

“Quadruple Consciousness”: A Literature Review and New Theoretical Consideration for Understanding the Experiences of Black Gay and Bisexual College Men at Predominantly White Institutions

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This article synthesizes literature on Black gay and bisexual college men and introduces a new theoretical consideration for understanding the experiences of Black gay and bisexual college men at predominantly White institutions building on W. E. B. Du Bois’ (1903/2010) theory of double consciousness and Vivienne Cass’ (1979, 1984) model of sexual identity formation—what the authors consider “quadruple consciousness.” The article closes with recommendations for practice and future research.

Keywords: Black gay and bisexual men, double consciousness, quadruple consciousness

Society’s construction of what it means to be a Black male does not leave room to include Black gay and bisexual men (BGABM; Collins, 2005; Goode-Cross & Goode, 2009; Harris, 2003; Washington & Wall, 2010). This gap forces BGABM to often feel the need to choose between their race and sexual orientation because they are seen as distinct, conflicting identities (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Washington & Wall, 2010). Many theories and models on sexual orientation identity development fail to consider how the intersections of social identities (e.g., Black, male, gay and bisexual) can and does influence the ways in which one identifies with their peers, friends, and family members (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Patton, 2011; Washington & Wall, 2010).

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For example, students who are not “out,” which is openly expressing one’s sexual orientation, to all of their peers, friends, and family members are frequently seen as less developed in sexual orientation identity models. However, there can be serious consequences for “out” BGABM, from losing their support network, to dealing with the stress of being a double minority, to being stigmatized in society and the Black community (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008, 2009; Harris, 2003; Patton, 2011; Washington & Wall, 2010). Theories and models that consider the intersection of racial identity development and sexual orientation identity development are critical for students’ success.

There are two purposes for the present article. First, the authors explore current literature on the experiences of BGABM in higher education. Second, the authors present a framework for understanding BGABM experiences within predominantly White higher education settings building on W. E. B. Du Bois’ (1903/2010) theory of double consciousness and Vivienne Cass’ (1979, 1984) model of sexual identity formation—what the authors call “quadruple consciousness.” Models that recognize the intersection between racial-ethnic and sexual orientation identities are critical to support BGABM (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). Practitioners and researchers who use models that assume all Black men and/or all gay and bisexual men are monolithic groups fail to fully support all students and recognize the varied experiences Black men bring to higher education contexts. The authors believe the framework presented in the present article provides practitioners and researchers with a more comprehensive conceptual framework for understanding the experiences of BGABM within predominantly White higher education settings.

Black Men in Higher Education

The challenges facing Black men in higher education are well documented—low college enrollment, college graduation, and bachelor’s degree attainment rates (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009; Cuyjet, 2006). Unfortunately, challenges facing Black men are many times used to stereotype all Black men as incapable of learning, uneducated, and disengaged (Brown, 2006; Harper & Nichols, 2008; McCready, 2004; Strayhorn, 2008a). In higher education, Black male college students are repeatedly seen as a uniformed group plagued with academic and social challenges (Brown, 2006; Harper, 2009; Harper & Nichols, 2008; Strayhorn, 2008a). These stereotypes lead to Black college males being underserved and unappreciated and having limited access to a supportive network of faculty and mentors (Strayhorn, 2008a). Black men at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) report being under constant surveillance (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007), feeling unwelcomed (Smith et al., 2007), being accused of owing admission to affirmative action policies (Harper & Griffin, 2011), being feared by White individuals (Smith et al., 2007), and feeling like outsiders (Smith et al., 2007). These feelings and experiences often lead to fatigue, anger, and hopelessness (Smith et al., 2007).

