

Introduction

The Interface of Child Development, Multiculturalism, and Media Within a Worldview Framework

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THE DEVELOPING CHILD, MULTIMEDIA, AND A CULTURALLY DIVERSE SOCIETY

There are in our scholarly discourses certain areas of study with constructs that are composed of systematically arranged theories, ideas, and concepts that, whether expressed separately or together, carry their own set of historical and contemporary complexities. This introductory section of the *Handbook* considers three such complex areas of study and sociocultural constructs. These three areas discussed flow naturally from the title of the *Handbook* and include child development within the principles of human development; multiculturalism and its relationship to pluralism and cross-cultural attitudes and beliefs; and various types of media as they provide information, models, and experiences that assist developing children to learn about the world within a broad-based multimedia landscape. The term *interface* was selected as a concept in the title of the introduction in order to emphasize the connected and common boundaries that can emerge between and

among areas of study. At the same time, this term also serves to highlight the fact that there are often points at which seemingly independent systems or diverse sociocultural concepts might interact with each other. Such an interaction of concepts can serve to bring together a focus on a number of complex principles, behaviors, and policies related to the early development of children who are growing up in an ever-changing multicultural and multimedia world.

The culturally diverse and media-rich environments, today, challenge children to acquire and understand a world where the press of a button, the pointing of a remote, or perhaps even the blinking of the eyes can expose them to a mosaic of customs, languages, religions, values, and sociopolitical beliefs that are similar to and different from their own. Indeed, the multicultural and multimedia shifts taking place in our society even challenge the adults in the home or family, school, religious institutions, and other agents of socialization for the hearts and minds of developing children. Such a shifting cultural and media-rich landscape suggests

that children, adolescents, and adults will need to be more open and understanding to those worldviews different from their own. A worldview is generally related to how an individual perceives his or her relationship to the world. Not only are worldviews composed of our attitudes, values, opinions, and concepts, but they also may affect how an individual thinks, makes decisions, behaves, and defines events (Sue, 1981). The attitudes and behaviors held by an individual help shape the personality constructs that are used to influence a worldview (Asamen & Berry, 2003). Thus, the worldview becomes for individuals a construct that directly affects and mediates their belief systems, assumptions, modes of problem solving, and conflict resolution (Ibrahim, 1991). Metaphorically, each person tends to view the world through a different pair of glasses, and multiple lenses that can reflect racial, ethnic, gender, cultural, religious, and other contextual factors (Ivey, Ivey, & Simek-Morgan, 1993). Clearly, children growing and developing in the 21st century, which is partly defined by its multimedia and vast communication resources, face a special challenge as they are bombarded by value and belief systems that play a role in the continuing process of shaping their worldviews (Asamen & Berry, 2003).

The major theories, concepts, opinions, and research based on the knowledge growing out of this *Handbook* reflect on the importance of understanding more about how children grow, learn, and develop within a sociocultural context of a changing technological and culturally diverse country and world. Ernest Boyer (1991), drawing on the early work of James Agee, wrote that “in every child who is born, under no matter what circumstances, and of no matter what parents, . . . the potentiality of the human race is born again” (p. 15). It was within the context of children and both the historical and contemporary complexities of the issues

related to child development, multiculturalism, and media studies from which this introduction was framed.

CHILDREN AND DEVELOPMENT

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted in 1989. It broadly defined a child as every human being to the age of 18 unless, under the law of his or her state, he or she has reached a majority earlier (Geddes, 1997). Considering the vital role of children in the lives of adults and their place in determining the future direction of humankind, this statement was a long time in coming and broad in its meaning. At the time the United Nations issued its statement on children, the scientific studies of child development and psychology were actively exploring a number of theories about them. Although the field of child development is extensive and complex, it was important to establish a brief framework for it in order to form a bridge to the other major themes in the *Handbook*.

One obvious way to begin the process of bridging some of the themes in this book is to see child development as encompassing the specialties of developmental psychology and child psychology, as well as the attention given to the intellectual, personal, and social aspects of individual development (Jeffrey, 2005). Child development includes physical, psychological, social, and all human growth from birth to adolescence, and is rooted in what we know as human behavior. Specialists in child development study virtually everything about children: the way their personalities are formed; the way they think and learn; and the way they acquire, understand, and respond to the special demands of their culture (Eggen & Kauchak, 1997; Wood, Wood, & Boyd, 2006).

