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## Research Article

### A Gendered Discourse Analysis of Biological and Trans-Women's Narratives on Women's History Month Celebration

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## ABSTRACT

This research paper presents a comparative analysis of the narratives from biological and trans women regarding the inclusion of trans women in celebrating Women's History Month. Utilizing Labov and Waletzky's Structural Approach to Narrative, the study examines the linguistic nuances in the narratives of ten participants—five trans women advocating for inclusion (Group A) and five biological women expressing reservation about trans women's inclusion (Group B). The analysis reveals significant differences between the two groups' use of evaluative and referential clauses. Group A's narratives predominantly feature evaluative clauses (59%), reflecting personal emotions and subjective interpretations of their experiences. Group B's narratives are characterized by a higher percentage of referential clauses (65%), focusing on their actual experiences and centering on the factual events. This disparity illustrates how each group's beliefs manifest in their narratives, highlighting the complexities of gender identity and inclusion within feminist discourse. The findings also revealed the importance of identifying referential and evaluative clauses in understanding the stances of trans and biological women, further underscoring the importance of recognizing diverse perspectives in the ongoing conversation about women's rights and the need for a deeper understanding of the implications of these differences in shaping feminist narratives. This study contributes valuable insights to the fields of feminism, linguistics, and social activism, advocating for a more inclusive dialogue that honors the experiences of all women.

**Keywords:** *Gender, Identity, Narratives, Inclusion, Feminist discourse, Discourse analysis*

## Background

The development of women's rights is an abstract shaped by the strands of social,

political, and economic shifts across cultures and historical periods rather than a simple lin-

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ear action. A rich history of work and perseverance has been created by the women's rights movement, which has built upon the successes and lessons of its ancestors with each wave. The discussion of women's rights has broadened to encompass intersectionality, acknowledging the varied experiences of women across the spectrum of sexual orientation, color, and class. In the Philippines, celebrating Women's Month has provided a forum for showcasing women's accomplishments and discussing current and upcoming topics, difficulties, and obligations related to gender equality and women's empowerment (IntramurosGOVPH, 2025). By virtue of Proclamation No. 224 s. 1988 – *Declaring the first week of March each year as Women's Week and March 8 as Women's Rights and International Peace Day*, and Proclamation No. 227 s. 1988, *Providing for the Observance of the Month of March as "Women's Role in History Month"*, it honors and commemorates the achievements made by women throughout history, recognizing their roles in various disciplines, including arts, science, politics, and education. This movement is a reminder that the struggle for equality is far from over. Many women continue to experience prejudice based on their gender and sex all across the world. Numerous issues that disproportionately impact women, including sexual and domestic abuse, low income, limited access to education, and subpar healthcare, are caused by gender inequality. Women's rights movements have long battled to combat this imbalance, whether through lobbying for legislative changes or turning to the streets to demand that their rights are upheld (Amnesty International, 2024). This sense of community is a force of encouragement for the women in marginalized groups as it amplifies their voices. By drawing attention to these problems, the celebration promotes discussion and spreads awareness, inspiring people and groups to act against the injustices that women experience daily (Sicat, 2025). Women who come together to exchange stories, struggles, and victories build a network of support that enables them to stand up for their and other people's rights.

Moreover, the term "women" goes beyond the traditional gender binary. It is essential to highlight the difference between sex and

gender. While sex refers to the biological status of an individual, gender relates to social roles, and gender identity similarly refers to an individual's internal sense. Hence, a biological woman refers to a female by birth, naturally having the scientific and biological features of the female sex. While a trans woman, on the other hand, can be from any sex that identifies as a woman, resonating with the feminine gender roles and having the internal sense of womanhood regardless of their sex assigned by birth (American Psychological Association, 2024). The evolving gender discourse has raised awareness of the variety of identities and experiences that fall under the umbrella of "women," which most importantly include trans women. However, even with the collective acceptance towards trans women as women, a clash has been sparked regarding the inclusion of trans women in Women's Month, eliciting discussions between women, predominantly trans women who stand for their inclusion in the celebration, and biological women who disagree. Many trans women contend that they are also facing the same gender-based oppression as biological women, including workplace discrimination, lack of healthcare access, and violence. Together with their supporters, they underscored that rather than distinguishing between biological and trans women, the observance should be centered on dismantling patriarchal systems that engender the oppression that strikes women across all spectrums of gender. Meanwhile, the other group of women posits that Women's Month is a tribute to women's contribution to feminism throughout generations, highlighting that celebration is deeply rooted in the historical struggles of systemic oppression against women, posing risks of overlooking these when the focus is shifted to the inclusion of trans women (Conejos, 2025). Additionally, these biological women argue that trans women have their own spaces for recognition, such as Pride Month in June, International Transgender Day of Visibility in March, and Transgender Awareness Week in November.