To dispel the myths of Black college men as a monolithic group, scholars have documented the varied experiences of Black male students (e.g., Goode-Cross & Good, 2008, 2009; Harper, 2009; Harper & Nichols, 2008; Hilton, Wood, & Lewis, 2012; Patton, 2011; Strayhorn, Blakewood, & DeVita, 2008; Strayhorn & Mullins, 2012). For instance, Harper (2009) explored counternarratives of Black college men who successfully navigated the academic and social aspects of college. Black men on college campuses often contribute their success to support from precollege programs (Strayhorn, 2008a); parents (Harper, 2006); faculty (Harper, 2008; Strayhorn, 2008a); key university officials (Harper, 2008); peers (Harper, 2006; Strayhorn, 2008a, 2008b); other Black student leaders (Harper, 2006, 2008); historically Black

fraternities (Harper & Harris, 2006; Mitchell, 2012); religion and spirituality (Wood & Hilton, 2012); and predominantly Black student organizations (Harper, 2006, 2008). It is evident that support for Black men on college and university campuses is essential for their success (Brown, 2006). However, Black gay and bisexual male college student experiences remain understudied.

Black Gay and Bisexual Men in Higher Education

Individuals with multiple minority identities often face many challenges and they can find the navigation of these identities to be exhausting and stressful (Crawford, Allison, Zamboni, & Soto, 2002; Goode-Cross & Good, 2008, 2009; Harris, 2003). Black gay and bisexual men (BGABM) habitually deal with challenges of identifying a supportive network of peers; psychological ramifications associated with their identities; and varied personal ramifications (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008, 2009; Harris, 2003; Patton, 2011; Washington & Wall, 2010).

In general, it is challenging for Black men to identify a support network of Black male faculty, staff, and administrators due to a lack of Black male faculty, staff, and administrators on college and university campuses (Washington & Wall, 2010). The intersection of race and sexual orientation makes it even more challenging for BGABM in college to find faculty, staff, and administrators on campus who also identify as BGABM, so they sometimes rely on White gay and bisexual men to serve as mentors (Washington & Wall, 2010). Any mentoring relationship is helpful, but there are differences between the experiences of BGABM and White gay and bisexual men in higher education. For instance, White gay and bisexual men in higher education do not have to navigate racism on predominantly White campuses.

BGABM time after time turn to each other for support, but these support circles are often small (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008). BGABM are commonly ostracized by the Black community and lose peer support networks that can assist them with dealing with mitigating racism and discrimination on college and university campuses (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009). Furthermore, BGABM regularly have to determine friendships based on how they believe people will respond to their sexual orientation identities (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008). In addition, BGABM who are not openly gay or bisexual may fear being involved with LGBT student organizations because of the fear of being “outed” (Patton, 2011), which may lead to the elimination of another social support network for BGABM. In sum, BGABM frequently find it difficult to find safe spaces on campus that will accept their racial-ethnic and sexual orientation identities (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008).

BGABM regularly deal with psychological ramifications for identifying as gay or bisexual (Crawford et al., 2002; Goode-Cross & Good, 2008, 2009; Patton, 2011). BGABM risk being stereotyped as flamboyant or weak, so BGABM fear they are not seen for who they are as individuals (Harris, 2003; Patton, 2011). Therefore, BGABM may take extra measures to hide their sexual orientation identities to avoid being stereotyped by others (Dancy, 2007; Patton, 2011), which can be exhausting. In addition, BGABM who have not integrated their racial-ethnic and sexual orientation identities are more likely to be unsatisfied with life and have more psychological stress (Crawford et al., 2002). BGABM often deal with issues of loneliness and isolation (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008). Furthermore, BGABM’s navigation of dual minority statuses can lead to negative moods and lower self-esteems if individuals fail to integrate their multiple identities and/or utilize coping strategies (Crawford et al., 2002). BGABM also deal with personal ramifications for identifying as gay or bisexual (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008,

2009; Patton, 2011). BGABM oftentimes fear identifying as gay or bisexual will have ramifications for future careers, so they may feel a need to demonstrate their ability to do excellent work before coming out; they feel like this allows others to get to know them for their work and not to judge them based on their sexual orientation identity (Patton, 2011).