The field of child development, as might be expected, has not escaped the push and pull of the many theories and schools of

thought that have emerged over the years. One premier area of professional debate has been the controversy related to the issue of whether inherited or acquired traits have the greatest influence on certain developmental characteristics and behaviors. Although some of the so-called nature-nurture issues are active today, there is now a recognition that both processes have a role to play in human development. That is to say, human beings are the products of both heredity and environment and these processes tend to be interrelated. Similar controversial issues have centered on the types of research paradigms and evaluation models that are necessary to measure some of the physical, cognitive, and psychosocial developmental aspects of children. Whether one is looking at nature-nurture issues or the research models, however, developmental specialists seem to agree that there can be some individual variations from child to child, but human development tends to involve a somewhat predictable process. Wendell Jeffrey (2005) provided a contemporary perspective on this consensus in the field of child development by pointing out “that given minimally adequate nourishment, reasonable protection from illness, and other hostile aspects of the environment, a relatively orderly pattern and sequential process of physical growth, as well as behavioral and motor skills can be observed in children” (p. 450).

The cognitive and behavioral changes found within the developmental processes are at the core of what is known as learning. Learning, among other factors, will depend on the level of maturation of the learner’s related stages of development. The implications of the biological aspects of this maturational process are that whether your theory of learning is based on a cognitive perspective, behavioral views, social learning concepts, or others, learning is interrelated with development and it also assists in guiding it (Eggen & Kauchak, 1997). The National

Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) identified a set of developmentally appropriate principles that provided a foundation for understanding in theory and practice many of the consensus points found among the specialists in child development and learning (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Six of the principles are identified here because they are succinct and yet comprehensive enough to form a point of departure for linking the learning aspects of child development with the multicultural and multimedia constructs in this introduction, and those same areas of study that are woven throughout the *Handbook*. The selected principles from the NAEYC are the following:

1. Domains of children’s development—physical, social, emotional, and cognitive—are closely related. Development in one domain influences and is influenced by development in other domains.
2. Development occurs in a relatively orderly sequence, with later abilities, skills, and knowledge building on those already acquired.
3. Development proceeds at varying rates from child to child as well as unevenly within different areas of each child’s functioning.
4. Development and learning occur in and are influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts.
5. Children are active learners, drawing on direct physical and social experience as well as culturally transmitted knowledge to construct their own understandings of the world around them.
6. Development and learning result from interaction of biological maturation and the environment, which includes both the physical and social worlds that children live in. (Bredekamp & Copple, pp. 10–13)

I submit that the linear listing of these principles from the NAEYC cannot explain all the complexities associated with learning

and development. The six points do, however, provide a framework for understanding that just as the many domains of child development are interrelated, so too are the relationships among these principles.

CHILDREN AND MULTICULTURALISM

At a juncture in the history, according to some estimates, humans left Africa around 1.9 million years ago (Wong, 2006). There is, of course, still some question and mystery as to where the migrations took these early ancestors. What we do know is that from those very early migrations and over thousands of years, the world became a rich mosaic of people and cultures whose human development includes the ability to visit distant planets, transplant organs in the body, paint beautiful pictures, compose complex musical scores, sail to great depths under the sea, and communicate over vast distances across the globe. Humankind is also at a point in history where the world is being made smaller by technological advances, the forces of geopolitics, and the present multicultural migrations taking place on a global scale. Socio-cultural and political changes large and small can always have some impact on the lives of children, as do the culturally diverse demographic patterns developing in the United States.

The multicultural and multiethnic nature of the changes in the country can be seen in the large number of people who are reported to be using multiple categories to describe their racial/ethnic group (Asamen & Berry, 2003). Immigrants have settled into a broad array of American communities, and this has brought about an unprecedented level of ethnic diversity. Robin Fields (2006) highlighted the changing demographic pattern in the United States by pointing out the following data since 2000:

The nation remains about two-thirds white, but minorities make up an increasing share of the population in every state but Virginia. . . . Latinos, who became the country's largest minority in 2000, continue to outpace other groups. They now constitute 14.5% of the population, up from 12.5% five years ago. (p. A12)

Indeed, the demographic future tends to suggest that sometime in the middle of the 21st century, the United States will become what is called a "minority-majority society," and that is a society in which the various minority groups of color will constitute a majority (Asamen & Berry, 2003; Chisman, 1998). This demographic picture of the number of people of color is already present in many urban cores, in some suburbs, and in the entire metropolitan areas of a few cities.