As the complex debates between groups of women continue to circulate, they establish social and cultural tensions, further revealing our proper understanding of women and gender.

Rebecca Solnit, a writer and activist, posits that in the definition of what a woman is, there is no one-size-fits-all. Some are born with chromosomal and hormonal anomalies and divergent parts. Women are not breeding stocks to be defined only by having a uterus and breasts, nor the capability of giving birth (Solnit, 2020). Rather than a biologically based category, "women" is a sense of community built with a spectrum of identities (Sanchez, 2021). When we relatively situate this in the context of the Philippines, particularly in the legislative aspect, there is still no comprehensive Gender Recognition Law, unlike other countries that have enacted specific legislation that advances the rights of transgender individuals in changing their name and gender in the civil registry (Respicio & Co., 2025). With the revealed beliefs of the society as well as the different perspectives in the lens of social activism and the legislative body presenting positions towards women and gender, a valuable approach that has not been crucially explored in understanding women is examining the perspectives that are from the women themselves. The researchers identified that although many women have voiced their stands and have made a handful of efforts to break the stigma and misconceptions towards women and gender, their voices are not completely heard, lacking focus on the perspectives of women and essentially taking their narratives into account, primarily through the lens of sociolinguistics. Hence, the researchers aim to bridge this gap through this study.

Narratives play an essential role in human culture. The early developments of structural approaches to narrative have led to Labov's works on narrative analysis, which have been influential in sociolinguistics (Fivable, 2024). Labov's Structural Approach to Narratives appears to be an ideal and relevant method in exploring women's perspectives through their narratives and examining the use of language within. The approach provides a valuable basis in analysing texts as it presents and reveals how linguistic domains impact a story (Sheikh et al., 2021). Additionally, exploring women's contentious discourses is deemed relevant as it extends our understanding of womanhood. Particularly employing Labov's Structural Approach to Narrative, the analysis centers the

study in highlighting the relations between language and social dynamics, and how they manifest and interplay in discourses situated in the context of women.

This study recounts the circulating issue regarding the inclusion of trans women in celebrating Women's Month to further delve into the means of being a woman. On the bigger picture, the two sides of the argument are women fighting for their rights; however, these rights happen to oppose each other. Accordingly, the researchers aim to answer these questions: (a) How are the differences of their stances manifested in their narratives? (b) What are the implications of these differences?

Women are the primary research beneficiaries of this study, with the deliberate analysis that aims to enrich the understanding of women. Additionally, the benefit of this paper extends to the general public and future researchers exploring women-related discourses, as well as Labov's Personal Experience Narrative (PEN). This paper provides valuable data and information that holds significance in various fields of study and disciplines, including feminism, linguistics, and the overall research academe.

## Methods

The researchers looked into the linguistic nuances utilizing a qualitative approach. The primary objective of this study is to describe how the two groups of women in conflict deliver their narratives and to identify how the differences in their beliefs manifest in their discourses. The paper underscores the issue circulating during Women's Month regarding the inclusion of trans women in the celebration and the disagreements between groups of women. The discourse materials to be analyzed were collected from 10 selected participants. 5 are trans women in favor of the inclusion, which were categorized as Group A, and five biological women who are not in favor of the said motion, categorized as Group B. All participants from Groups A and B were gathered through purposive sampling. The specific characteristics of the participants that are sought to be identified by the researchers were their gender status and their stances towards the issue. Participants were searched online by examining

the accounts participating in the online discourses regarding Women's Month and the inclusion of trans women. The researchers sent private messages to the selected users to first confirm their gender status and their stances as part of the purposive sampling to verify that they are qualified to participate in the study. The study is then introduced to them, and they are invited to participate.