The experiences of BGABM in higher education greatly depend on institutional context. For example, BGABM experiences at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and predominantly White institutions (PWIs) will vary. To highlight this point, Patton (2011) conducted a phenomenological case study at one historically Black university to understand how BGABM disclosed their sexual orientation identity to others and how they navigated their institutional environment. Generally, the participants described having positive experiences at their institution (Patton, 2011). However, the participants in the study felt the need to place their sexual orientation on the back burner in relation to their other identities, such as racial and student identities. The participants in the study also felt like there were politics and ramifications associated with being “out” on campus, such as being stereotyped or having limited opportunities because of their sexual orientation identity. Patton’s study provides great insight for BGABM at one HBCU; the present article focuses on the experiences of BGABM at PWIs, and provides a theoretical consideration for practitioners and scholars to consider as BGABM navigate PWIs.

BGABM at Predominantly White Institutions

BGABM at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) have to navigate from a position of a double minority and often struggle socially at PWIs as they commonly face challenges related to their race and sexual orientation identities (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008, 2009; Harris, 2003). For example, Strayhorn and Mullins (2012) found Black gay men had to navigate racism from White male college students and homophobia from same-race peers while living on campus at PWIs. However, BGABM frequently report that race—not their sexual orientation—affects their daily interactions with faculty, staff, and other students (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008, 2009). BGABM at PWIs repeatedly find it challenging to meet romantic partners on their college and university campuses, and they often find more men who are more interested in sexual activity than in romantic and emotional relationships (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008). In addition, Black gay and bisexual male romantic relationships that are formed often lead to challenges because of the small number of BGABM at PWIs (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008). Ultimately, it is not uncommon for BGABM to use the Internet to connect with potential romantic partners (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008). BGABM who are in a romantic relationship often state their college experiences at PWIs are less isolating, but they continue to face social support challenges (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008).

BGABM repeatedly feel unsafe on and off campus (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008). BGABM frequently seek out safe spaces through friendships and peer relationships, which help with their success in college (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008; Strayhorn et al., 2008). Strayhorn et al. (2008) found that interracial peers played a critical role in BGABM’s success in higher education. However, other scholars have highlighted the struggle for BGABM to develop interracial peer relationships and the need to rely on other BGABM for friendships (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008; Washington & Wall, 2010). A Black gay or bisexual man who does not have access to a BGABM community “is not likely to find safety in the heterosexual African American community, thus leaving him to find his way amidst the racism often present in largely White gay communities” (Washington & Wall, 2010, p. 137). The gay community at PWIs is

commonly racially segregated and focused primarily on the experiences of White LGBT students, and BGABM frequently find themselves uncomfortable in the White-centered LGBT communities on their campuses (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009). Furthermore, the predominantly White LGBT community at PWIs value being “out,” but BGABM are less likely to be openly gay or bisexual (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009). Thus, BGABM at PWIs struggle to find spaces that will embrace their intersecting identities.

The literature highlights the unique experiences of BGABM—experiences that are very different from monolithic “African American male student” or “gay or bisexual student” descriptors. The literature also highlights the navigation of identities by BGABM on college campuses, particularly at PWIs. However, scholarship on BGABM in higher education is lacking as scholars and practitioners of higher education have to draw primarily from other disciplines (e.g., sociology, psychology, gender studies) for developmental models. In addition, there is no recognized theoretical foundation for understanding or conceptualizing the experiences of BGABM in predominantly White contexts. It is the authors’ hope that the introduction of this theoretical consideration will help shape future research and scholarship on Black gay and bisexual men within higher education contexts, as well as help scholars and practitioners interpret existing and future scholarship produced by higher education scholars (e.g., Dancy, Harper, Harris, Patton, Strayhorn) whose research explores BGABM and Black male masculinities.

