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PARENTS' EDUCATIONAL LEVEL AND ADOLESCENT VALUE ORIENTATIONS*

Abstract. This study examines the relationship between the parents' educational level and adolescent value orientations, and analyses value differences among adolescents based on the school type. The study involved 437 vocational and grammar school students (194 male or 44.4%; 243 female or 55.6%). The study included mid and late adolescents, with the participants' age ranging from 14 to 19 ($M=2.32$, $SD= 1.16$). A questionnaire consisting of socio-demographic and self-direction questions, and conformity value orientation questions was implemented in the study. The theoretical analysis outlined the research findings related to adolescent values and parental class (education and occupation). The results demonstrated a significant relationship between the mother's educational level and grammar students' self-direction. A significant relationship was not found between the parents' educational level and vocational/grammar students' degree of conformity. Significant value differences based on the school type were established as vocational students ascribed higher importance to conformity values as opposed to grammar school students. These results suggested that future research could examine the reasons behind vocational students' inclination towards conformity. Moreover, future studies should turn to parents-child rearing values and teacher's values, in order to provide a deeper understanding of the value transmission during schooling.

Key words: parental education, adolescents, values, school.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence, a transitional period that begins at the offset of childhood, is marked by major behavioural, cognitive and emotional changes. This dynamic period is not conclusive until one has acquired a new sort of identification, characterized by new experiences and devoid of childish mischief (Erikson, 1968). An adolescent's behaviour and an overall belief system throughout this period is motivated by values, which are "implicit

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organizers of judgments about the capacity of things, people, actions, and activities” (Rohan & Zanna, 2001:467). By investigating adolescent values one is able to provide an insight into the underlying attitudes and beliefs which shape an adolescent’s identity and behaviour. The adolescent’s value system is also a result of various socializing agents, specifically parents, peers, and teachers, religious and social institutions, which unconsciously or consciously impart values onto the adolescents (Daniel et al., 2012; Knafo & Schwartz, 2004). Parents as primary socializing agents are first in line to transmit values onto the adolescents through verbal or non-verbal ways of communication. Each parent shares a universal set of values (Bilsky & Schwartz, 1994; Schwartz, 1994) which is a product of his or her family upbringing, school type, level of education, job satisfaction, etc. This study aims to examine the possible relationship or connection among the high school students’ conformity and self-direction values and the parents’ educational level. Moreover, the study also investigates whether adolescent conformity and self-direction value differences exist based on the school type.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The concept of values has been intensely investigated by many prominent researchers (Kluckhohn, 1951; Rohan & Zanna, 2001; Rokeach, 1968; Schwartz, 1994; Schwartz, 2006). As defined by Kluckhohn (1951:396), values persistently existed throughout time, they were a “preference which is felt and/or considered to be justified”. Rokeach (1968:16) defined a value as “an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally and socially preferable to alternative modes of conduct or end-states of existence”. While Rokeach

(1968) categorized values into terminal and instrumental ones, Schwartz (1992) identified ten specific value types. In an attempt to avoid further misconceptions about theory and research related to values, Rohan (2000) insisted, while taking into account Schwartz's theory on universal values, that individuals only varied based on importance ascribed to certain value types. Bilsky and Schwartz (1994:165) explained that a "system of value priorities" was created by ascribing importance to certain value types. Moreover, Schwartz (1994) added that values were attained through the process of socialization, as well as through experiences unique to each individual. Thus, the term *value orientation* would be used further on as it comprised value priorities and contextual aspects (Kluckhohn, 1951). Rokeach (1968:18) insisted that "culture, social system, caste and class, sex, occupation, education, religious up-bringing and political orientation" contributed to the formation of the value systems. When investigating adolescent values, societal factors need to be taken into account since an adolescent's *self* is not only a singular construct, but also a social construct, formed by interactions with parents, teachers, and peers (Harter, 2012). Furthermore, an adolescent's identity is a complex interchangeable construct that involves "the traits and characteristics, social relations, roles, and social group memberships that define who one is" (Oyserman, Elmore & Smith, 2012:69).