Additionally, for Group A, not all trans women participants were from the online discourses; a few were found through referrals and were interviewed initially to confirm their stances about the issue. Moreover, all participants were allowed to keep their personal information, such as their names, anonymous. This is deemed essential, especially for the biological women (Group B), as the discourses have become controversial for them since they are mostly cyberbullied and tagged as transphobic due to their stances. All participants produced their narratives with a prompt asking them to share a personal experience that justifies their stand on the issue.

In this discourse study, the researchers employed Structural Approach to Narrative, specifically Labov and Waletzky's concept of Referential and Evaluative Clauses. In William Labov's influential work on personal experience narrative (PEN), Labov and Waletzky posited that each clause serves one of two

functions: referential or evaluative. Clauses that narrate the events, characters, setting, and generally what the story is all about are classified as referential. On the other hand, when the clauses narrate the story's point and the narrator's reflection on the story, these are called evaluative clauses (Johnstone, 2016). Furthermore, in this study, the discourse materials were examined to identify the functions of each clause. Moreover, as the researchers aimed to reveal comprehensive results, this qualitative study presented a frequency count in identifying the usage of referential and evaluative clauses. The revealed data became the basis of this comparative analysis in describing the linguistic nuances and creating implications.

## Results and Discussion

The narratives from Group A and B were individually examined to identify the function of each clause through the lens of Labov's Personal Experience Narrative (PEN), particularly the concept of referential and evaluative clauses. After the deliberate analysis, the researchers found a significant disparity between the two groups using referential and evaluative clauses in their narratives. The results are illustrated in a table. Table 1 presents the tallies of the two clauses in each group, including their equivalent percentages, for the results to be more comprehensive.

Table 1. Frequency of Types of Clauses

	REFERENTIAL	EVALUATIVE	TOTAL NO. OF CLAUSES
Group A (Trans)	22 (41%)	32 (59%)	54 (100%)
Group B (Biological)	32 (65%)	17 (35%)	49 (100%)

Evaluative clauses were found to occur more often in Group A (59%), compared to Group B (35%). Group B displayed more referential clauses (65%) compared to Group A (41%) in their narratives. It is also worth mentioning that Group A was close to having neutral use of both clauses, with more evaluative and referential clauses, having only a 9% gap, while Group B maintains a higher disparity between the two types of clauses, with a 15% gap. Nevertheless, the results conclude that Group A uses more evaluative clauses in their narratives, while Group B leans more on referential

clauses. Moreover, to further explore the differences between group A and B in delivering their narratives, excerpts categorized as evaluative clauses from Group A's narratives and excerpts of referential clauses from Group B are presented.

### Group A: Evaluative Clauses

1. *"Looking back, those were really some of my toughest challenges as a trans woman, and I think that women's month should shed light on these challenges as well."*

2. *"That's why it felt very discriminatory when I heard the issue about excluding trans women in Women's Month. To me, it seemed like all of our struggles as trans women were disregarded."*
3. *"With all the issues going around about how we should not be allowed to celebrate women's month, I think these are all forms of oppression and discrimination towards us."*

Taken from the narratives of Group A, these excerpts identified as evaluative clauses depict how their narratives lean more towards their reflection on their experiences, and express their feelings, which is a salient feature that dominates their narratives. The clauses presented the same pattern of having a phrase in the first part that functions as a key determinant that the clause is evaluative. In excerpt 1, the first part of the clause, *"looking back,"* is a phrasal verb defined as thinking about the past. In parallel with Labov's Narrative Analysis, evaluative clauses, rather than simply narrating the sequence of events, reflect the narrator's thoughts and feelings towards the events (Sheikh et al., 2021). Hence, *"looking back"* signifies that the narrator reflects on the event, rationalizing that the clause is evaluative. Similarly, the phrase *"That's why it felt very discriminatory..."* in excerpt 2 expresses the narrator's attitude and feelings about the narrated event, concluding that it is an evaluative clause. Furthermore, excerpt 3, *"With all the issues going around..."* affirms that the narrator is recapitulating the already narrated events and further proceeds to express her thoughts about it.