A New Theoretical Framework

Crawford et al. (2002) conducted a study on the process of dual-identity development of Black gay and bisexual men (BGABM); the study included 174 participants who ranged in age from 19-55. They developed four modes of acculturation for BGABM based on a previous model developed to understand the acculturation of Latino/as: (a) assimilation, (b) integration, (c) separation, and (d) marginalization. BGABM who identified with the assimilation mode had low sexual orientation identification and high racial-ethnic identification; these men felt connected to the Black community but not to the LGBT community. BGABM who identified with the integration mode had high sexual orientation identification and high ethnic-racial identification; these men felt connected to both the Black and LGBT communities. BGABM who identified with the separation mode had high sexual orientation identification and low ethnic-racial identification; these men felt connected to the LGBT community but not the Black community. BGABM who identified with the marginalization mode had low sexual orientation and ethnic-racial identification; these men did not feel connected to the Black or LGBT communities. According to Crawford et al. (2002), BGABM who identified with:

The Integration Mode of Racial-Ethnic Sexual Identity Acculturation reported experiencing higher levels of self-esteem, HIV prevention, of self-efficacy, stronger social support networks, greater levels of life satisfaction, and lower levels of male gender-role and psychological distress than their counterparts in the other Modes of Racial-Ethnic Sexual Identity Acculturation. (p. 186)

Crawford et al. present evidence for what the authors call “quadruple consciousness.” To frame the psychosocial conceptualization of identity development for BGABM students attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs)—or quadruple consciousness—the authors build upon two existing frameworks: (a) W. E. B. Du Bois’ (1903/2010) theory of double

consciousness and (b) Vivienne Cass' (1979, 1984) psychosocial model of sexual identity formation.

Du Bois' (1903/2010) theory of double consciousness suggests African American men navigate two identities—one as an American, the other as an oppressed person of African decent living in America. Reflecting on the experiences of African American men in America, Du Bois (1903/2010) wrote:

In this merging he wishes neither of the other selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. (p. 9)

In the aforementioned quote, Du Bois (1903/2010) highlighted the complexities and psychosocial implications of African American men navigating America in the early 20th century, as they constantly negotiated “two-ness” or being both American and African American. This state of double consciousness for African American men is still prevalent at today's PWIs, as African American men often negotiate their racial identities to fit-in in spaces where Whiteness is seen as normative (Dancy, 2007; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Strayhorn, 2008a).

Interpreting Du Bois' (1903/2010) theory of double consciousness, the authors suggest Du Bois indirectly addressed social class or socioeconomic status because of the era his essay was written; social and economic progress was not easily obtained for African Americans in the early 20th century. Furthermore, the authors note that Du Bois' theory of double consciousness does not address the intersections and implications of sexual orientation and its impact on the identity development of BGABM. Yet again, because of the era Du Bois' essay was written, it would be unexpected for him to acknowledge sexual orientation in his writings, as gay and bisexual orientations were deemed unacceptable and illegal. As a result, the authors couple Cass' (1979, 1984) model of sexual identity formation with Du Bois' theory of double consciousness to highlight the intersection of race and sexual orientation for BGABM.

In Cass' (1979, 1984) model of sexual identity formation, she explained that sexual orientation identity is formed by *environment* and *interactions* with individuals. In addition, her model identifies six stages of sexual identity development: 1) *identity confusion*—an unexamined belief in being heterosexual and an awareness of gay feelings; 2) *identity comparison*—considering the possibility of being gay; 3) *identity tolerance*—initiating a gay community of peers 4) *identity acceptance*—when contact with other gays increases; 5) *identity pride*—rejection of heterosexual beliefs and values; and, 6) *identity synthesis*—when a person's sexual identity becomes congruent with other identities. While the stages are sequential, a person might revisit certain stages throughout their life. Yet, as Cass highlighted sexual orientation identity is informed by *environment* and *interactions*, sexual orientation identity development is problematized for BGABM, particularly at PWIs. BGABM constantly (re)negotiate the acceptability of their sexual orientation at PWIs dependent upon the social spaces they occupy at the time (Crawford et al., 2002; Goode-Cross & Good, 2008, 2009; Patton, 2011). In addition, BGABM at PWIs navigate an *environment* where they are consistently aware of their two-ness (Dancy, 2007; Du Bois, 1903/2010; Smith et al., 2007; Strayhorn, 2008a).