However, this transitional, postmodern period has seen a shift in adolescents' views on family, social institutions and surrounding. This change has led to adolescents adopting and claiming fragmented values and lifestyles which are no longer dictated by societal norms (Karvonen, Young, West & Rahkonen, 2012). Adolescents can strive for self-direction values, for instance independence, mastery and freedom of action, but if socialising

agents, for example parents, do not nurture such values, the adolescent might not acquire self-direction values, but the opposite, conformity values. The end goal of the conformity value orientation would lead to a restraint in terms of actions, preferences or even likings that could jeopardize or in any way harm societal norms or expectations (Schwartz, 1992).

The parent's role, specifically the parental educational attainment, is taken into consideration, since the socio-cultural context, as well as agents inhabiting such contexts, are important in producing, transforming or even constraining certain value preferences in adolescence (see Liem, Martin, Porter & Colmar, 2012; Tuma & Livson, 1960). Various studies have shown value similarity between adolescents and parents (Jodl, Michael, Malanchuk, Eccles & Sameroff, 2001; Roest, Dubas, Gerris & Engels, 2009; Pinquart & Silbereisen, 2004; Laghi, Pallini & De Sclavis, 2012; Barni, Ranieri, Scabini & Rosnati, 2011). In their research on the influence of social stratification of parental values, Kohn, Slomczynski and Schoenbach (1986) found evidence of a strong relationship, even though a relation between the parent's social position and the child's value orientation was not previously empirically investigated in detail. Thus, study efforts were placed on the relationship between a family's social position and a child's value orientation. By exercising self-direction through their work and occupation, parental values influenced their children's values. The family was viewed as a part of a larger social system, meaning that they were seen as an integral part of industrial societies. The same study was conducted in Italy and the United States by Pearlin and Kohn (1966), who showed that middle-class parents valued self-direction in children more as opposed to working-class parents who valued conformity. While analysing Kohn's work on class and conformity, Wright

and Wright (1976) indicated that the parents' educational level could be viewed as a stronger determinant of values as opposed to their occupation. However, in clarification, Kohn and Schooler (1969) insisted that the social class encompassed various complex social variables, and defined education and occupation as important determinants of values throughout their research on the relationship between the parents' social class (level of education and occupation) and adolescents' self-direction versus conformity. Moreover, occupation provided a space where self-direction values could be exercised or even restricted, while education broadened the participants' perspective and acted as a prerequisite for self-directed values. Luster, Rhoades and Haas (1989) went on to confirm Kohn's theory when investigating the relationship among the mother's social class (occupation and education level), values (degree of conformity and self-direction), behaviour, and parental practice. Specifically, mothers who valued self-direction were more supportive, nurturing, prone to reading, talking and emphasized the child's need for exploration. On the other hand, mothers who valued conformity exercised restraint and control in their childrearing practices.

Thus parents, as primary socialising agents, can produce and transmit their own values onto the adolescent, but some research has yet to find concrete evidence of such a strong relationship (McBroom, Reed, Burns, Hargraves & Trankel, 1985; Whitebeck & Gecas, 1988). Edgar-Smith and Wozniak (2010: 189) stated that strong "value agreement" within families was not expected during the period of adolescence, since adolescents were in constant interaction with other socialising agents aside from the family. A family was not an isolated unit devoid of societal influences. Value transmission occurred in the family, school, and community realm. Boehnke,

Hadjar and Baier (2007:778) emphasized the issue of the context, specifically “societal context”, when analysing value transmission. The societal context encompassed peers, schools, media, religious institutions, etc. and all of them might have an effect on the value priority formation. The above mentioned authors pointed to a lack of agreement when it came to defining and measuring the overall societal context influence on the individual.