In summary, it is observed that most of the evaluative clauses of Group A display a pattern of recalling the narrated events before conveying the narrators' thoughts, feelings, and attitudes. This means that the first part of the sentence served as a key determinant for identifying evaluative clauses. Moreover, the evaluative clauses in the narratives of Group A provide us with a lens of what it's like and how it feels to be in a marginalized group, as their actual experiences tend to be downplayed and overlooked by society; their emotional and evaluative accounts essentially function in further revealing the oppression against them. Such failure to acknowledge their identities

and the oppression that comes with it consequently exacerbates the marginalization of trans women (Zhao, 2021). Therefore, identifying the occurrence of evaluative clauses and examining the use of evaluative language in the narratives of Group A holds great significance in understanding their perspective.

Overall, evaluative clauses are dominant in their narratives, manifest in the fact that trans women's personal experiences have been overlooked throughout the years. While trans people are increasingly visible in both popular culture and in daily life, they still face severe discrimination, stigma, and systemic inequality. Trans people still experience severe prejudice, high rates of violence, and poor health outcomes, despite the transgender movement's tremendous advancements over the past ten years, which have led to increased public awareness and critical legislative successes (Funders for LGBT Issues, 2021). Their deep reflection on their identities is rooted in their struggle for recognition in various social, medical, and personal contexts. Denying someone the legal recognition of their gender has a detrimental effect on every area of their life, including their right to housing, health care, social security, freedom of movement, and residence, which also encourages violence, discrimination, and exclusion in social contexts, such as workplaces and educational institutions (Ohchr, 2025). These narratives reveal how experiences of discrimination, support, and triumph contribute to a richer understanding of self and community. Trans women emphasize the value of acceptance—from others and oneself—through their personal narratives. Trans women's perspectives provide light on more general issues of identity, belonging, and the continuous search for acceptance in a society still coming to terms with variety. In addition to promoting empathy, their tales stimulate a more in-depth discussion of gender and the human condition.

#### Group A: Referential Clauses

1. *Transwomen like me are more woman than female at birth who are privileged enough to not experience struggles.*
2. *Like them, we also have rights that need to be fought for.*

3. *Many trans women in history and up until the present have made great impacts and contributions in societies and especially in feminism.*

Furthermore, although the narratives of Group A were shown to lean more towards using evaluative clauses, their referential clauses are also deemed worth considering. The referential clauses of the participants were observed to mostly narrate how trans women can encapsulate womanhood in many different ways. Excerpt 1 compares trans and biological women, highlighting that womanhood comes from experience rather than a biological categorization. Excerpt 2, on the other hand, contends that trans women need to fight for their rights, just like biological women. This emphasizes the similarity of trans and biological women in terms of their experiences and how they are oppressively positioned in society. Relatively, excerpt 3 narrates that trans women throughout history have contributed significantly to feminism, accentuating how the fight for women's rights is also a fight for trans women. Moreover, it is shown that the use of referential language in the narratives of Group A provides a view of how womanhood essentially manifests in the experiences and perspectives of transwomen. This type of clause shows a broader understanding of what womanhood is, emphasizing the contributions of trans women in feminism and their shared experiences with other groups of women. This rationalizes their stances on Women's Month inclusion and how, in many ways, trans women are women. This perspective not only rationalizes the inclusion of trans women in discussions surrounding Women's Month but also reinforces the idea that all women, regardless of their backgrounds, deserve recognition and respect. They illustrate how womanhood manifests in various forms and experiences, emphasizing the contributions of trans women and their shared struggles with other women.

#### Group B: Referential Clauses

1. *Personally, most people I encounter especially men expects me to be modest and when I reject this, I am suddenly a horrible woman undeserving of respect.*

2. *I grew up in a patriarchal household wherein my family is led by my father and all of my three siblings are also men. I am a Muslim woman and my mother did not really have that much voice in our family, just like most Muslim women in our religion and I am no exemption of that.*
3. *My whole life I was bullied and belittled for not acting feminine as people think women should, and I was not able to pursue a career I wanted because of the standards that society have imposed upon women, specifically upon the traditional or biological women.*