The half-decade since 2000 has brought gradual and predictable ethnic changes to a state like California where, of the 35 million residents, a third are Latino, and where Asians outnumber African Americans more than 2 to 1 (Fields, 2006; Maton, Kohout, Wicherski, Leary, & Vinokurov, 2006). The change in the ethnic makeup of the country becomes very clear when one observes so many aspects of everyday life. It is safe to say that every aspect of society in the United States, ranging from schools and urban life to media and business, has been influenced by the rapidly increasing ethnic diversity in the country (Maton et al., 2006). The diversification of the United States can be seen more dramatically by data showing that the population is increasingly aging, people with disabling conditions are seeking more opportunities, and women presently represent one of the growing groups entering the labor force today.

Any analysis of changing demographic patterns and cultural diversity frequently moves race and ethnicity to the center of the discussions. Jon Meacham (2000) pointed out that the national conversation about

race must now shift, and there is a need to think more broadly about the changing face of America. At the same time, there has also been an issue with the meaning of race that has always caused a discussion of it to be scientifically problematic. Race is, after all, a social construct. Thus, Henze, Katz, Norte, Sather, and Walker (2002) supported the proposition that from a biological framework the concept of race and the continuance of race classification are erroneous and indeed obsolete. A term such as *ethnicity* is a better descriptor because it refers to groups of people who perceive themselves as constituting a community because of a common culture, ancestry, language, history, religion, and customs. At the same time, ethnicity does not mean that there are a constant or uniform set of social experiences either for individuals or for groups (Riggins, 1992).

The reference to the concept of culture related to changing demographic patterns and a theme of multiculturalism also needs, albeit difficult to define, some brief explanation. Culture in the ideational sense is a product of learning, and it consists of what the members of a human group have to know in order to function acceptably as members of that group in the practices, customs, beliefs, and other activities in which they engage (Fowers & Davidov, 2006). A broader way to frame the elements of culture is by identifying some of the contemporary concepts that are meeting a level of understanding among social scientists. They are the following:

1. There is tremendous variation in the cultural repertoire within a given cultural group, depending on age, gender, occupation, economic niche, and many other factors.
2. Cultural borderlands, with much sharing and borrowing, are more the rule than the exception these days, especially among industrialized nations and in our increasingly interconnected cyberspaces.
3. We all actively construct and change culture, as well as acquire parts of it through socialization—the only culture that remains static is a culture that has died.
4. Much of culture is implicit—foods and festival depictions give a false picture of culture as a visible, ritualized set of practices and ignore the less-visible aspects of culture, such as the way we respond to a compliment or how we know when it is appropriate to hug somebody. (Henze et al., 2002, p. 11)

Some other capsule views agreed on among social scientists are that culture is learned, it is dynamic, it has multiple meanings, it is not an inherited trait, and we now live in a culturally plural and multicultural world (Henze et al., 2002; Murphie & Potts, 2003).

Multicultural concepts and issues, although a part of the literature and national debate in this country today, have been at the core of human thought from its early beginnings. Morris Jackson (1995) noted that this concept was recognized in ancient Mediterranean civilizations from the new kingdom of pharaonic Egypt through the collapse of the Roman Empire. A framework for understanding multiculturalism in the United States is to see it as having some elements of cultural pluralism. That is to say, a culturally pluralist society that promotes the principles of what John Axelson (1993) broadly referred to as having unity in diversity, and where various cultural groups in this country develop through equal cooperation and interaction. To endorse cultural diversity and cultural pluralism within this framework of multiculturalism is to understand and appreciate the differences that exist among the citizens of the United States, to affirm cultural differences, to profess a wholesome respect for the intrinsic worth of every individual, and to reject separatism (Asamen & Berry, 2003; American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, 1973).