While the authors find Du Bois' (1903/2010) and Cass' (1979, 1984) theories to be foundational in explaining African American and sexual orientation identity development, the theories present limitations for explaining the psychosocial development of BGABM as the two theories examine race and sexual orientation in silos and fail to acknowledge the intersection of

the identities. The intersection of race and sexual orientation shape the experiences and psychosocial development of BGABM in unique ways; quadruple consciousness, builds on the tenets of Du Bois’ and Cass’ theories to explain the psychosocial development for Black gay and bisexual college men at predominantly White institutions.

Quadruple Consciousness

The premise of the authors’ theoretical consideration is that Black gay and bisexual men (BGABM) at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) move between more than two states of consciousness as suggested by Du Bois (1903/2010) in his theory of double consciousness; BGABM have even more levels of consciousness because of their sexual orientations. For example, BGABM often find the need to code-switch and/or suppress their true identities more so than White gay and bisexual men on predominantly White campuses. While White gay and bisexual men are sometimes marginalized because of their sexual orientation, they possess White privilege, what McIntosh (1988) defined as “an invisible package of unearned assets” (p. 1) available to White people because of the color of their skin. Therefore, the authors suggest White gay and bisexual men may operate in some form of double consciousness in regards to their sexual orientation identities.

However, BGABM are at times marginalized by their race, sexual orientation, and the intersection of the two salient identities; therefore, they may move between four dominant states of consciousness as they seek acceptance and do not want to be stereotyped, harmed, “outed,” or ostracized. Perhaps these multiple levels of consciousness might explain why Black men are commonly on the “down low” or “DL,” which is actively hiding your sexual orientation; it may be a coping mechanism for acceptance as they navigate social constructs and social contexts that are impacted by race, sexual orientation, and gender. The four states of consciousness are: I) White and heterosexual, II) White and non-heterosexual, III) Black and heterosexual, and IV) Black and non-heterosexual (see Figure 1). While identifying as Black and gay or bisexual are segments of BGABM true identities, the authors hypothesize BGABM are habitually forced to assimilate or suppress their true identities to be accepted by others in different social contexts. Further, the authors posit this practice is particularly salient on predominantly White college and university campuses. Subsequently, social integration may or may not be maximized which in turn may impact academic integration, or vice versa, ultimately impacting postsecondary outcomes for BGABM.

Identity I	Identity II	Identity III	Identity IV
White	White	Black	Black
Heterosexual	Non-heterosexual	Heterosexual	Non-heterosexual

Figure 1. Quadruple consciousness. This figure illustrates the four states of consciousness BGABM navigate at predominantly White institutions. The shaded boxes are considered societal and/or institutional norms.

In many cases there is an overarching White normative culture that exists for African Americans and other minority populations at PWIs (Dancy, 2007). Consequently, in order to be accepted, BGABM may be forced to assimilate to fit within *identities I* and *II*—White, heterosexual or White, non-heterosexual spaces. One might imagine that White gay and bisexual

men would be open to BGABM; however, BGABM sometime do not “fit” within the White gay community because of racial difference (Dancy, 2007). In addition, the literature suggests African American heterosexual men at times reject BGABM (e.g., Goode-Cross & Good, 2009). In order to connect with African American heterosexual men on predominantly White college campuses, BGABM may suppress, hide, and deny their sexual orientation identities (Dancy, 2007; Patton, 2011) and assimilate to fit *identity III*—African American, heterosexual spaces. This constant negotiation of identity suppression highlights the limitations of Cass’ (1979, 1984) model of sexual identity formation for BGABM. The authors suggest that BGABM do experience some of the stages of Cass’ model; however, race adds complexity to what Cass and other theorists identify as development. The possibility of BGABM operating in three states of consciousness and suppressing parts of their true identities suggests they may have a harder time reaching *identity pride* as articulated in Cass’ model of sexual identity formation. In addition, BGABM may move fluidly between the latter stages of Cass’ model (i.e., *identity tolerance*, *identity acceptance*, *identity pride*) indefinitely as they continuously navigate contexts seeking acceptance. Perhaps this behavior is seen as atypical in Cass’ model of sexual orientation identity formation; however, the authors interpret it as “life,” that is, as the intersection of race adds to the complexity of sexual orientation identity development for BGABM at PWIs. Holistically, these behaviors impact the psychosocial development of BGABM and this constant negotiation of “being” can be interpreted as quadruple consciousness.