Clauses found to be dominant in Group B were referential. These excerpts from the group display how their narratives were more centered on narrating their experiences and less on evaluating. However, although referential clauses aim to orient the audience about the events, characters, and setting (Poignant, 2020), the referential clauses of the narratives in Group B were consistent in the frequent use of the first-person pronoun and self-referring words. This suggests that although their narratives centered more on narrating events, the narration still revolved around their perspectives. In excerpt 1, the adverb "personally" referred to the narrator, and there is an evident recurring use of the personal pronoun "I". Excerpt 2 displays a frequent use of "I" similar to excerpt 3, including "my". Moreover, the narratives in Group B did not present structural linguistic patterns and features other than frequently using first-person pronouns and words, even though referential clauses were predominant, given the function of such clauses. Additionally, with the focus on the narration of events in their narratives, the participants of Group B have collectively made a rationality that misogyny and transphobia are two separate matters. It is observable in their narratives how misogyny is manifested in their experiences. In excerpt 1, the participant talked about how people, especially men, expect her to be modest and the consequences she faces when going against this imposed standard of a woman. Excerpt 2 relays what it is like to be a Muslim woman dominated by patriarchy, and how their identity as a woman equates to being powerless. Excerpt 3 similarly talked about

how it was for her to be a woman in a society that enforced traditional women's standards and roles. Relatively, Sally Haslanger, an American Philosopher, developed a feminist account of womanhood. She posited that as societies have unjustly imposed that social positions are governed by the virtue of reproductive markers, and the oppressive placement of women, as a class, in subordinate positions, a female is thus placed in an oppressive position by default due to possessing such reproductive markers (Zhao, 2021). This rationalizes the argument of Group B that the oppression, particularly the misogyny they are experiencing, is heavily embedded in their biological status. Overall, the significant linguistic features in Group B are found to be leaning on the semantic meanings rather than their structural construct. However, the referential clauses, which are part of the structural construct, served as an indicator of the implicit meanings of their narratives. Therefore, identifying the prevalence of referential clauses was essential in further understanding the semantic meanings.

The exploration of narratives from Group B reveals a compelling insight into the lived experiences of individuals who navigate the misogyny against women. Throughout their lives, women and girls face violence, sexist attitudes, open discrimination, and prejudice; the severity of these experiences varies by place, identity, and culture (Fontanella et. al., 2024). The participants articulate their experiences of societal expectations and the pressures they face as women, particularly in contexts where traditional gender roles are enforced. It examines how legal systems and societal norms perpetuate misogyny by defining womanhood in ways that reinforce gender hierarchies (Schoenbaum, 2024). The narratives also reveal a critical distinction between misogyny and transphobia, suggesting that while both are forms of oppression, they manifest differently in the lives of the participants. The dominance of referential clauses, coupled with the frequent use of first-person pronouns, underscores the importance of personal storytelling in shaping our understanding of broader social issues. As we engage with these narratives, we are reminded of the power of individual experiences to challenge societal norms and foster empathy

among diverse groups of women. Ultimately, the stories of Group B serve as a testament to the resilience of individuals navigating the intersections of identity and misogyny.

#### Group B: Evaluative Clauses

1. *Reflecting on this experience and the other struggles I faced as a woman, it makes me realize how it is deeply rooted on the history of women that are biological, which trans women cannot relate to.*
2. *With all these real-life cases, it's very obvious how women are hated for not acting like their definition of a woman, and biological women are the ones that suffer from this.*
3. *From that, we can tell that when biological women are attacked, it is because of misogyny, and when trans women are attacked, it is because of homophobia/transphobia.*

Regardless of the high disparity between referential and evaluative clauses, the referential clauses in Group B's narratives, which were found to be less used than the others, are still essential to be explored and examined in further understanding their stances. The researchers have observed that the evaluative language in the narratives of Group B provides emphasis on the uniqueness of the experiences as biological women, highlighting the differences between biological and trans women, as well as the differences in the issues and struggles that both women face. Excerpt 1 emphasizes the historical oppression that primarily affects biological women, which illustrates where the oppression they experience is rooted. Excerpt 2 similarly narrates another struggle in the societal standards towards women that biological women experience in most cases. Excerpt 3, on the other hand, highlights the difference between misogyny and transphobia and how it is manifested in their experiences. However, it is worth mentioning that regardless of the differences in their experiences, all of these are equally valid. In the evaluative clauses of the narratives, Group B collectively establishes a point that although trans women fall under the umbrella of "women", the struggles they experience are rooted in transphobia, in which the cases of trans women being attacked are not because of

them being women but rather for being transgender.