Some of the early debates among scholars, researchers, educators, and various types of media groups were related to cross-cultural conflicts involving assimilationist, cultural pluralist, and multiculturalist ideologies. At the center of these early discussions and debates were the issues related to the role each ideology might play in the socialization of the child, the ethnic identity of the child, the nature of schooling, and certainly how individuals would see their place and values as members of society. While there were other ideologies in the cross-cultural debates, a quick summary of some of the beliefs is the following: (a) the assimilationist envisions a society in which ethnicity and race are not important identities, and group affiliations would be based primarily on such variables as social class, politics, education, and other interests; (b) the pluralist tended to view the ethnic group as very important in the socialization of the individual, and it is within their own particular ethnic groups that children and adolescents develop their language, lifestyle, and values; (c) the multicultural theorist envisions an open society in which individuals from diverse ethnic, cultural, and social class groups have equal opportunities, as well as a place where various ethnic groups will have some unique cultural characteristics as they share and are influenced by common national traits (Banks, 1994). The debates involving the ideologies of these three groups and others, especially related to cross-cultural and multicultural beliefs, are active in some quarters today. For example, some critics of multiculturalism charge that it tends to classify people according to categories, oversimplifies the source of human identity, and encourages division and tensions among ethnic groups.

Multiculturalism as conceptualized in a more contemporary framework suggests a type of cross-cultural balance and inclusiveness related to within-group differences and

between-group differences. One advantage of using multicultural concepts in this way is that it implies and includes a wide range of multiple groups without grading, comparing, or ranking them as better or worse than one another, and without denying the very distinct and complementary, or even contradictory, perspectives that each group brings with it (Asamen & Berry, 2003; Pederson, 1991). The perspective of multiculturalism advanced here does not mean that there are no standards applied to the concepts and practices of individuals and groups. Clearly, there are such factors as common obligations and common civic standards of conduct that are expected of people living in a country, state, city, and community. What is called for when cross-cultural issues arise is the need for a type of sociocultural narrative that looks at customs, behaviors, and beliefs that grow out of an *emic*, or from within a cultural context, and not exclusively from an *etic*, or outside of it.

This introduction perceives its tenets of multiculturalism as trying to bridge some of the philosophical and sociopolitical fissures that have been a part of the past and present debates. That is to say, the conceptual framework articulated recognizes the legitimacy of the multicultural debates. It also recognizes the often-complex nature of the relationships between and among so many diverse groups in the United States. At the same time, the framework also embraces a belief system that seeks cross-cultural common ground to foster unity, respect, open dialogue, civility, and intergroup understanding, while striving for a commitment to common national goals within a spirit of cultural diversity.

The *Handbook* uses a broad-base approach to understanding the multicultural concepts by including racial/ethnic groups, gender/women, social class, religious groups, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender

individuals under its multicultural tent. Much of the thought, especially related to children and media, has centered on African Americans, Native American Indians/Alaska Natives, Asian/Pacific Islander Americans, Hispanic/Latino Americans, and women. In this connection, it is also important to recognize the long history of stereotyping and bigotry aimed at certain religious groups and immigrant populations. Consistent with the inclusive perspective argued for here is the description of multiculturalism advanced by the organization Visions Incorporated (2005) of Arlington, Massachusetts, which offered the following statement:

Multiculturalism refers to the process of recognizing, understanding, and appreciating one's own culture as well as the culture of others. It stresses an appreciation of the impact of differences—race, gender, class/status, age, sexual/affectional orientation, religion, military experience, language, ethnicity, country of birth and physical ability. (p. 1)

It is axiomatic to observe that the United States is a country where historically and traditionally people differ not only in the areas of ethnicity, gender, class, and religion, but also in family composition, lifestyle, political outlook, and their general worldview. David Meyers (2007) captured a perspective on some cultural differences and what might be referred to as the common humanness of our similarities in the following observation:

Because we are so mindful of how others differ from us, we often fail to notice the similarities predisposed by our shared biology. Cross-cultural research can help us by leading us to appreciate both our cultural diversity and human kinship. Compared with the person-to-person differences within groups, the differences are small. Regardless of our culture—and culture is itself something that shapes us . . . we humans share the same life-cycle. (p. 125)

Finding new ways of working together will require teaching and thinking about people's differences so as not to divide, separate, or exclude, but rather to learn from the differences (Xanthopoulos, 2006).