Discussion and Conclusion

While the present article focuses on Black gay and bisexual men (BGABM) at predominantly White colleges and universities, the authors note that quadruple consciousness may not be limited to college and university communities. However, diverse themes or findings may emerge in different contexts (e.g., predominantly White religious settings, predominantly White business settings). The authors are aware that external factors—or person-environment interactions—impact and shape psychosocial development; however, these interactions are not limited to physical spaces; psychosocial development is also shaped by systemic and institutionalized social constructs. Indeed, Harper (2012) is correct when he noted that an awareness of race as a social construct and racism as an oppression in higher education research is needed for true change. Similarly, the authors note that gender and masculinity as social constructs and homophobia as an oppression must be acknowledged in higher education research and scholarship. Ultimately, an awareness and explicit recognition of social constructs and oppressions are initial steps in supporting BGABM and other marginalized and oppressed groups. Then, as scholars and practitioners learn more about BGABM through theory building and research, colleges and universities can begin creating, shaping, and implementing effective policies and practices to improve the experiences of BGABM students at PWIs and other types of college campuses.

Recommendations for Practice

The authors would like to make note of two practices that may be effective based on their review of the literature and theoretical consideration. First, mentors and role models have been extremely important in the matriculation of African American men attending predominantly White colleges (Strayhorn, 2008a). Therefore, African American male faculty and staff have to be actively recruited on college campuses. However, simply recruiting African American men is

not enough. BGABM students may not be able to fully relate with African American heterosexual male faculty and staff (i.e., operating in *Identity III*), and vice versa (Washington & Wall, 2010). Subsequently, while it is important to recruit African American male faculty and staff, institutions must also actively recruit BGABM for faculty and staff positions. Such practices will improve the chances of BGABM students having mentors and role models who they can more holistically relate to as they navigate higher education.

Second, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer and/or questioning (LGBTQ) centers must actively target BGABM. Many LGBTQ centers are White-centered (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009). In addition, the authors have observed marketing materials (e.g., websites, brochures, videos) for LGBTQ centers on college campuses that frequently target women and White students, or leave BGABM's presence out of marketing tools. Such practices push BGABM towards the margins of a place that should be a safe space (i.e., operating outside of *identity VI*). As noted in the literature, BGABM tend to suppress and hide their sexual orientation identities more than other populations due to their unique identity (Dancy, 2007; Patton, 2011); therefore, LGBTQ centers should make sure their marketing materials include and welcome BGABM. LGBTQ centers can be critical spaces for BGABM and their identity development during college.

Recommendations for Future Research

The limited research on BGABM suggests there are many unexplored areas to be examined regarding the experiences of BGABM at PWIs and at other institutional types. The authors would like to further their theoretical consideration through a series of quantitative and qualitative studies. In addition, the authors would like to see research emerge surrounding the following questions: (a) In what ways do the marginalization of racial/ethnic and sexual orientation identities and the intersection of the two influence educational outcomes (i.e., operating in *Identities I, II, and III*) for BGABM? (b) In what ways do the intersections of other identities (e.g., religion, socioeconomic status, first-generation college, [dis]ability) shape the experiences of BGABM? (c) What are similarities and differences in experiences of BGABM college students and other BGABM populations (e.g., high school students, homeless, incarcerated), particularly in predominantly White contexts? (d) In what ways does institutional context (e.g., size, geographic location, religious affiliation, Carnegie classification) matter for BGABM at PWIs? (e) In what ways do student affairs practitioners foster avenues of self-authorship for BGABM during their college experiences?

Scholars and practitioners of higher education, student affairs, diversity and multiculturalism, ethnic studies, women's studies, feminist studies, men's studies, and identity development must continue to conduct research, form new and/or revised theories, and develop interventions and support programs for 21st century college students. Although the number of student experiences is infinite, scholars, practitioners, and institutions do students a disservice by not telling students' stories and not attempting to provide services to meet their unique needs. The present article is a call to further explore the experiences and unique needs of BGABM.

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