handicapping to shift the blame to something or someone else, rather than being willing to acknowledge and address areas that need growth.

Normative

Individuals who are using a normative identity style are likely to conform to standards of identity that have already been established by important significant others. For example, a supervisee who has never knowingly interacted with or sought out information about the LGBTQ community, but has a negative bias toward this group because her family espoused negative views, may be using a normative identity style. Normative styles are positively correlated with values of tradition,

security, and conformity, and demonstrate a positive relationship to Marcia's (1966) concepts of identity foreclosure and identity achievement.

Identity foreclosure is an identity stage in which an individual does not explore alternatives, but instead makes a commitment to follow the path set by others (usually family; Marcia, 1966). This often means values, career choices, and beliefs are pre-defined rather than pro-actively developed. Generally, these individuals are closed to information that may threaten core areas of the self. Normative styles depend on what they have been taught (their environmental norm) without question (Berzonsky, 1989). Therefore, if a supervisee has personal identity that directly conflicts with professional identity, it may be difficult to have them critically assess their personal values or to set these aside within a counseling session.

Informational

Finally, those individuals using an informational style of identity take the time to gather and consider information that may be related to their identity prior to making decisions (Berzonsky, 1989). For example, a supervisee may realize a negative bias about a certain group of people and decide to read scholarly information about that group or seek out time to spend with people from that group, before making any decisions about the validity of their bias. They may come to the conclusion that one negative experience with a member of a group may not have anything to do with group membership, but instead with that particular person's personality or circumstance, or even with their own personal perception. They are likely to take the time to examine multiple viewpoints, including exploring areas that

may challenge their personal beliefs, before coming to a decision (Berzonsky, 1989).

An understanding of these basic identity styles may be helpful in navigating the challenges that can arise within supervision. Insight into how a supervisee forms their opinions and judgements, how they may respond to evaluative feedback, and how they cope with stressors, based on their own identity formation, can help supervisors and educators decide how to intervene or address common challenges in an effective way.

Intervention Framework

The following sections comprise a non-linear framework for addressing multicultural awareness and competence, starting with the lens of identity development and then moving into the exploration of biases and assumptions held by both supervisor and supervisee.

Address Identity Development

As outlined above, identity development and style may play an important role in the way supervisees view and address various multicultural issues. Bringing discussions around personal and professional identity into the supervision space for exploration can be beneficial. This can aid in understanding of both the supervisor's and supervisee's developmental process and identity style. Further, if either person believes that knowing their current identity style may be useful, the supervisor may consider obtaining a copy of Berzonsky's identity style inventory (ISI-5; 2013) and using the results to facilitate further conversation around the influence of identity style on ability to demonstrate multicultural competence. Developing an understanding of identity style may help

supervisors more easily navigate the remaining suggested interventions.

Initiate Discussions of Privilege and Marginalization

As the person holding the power within the supervisory relationship, it is imperative for the supervisor to initiate discussions of multiculturalism, privilege, and marginalization from the outset of supervision (Bernard and Goodyear, 2014). These initial discussions, even if they are brief, can set the stage for the supervisee to feel comfortable approaching such topics in the future. Additionally, supervisors must maintain an awareness of biases and values—belonging to themselves and to their supervisees—to be sure they are not perpetrating microaggressions.

The supervisor may consider use of the multicultural supervision scale (MSS) to assess their own supervisory skills, supervisors' attitudes and beliefs, and stereotypes toward diverse populations (Sangganjanavanich & Black, 2011). This may increase intrapersonal understanding of biases and areas of growth. Initiating discussions that acknowledge and examine biased thoughts and actions within the supervisee can be challenging, as many individuals, and particularly those who know they are being evaluated, become uncomfortable addressing this topic. The next intervention, the SPANS model, may be a useful tool for beginning these conversations with supervisees.

The SPANS model. The scripted prejudice-awareness narrative strategy (SPANS) model (Rowell, 2009) was developed with three specific goals in mind: 1) to develop counselor awareness of their own biases, 2) to help supervisors understand their supervisees' biases and the

conflicts that may arise from them, 3) to target specific areas for intervention around cultural competence. The model, particularly when used with understanding of identity style, addresses each of the dimensions of supervision identified by Bernard and Goodyear (2014). The model consists of nine questions across three different areas. The areas include early recollection; adolescence, social messages, and identity development; and reflective thinking on the current self and the influence of cultural differences within the supervisees' lives.