CHILDREN AND MEDIA

The culturally diverse United States and the world are long past the issues of whether mass media are dynamic forces in shaping the lives of children, adolescents, and adults in a global society. That genie is metaphorically off the printing press, out of the electronic box, free of the printed circuits, and media worldwide are a fact of life. Of course, the globalization of mass media must be understood within the reality that two thirds of the world's population who live in regions referred to as developing countries enjoy only 15% of the world's income, and this imbalance in resources naturally defines the state of mass media in certain parts of the world (Musa & Okoli, 2001). Mass media as used in this context generally means the system of information for reaching a large, diversified, anonymous, and widely scattered audience (Thomas & Carpenter, 2001). These media are represented by the press, broadcast television, radio, Internet services, websites, advertising, cable, cinema, video-recorded music, computers, satellite services, electronic games, photography, photocopiers, billboards, and other emerging forms of communication and media devices. They are the media that supply our cultural icons and stereotypes, suggest consumer demands and wishes, and convey much of the news and information people use on a daily basis (Asamen & Berry, 2003; Firestone & Garmer, 1998).

Perti Alasuutari (1999) noted that the media are an essential part of our everyday life and social reality, and they unproblematically provide us with some level of common ground for discourse in modern society.

“Radio, television, film and the other products of media culture provide materials out of which we forge our identities, our sense of class, of ethnicity and race, of nationality, of sexuality, of us and them” (Kellner, 1995, p. 10). The implications of the positions by Alasuutari and Kellner are that media and its technologies are not neutral or benign because their messages embody the ideas, needs, and possibilities in our culture.

Steven Lubar (1993) referred to the media as a part of the “information culture” at least as much as ethnicity, race, or geography. Understanding the media means we must increasingly do so within the context of an information society, and to realize that the term no longer refers to a single coherent set of theoretical or empirical constructs (Curran & Gurevitch, 2005). Every medium comprises and is shaped by technologies, social relationships (institutions), and cultural forms (Grossberg, Wartella, & Whitney, 1998). These writers further concluded that “each of these ways of thinking about the media is important, for each contributes something unique to how we understand the media and their relationship to society and social reality” (p. 10). The implications of the social reality of this emerging media environment are that the people who are studying, creating, producing, and broadcasting various types of media need to be aware of some of the special complexities they bring to society and learning experiences of the developing child.

The unique and special attributes of media and the healthy development of children from birth to age 12, teenage, and early adult years are major themes of this *Handbook*. Special attention to children who are younger than 12 is especially important because of a need to assist them toward the sound social and emotional developmental tasks during the early childhood years, as well as to help in their cross-cultural experiences and media usage. These are the children for whom the

electronic media are thoroughly integrated in the fabric of their life, with television, movies, videos, music, video games, and computers being a natural part of their everyday lives (Kaiser Family Foundation Center on the Media and Child Health, 2005). It is interesting to note that in a typical day, 83% of children ages 6 months to 6 years use some form of screen media, including 75% who watch television, 32% who watch videos or DVDs, 16% who use a computer, and 11% who play either console or handheld video games (Rideout & Hamel, 2006). In a study of young people with a sample from ages 8 to 18, the conclusions were that they live media-saturated lives by spending an average of nearly 6½ hours a day on media; television and music dominated these activities (Rideout, Roberts, & Foehr, 2005). Television, computers, radio, and other forms of media are now converging so that they will have a greater impact on the child’s attitudes, beliefs, and information base. For example, with high-speed Internet connections provided either by telephone wire, a cable television line, or a satellite link, new entertainment options such as movies-on-demand, radio, television, and live online games against many players scattered around the globe have become a reality (Paik, 2001).

Children’s and adolescents’ usage of various types of media at such saturated levels naturally becomes the concern of those specialists and groups interested in their social development and learning. Media have their greatest effect when they are used in a manner that reinforces and channels attitudes and opinions that are consistent with the psychological makeup of the person and social structure of the groups with which the child identifies (Wilson & Gutierrez, 1995). Consistent with the psychosocial makeup of children and similar to other learning experiences, social cognitive theory suggests that cross-culture attitudes related to gender, ethnic, religious, class, and other beliefs can be

acquired from observations growing out of television and other media through the process of modeling (Bandura, 1986; Berry & Asamen, 2001; Eggen & Kauchak, 1997). The learning experiences drawn from both positive and negative cross-cultural media images provided to children can become a part of their stored bits of information or schemata that will help them draw relationships and understandings from the content and its messages.