This provides a relevant insight into how trans women and biological women are differently oppressed. When this is reflected in the context of the Philippines, it is manifested in our country's legislative body, in how we lack implementing transgender rights and protection, especially in the aspect of legally identifying trans women as women. Women empowerment movements, including the celebration of Women's Month, have made many changes in upholding the rights and improving women's lives. For instance, we have Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children (VAWC), yet the law does not cover trans women, excluding them from the protection. Even with the fact that they are socially recognized as women, they are not seen as transgender. While division between women may seem negative, this study further reveals the importance of recognizing and highlighting the differences between biological and trans women. This sheds light on a related issue that not only affects trans women but also the overall community of transgender people. Further, this study pushes forward the need for equal protection of the LGBTQIA+ community members from any form of biases, social injustices, and hate speech (Aperoch et al., 2023).

Overall, the researchers found that the narratives of Group A consist of more evaluative clauses than referential, while the narratives of Group B consist more of referential clauses than evaluative. This distinguishes the narratives of the respective groups, illustrating how the differences in their stances are manifested in their narratives. Furthermore, the researchers have constructed relevant implications of these drawn differences. Based on the results of the narrative analysis, the stances of Group A stemmed from how their personal experiences made them feel, centering on how they took the experiences and presented their reflection. Meanwhile, the narrative analysis result in Group B suggests that their stances were more rooted in their actual experiences, presenting factual events. Additionally, basing on the deliberative analysis consolidated with related literatures, the researchers have also concluded that examining the narratives of women with

the utilization of Labov's concept of referential and evaluative clauses did not only identify how the differences of their beliefs manifested in their narratives in the lens of structural approach, but the study also revealed the importance of identifying the frequency of the clauses in further understanding the motives and meanings of their stances. Lastly, it is essential to highlight that although the narratives of two groups dominate in contradicting categories, it does not imply any power dynamics between them. While referential clauses function as the foundation, evaluative clauses magnify the depth and significance of the narrative. The crucial interplay of both clauses is pivotal in building the collective meaning of a narrative (Nicolopoulou et al., 2021). With that, the researchers posit that although the influence and motive of their stances are evidently distinct, none of them is less or more important or valid than the other.

## Conclusion

This study has explored the diverse narratives and beliefs of biological and trans women, shedding light on the complex discourses that shape their experiences and identities. The researchers have comprehensively examined the linguistic nuances present in the narratives of two distinct groups of women within the context of the ongoing discourse surrounding Women's History Month celebration, by utilizing Labov and Waletzky's framework of Referential and Evaluative Clauses to dissect the participants' narratives, through the collection of discourse materials from ten participants, each sharing from personal experiences and different beliefs to show how they articulate their narratives.

The analysis of narrative structures within this study revealed significant differences in using Evaluative and Referential clauses between the two groups of women. Group A consists of transgender women, with a close ratio of 59% Evaluative to 41% Referential clauses. This high percentage of evaluative clauses indicates that trans women are strongly inclined to express personal reflections, emotions, and subjective interpretations of their experiences and beliefs. This emotional engagement may stem from their experiences of marginalization

and the desire for recognition and validation within feminist spaces. Group B, on the other hand, comprised biological women and exhibited a higher percentage of Referential clauses, which counted for 65% of their narratives, followed by 35% of Evaluative clauses. This reveals that biological women lean more on the factual events without delving deeply into their personal reflections or emotional responses, showing that biological women prioritize articulating their beliefs based on perceived definitions of womanhood and the implications of inclusion for their identities. This may reflect their desire to ground their narratives on the traditional understanding of womanhood.

Overall, the results of this study show a significant distinction between the two groups. The narratives of Group A, which comprises trans women advocating for inclusion, contain more evaluative clauses than Referential clauses. In contrast, the narratives of Group B, consisting of biological women who also stood up for their rights, predominantly feature referential clauses over evaluative ones. The gap and disparity in the analysis results illustrate how their beliefs are manifested through their respective narratives. This analysis underscores the complexities of the discourse surrounding inclusion and identity, emphasizing the need for a deeper understanding of how these differences shape the broader perspective of feminist conversation.

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