The questions around early recollection are:
1. Describe the influential people in your childhood and include as many details as possible.
2. How did your ethnic, religious, cultural, gender, familial, and/or financial circumstances influence your childhood?
3. Describe early memories when you felt different, ridiculed, or alone. What were the factors or attitudes of others that prompted these feelings? (Rowell, 2009, p. 46)

The questions regarding adolescence, reinforced social messages, and identity development are:
1. As an adolescent, did you ever take a stand (or felt as if you could have) on issues on ethnic, religious, cultural, gender, familial, and/or financial difference? Describe the experiences in detail.
2. Describe some values of people you admired as an adolescent. Which of these values did you adopt as your own?
3. As an adolescent, did you ever wish you could change something about your ethnic,

religious, cultural, gender, familial, and/or financial background? If so, describe what you would have changed and how? (Rowell, 2009, p. 46)

Questions regarding introspection of the current self and impact of cultural differences are:
1. How are you different from people of other ethnic, religious, cultural, gender, familial, and/or financial backgrounds?
2. What aspect of your ethnic, religious, cultural, gender, familial, and/or financial background has had the biggest impact on your life and why?
3. Describe in detail how people of differing backgrounds would exist together in your ideal world. (Rowell, 2009, p. 47)

Once the narrative is complete, the supervisee searches for themes within and across questions. The supervisor also identifies themes within and across questions. Comparing and revisiting identified themes throughout the supervision process can provide a springboard for more in-depth exploration of values and biases and their effect on personal and professional relationships.

An additional benefit to this exercise is that it can be used with supervisees in any identity style. Those in the diffuse-avoidant style may struggle because they are trying to avoid having to provide a firm stance on questions such as these, but the exercise can force them to begin identifying important influences in shaping their values and belief systems. Supervisees may benefit from supervisor support and constructive feedback that helps them to focus and narrow their answers. Similarly, those in the normative style may be uncomfortable with

some of the questions asked, as they might challenge the normative beliefs that feel safe to the individual. However, their answers may provide useful information to begin deconstructing some of their normative values. Supervisors can gently encourage these supervisees to continue taking inventory of where their beliefs come from, and which of them they have experienced first-hand versus what has been passed down to them. Supervisors can provide support and validation for supervisees' difficult emotions while still challenging them to closely examine their values. Finally, those coming from an informational style are likely to find this exercise interesting as it requires them to self-reflect and think critically, which is something they are likely already doing.

Take an Emic Approach

It may seem simplistic, but holding an emic approach to supervision facilitates an open, empathic, and curious mindset. Seeking to understand and appreciate differences can aid in lowering others' defenses and allow for genuine exploration of beliefs and values. Additionally, approaching supervisees with humility can further cultivate an attitude of positive multicultural interactions. Humility has been found to be associated with positive cross-cultural and intercultural engagement (Drinane, Owen, Hook, Davis, & Worthington, 2017; Mosher, Hook, Farrell et al., 2017; Paine, Jankowski, & Sandage, 2016). Specifically, humility has been found to help individuals develop stronger relationships with others who are culturally different (Hook et al., 2013; Owen et al., 2014), prevent engaging in cultural ruptures or microaggressions toward racial/ethnic minorities (Davis et al., 2016; Hook et al., 2016), improve attitudes and behaviors toward religious out-group members (Hook

et al., 2017), and buffer against missing cultural opportunities in therapy (Owen et al., 2016). This not only acts upon the supervisory relationship, but models for the supervisee what they can implement in their client-counselor relationships.

Case Example

The fictional supervisor and supervisee used in this case example serve to represent some of the interpersonal dynamics and common challenges that can arise during the supervisory process. The following will outline how the interaction between identity, power, privilege, and sociopolitical issues can make for a complex supervisory relationship. Additionally, the intervention components outlined above are integrated to demonstrate how supervisors might maneuver this challenging terrain in a manner that is ethical and prioritizes multicultural considerations.

A 60-year-old White male supervisor named Abram is taking the supervision class offered by his Counselor Education and Supervision doctoral program. He is assigned to work with a 30-year-old female supervisee for the semester. Originally from Indonesia, Olive is in the practicum stage of her master's program in clinical mental health counseling. She is in the United States to complete her graduate work, after which she will return home to Indonesia where her family lives in a highly matriarchal society. Abram was raised in a military family in the United States, and patriarchal principles were strongly encouraged. In the past, his family has made it clear they view him as "weak" and "less of a man" for seeking a career in counseling, but Abram tends to suppress his conflicted feelings around his career and his family's values. Both Abram and Olive feel uneasy working with one another because they are not sure what to expect from the other or how they will find ways to connect.