Children are a special audience for television as well as special users of video games, the Internet, and other media (Bryant & Bryant, 2003). In the further words of these two researchers: "Because of a lack of previous experiences and limited cognitive schemata, children are not able to interpret present circumstances in a sophisticated manner, but instead rely on their senses in the here and now" (p. 198). One way to attempt to get some understanding of television and the other media might well be to introduce the concept of "scripts" as constructs for ascertaining how sexist, ageist, and other cross-cultural views are acquired by children. A script consists of a "vignette" of both an image and a conceptual representation, as well as observations made by the child and programs for how to solve problems (Bushman & Huesman 2001; Condry, 1989). The television content can, for example, provide scripts for how children should behave, comprehend sex roles, and view health-related behavior (Condry, 1989). Scripts as a type of schema can also play a part in the way in which children and adults perceive the ethnic, gender, social class, religious, and other social roles they experience in their daily activities and the multimedia world. The unique nature and attractiveness of various types of media make the exploration of them in this *Handbook* especially important when we consider their impact on the special developmental needs of children. These are, after all, the children who can spend a great deal of time with content

that has no known value to their development, but they can also learn preacademic skills from well-designed television programs that can have lasting association with their academic achievement (Huston, Bickham, Lee, & Wright, 2007).

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE SAGE HANDBOOK OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT, MULTICULTURALISM, AND MEDIA

The nexus of understanding how children grow and develop in a changing multicultural and multimedia-rich society presented a special set of challenges for both the scope of this book and its organization. As editors, we attempted to bring the three major themes together and explore their complexities from a multidisciplinary perspective. We believe the contributors to this book did an excellent job of providing scholarly, research-based, and practical content that will assist academics, public policy groups, foundations, teachers, parents, media professionals, and especially college students at all levels to better understand the major themes identified in this volume.

The *Handbook* is divided into four major parts:

1. Part I (Chapters 1–6) provides a foundation for understanding the roots and key concepts of multiculturalism, the cognitive processes involved in child development, and the principles associated with the early acquisition of a worldview. This part also addresses the methodological challenges relevant to the study of multicultural issues. The chapters in the first part of the volume provide the prerequisite theoretical context for critically reading the chapters in the following three parts.
2. Part II (Chapters 7–12) focuses on the traditional institutional influences that contribute toward the socialization of children

and their view of self and others (home and family, community and sociopolitical context, school, religion, and peers). The authors who contribute to this part of the *Handbook* not only offer an overview of the scholarly literature on how these agents of socialization may contribute to the development of a multicultural worldview, but also provide suggestions for how these institutions may promote the development of this perspective.

3. Part III (Chapters 13–24) concentrates on one of the most influential agents of socialization among children—television and other electronic and print media forms. Given their powerful influence on children, these media forms help shape the multicultural worldview of children. The chapters in this part of the *Handbook* discuss the various media forms in relation to the development of multicultural awareness as well as attitudes toward self and others.
4. Part IV (Chapters 25–28) offers chapters relevant to promoting a multicultural perspective among children by various constituencies. The authors who contribute to this part of the volume offer research and programs related to the role of parents,

public policy groups, government agencies, broadcasters, advocacy groups, and others interested in the media, cross-cultural issues, and the needs of developing children.

Professor Ronald Takaki (1993), in the book *A Different Mirror*, presented a series of observations that are still viable to close the introduction to this book. He wrote the following:

Whatever happens we can be certain that much of our society's future will be influenced by which "mirror" we choose to see ourselves. America does not belong to one race or one group, . . . and Americans have been constantly redefining their national identity from the moment of first contact on the Virginia shore. By sharing their stories they invite us to see ourselves in a different mirror. (p. 17)

Thus, our theories, scholarly research, well-thought-out practices, and good old common sense need to be aware of the importance of having healthy and media-literate children in a country and world trying to see and understand through a prism of many multicultural reflections.

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