Depending upon the combination of supervisor and supervisee, a variety of challenges can arise during the supervision process. Common challenges in supervision occur when the supervisor and/or supervisee have blind spots or areas in which they are lacking in self-awareness. Olive and Abram will need to work through their respective and collective blind spots so that their supervisory relationship can be a place of support that encourages development and practice and allows for assessment in a safe way.

Abram has quite a few blind spots to address in his role as Olive's supervisor. First, he has not fully acknowledged the incongruence between his personal and professional identities. He has also not recognized the power and privilege he has as a White male in the United States, nor how the power and privilege Olive experiences is likely vastly different than his own. Furthermore, because he has not acknowledged his power and privilege, he is lacking in awareness when it comes to how he presents to others. Finally, he has not given thought to the Western ideals that influence his way of communicating and being with others.

Olive's primary blind spot comes from being a practicum student and not knowing what purpose supervision is supposed to serve. She has not yet realized the impact coming from a matriarchal society has had on her values both personally and professionally and how these values can influence a supervisory relationship. Additionally, she can feel the power and privilege Abram projects when they meet; she experiences his demeanor as entitled and somewhat condescending. She

does not realize that this will absolutely influence the trust and safety that needs to be built between them. She also has not recognized that she will need to provide some education about her Indonesian culture so that she and Abram can better understand the others' perspective.

In addition to acknowledging blind spots and their influence on a supervisory relationship, recognizing supervisor and supervisee identity style can also be beneficial to understanding the dynamics of a supervisory pairing. Such discussions around personal and professional identity provide exploratory space for increased understanding of self and other. In the aforementioned fictional scenario, Abram has a primarily normative identity style. The normative style is based in tradition and often pre-determined; in Abram's case he abides by his family's idea of what it means to be a White, American male. Due to his normative identity style, he experiences difficulty assessing his personal values versus his familial values, and at times struggles to set these aside during sessions.

In contrast, Olive usually leans towards an informational identity style, particularly when feeling safe in her environment. Individuals with informational identities are more likely to take the time to examine multiple viewpoints and more willing to explore areas of personal attitudes and beliefs than the normative style. This is an excellent quality for Olive to have as a supervisee, but she is restricted in her ability to explore in this manner because she does not feel accepted by or trusting of Abram in the early stages of their relationship. However, by choosing an appropriate intervention, Abram and Olive can discuss their blind spots and identity styles in a manner that builds rapport, safety, and

understanding, ultimately strengthening the supervisory relationship.

Choosing a supervisory intervention specific to the needs of the supervisee and the supervisory relationship can help to address issues of power and privilege. By conversing about newly acknowledged biases and prejudices, supervisory pairs can increase awareness of the other, develop trust, and more safely confer about sociopolitical issues relevant to supervision. The SPANS model (Rowell, 2009) is a collaborative intervention used to help initiate discussions surrounding the spectrum of privilege. This inventory focuses on awareness, biases, and cultural competence; therefore, it is an appropriate choice for Abram to implement in session with Olive. By working through the prompts collaboratively, a discussion surrounding the nuances of privilege and of previous life experiences emerges. This dialogue presents the opportunity for Abram and Olive to explore their values and biases more in-depth, resulting in increased understanding of self and other, as well as a safer supervisory relationship. While these conversations do allow some risk for microaggressions to occur, they are also an opportunity for perspective taking, encouraging the supervisory pair to connect in a more genuine and intimate manner.

As Abram is aware of his normative identity style, he is likely to benefit from seeking consultation from a peer or his own supervisor to be sure that he is stepping outside of his normative parameters and moving further toward the informational style when in session with Olive. This may also help to adjust the demeanor of entitlement observed by Olive, as Abram increasingly develops his own awareness and understanding of his privilege and

makes adjustments to be more multicultural competent.

Ultimately, the use of the SPANS model (Rowell, 2009) in conjunction with understanding identity styles and their influence on problem solving, emotional intelligence, and willingness to step outside of areas of comfort, is an effective way for supervisory pairs to navigate growth edges and strengthen multicultural competence. Additionally, use of these interventions in session is a practical method to model for supervisees how to initiate difficult conversations surrounding culture and privilege with clients in a professional and ethical way.

Conclusion

The case example of Abram and Olive is just one of many scenarios that may present regarding supervisory pairings, challenges, and identity styles. However, with any situation, the suggestion intervention framework can provide navigational tools for educators and supervisors to move through difficult conversations and into heightened awareness and understanding. As the multicultural competencies point counselors and counselor educators toward social justice and advocacy, interventions such as these are becoming increasingly important to the field of counseling and counselor education. It is not enough just to be aware, but having the skills and ability to advocate for both self and others in a variety of settings is a necessity.

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