Desjardins (2015: 135) examined the role of education on the value formation by taking into account the societal context. Specifically, in order to examine the role of education, it was necessary to consider, as the author said, “the socio-cultural and socio-political contexts in which education is delivered”. Halstead (1996) stressed that schools presented a space where value priorities of teachers, parents, children themselves, peers, media, communities, etc. clashed, and that in the long run they affected and influenced the value priorities of children and adolescents. While examining the correlation between families and children’s success and/or failure at school, Stigler (1991:199) introduced the “match theory”. The author explained that children who excelled at school did so since the family’s values, beliefs, and attitudes matched the ones that existed at schools. Therefore, if a child did not adapt or did not excel, it was because the home surrounding was not oriented towards academic success. The author then broadened the theory by explaining that the family and school overlapped in their functions and goals, meaning that one did not exclude the other.

METHOD

Research aims

The research aims of this study are twofold: (1) to examine the relationship between the parents’ educational level and adolescent value

orientations, and (2) to compare the value orientations of grammar and vocational school students in Osijek, Croatia.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses have been established based on the research aims:

H1: A relationship between the parents' educational level and students' degree of self-direction is expected.

H2: A relationship between the parents' educational level and students' degree of conformity is expected.

H3: Value orientation differences based on high school type are expected.

Participants

The random sample consisted of 437 high school students, precisely 245 students from grammar schools, and 192 students from vocational high schools in Osijek, Croatia. The schools were randomly selected, and after contacting them, 2 grammar schools and 2 vocational schools gave the research approval. A total of 437 students participated in the study, and submitted the (anonymous) questionnaire after completion. The research study included 194 male (44.4%) and 243 female students (55.6%), ($M=1.56$, $SD=0.49$). Descriptive data concerning the number of participants, school type, and gender are presented in Table 1. Mid (grades 9-11) and late (grade 12) adolescents were included in the study. The participants' age ranged from age 14 to 19 ($M= 2.32$, $SD=1.16$).

Table 1 *Descriptive data of the sample*

School	Gender	N	M	SD
Grammar school	Male	110	1.56	0.49
	Female	135	1.56	0.49
Vocational school	Male	84	1.56	0.49
	Female	108	1.56	0.49

Instrument

The questionnaire was categorized into two parts. Specifically, the first part consisted of socio-demographic questions, whereas the second part focused on value orientations. The socio-demographic part of the questionnaire consisted of the following questions: *School type*: a) Art school, b) Grammar school, c) 4-year Vocational school, d) 3-year Vocational school; *Gender*: a) Male, b) Female; *Age*: a)15, b) 16, c)17, d) Other; *Family structure*: a) Living with his/her mother and father, b) Living with his/her father, c) Living with his/her mother, d) Other; *Parental education*: a) None, b) Primary education, c) Secondary education, d) Bachelor's degree or equivalent, e) Master's/Professional/ Doctorate degree and *Previous year academic success*: a) Insufficient, b) Sufficient, c) Good, d) Very good, e) Excellent.

The second part of the questionnaire examined the self-direction and conformity value orientation. Schwartz (1992) value type survey on universal values was modified in order to examine the self-direction and conformity values, and to reflect the societal context in Croatia. The self-direction value type focused on a varied life, action, independence, freedom of thought, achieving internalised standards, mastery, authenticity, forging meaningful relationships, creativity, and self-respect. Ten value statements were included

to measure the self-direction value orientation: *Doing what you love is the most important thing; It is important to be independent and not depend on anybody; It is important to be authentic in your relationships; Friendships are important; Life should be filled with personal adventures and excitement; I read books in my free time; I volunteer and do charity work; Volunteering brings me inner peace and happiness; Free time is best spent with friends; I attend music concerts, the theatre and movie cinemas.* The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the self-direction value orientation was $\alpha = .69$

The conformity value orientation was modified and broadened (see Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz, 1994). The main aim of the conformity value orientation was obedience, politeness, self-discipline, self-restraint, maintaining social order, stability in terms of relationships and *self*, honouring social norms, parents and elders. The conformity value orientation was measured by using the following eight items: *One should strive for a steady and secure job position in the near future; A good friend tolerates disrespect from others in order to avoid conflict; I do the housework and participate in family affairs; I spend my free time with my family; I attend church, mass, sermon and lectures; A family should live in accordance and peace; One should live in premarital purity; One should regularly attend church.* The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the conformity value orientation was $\alpha = .72$

The participants were asked to read the given statements and indicate the extent of agreement or disagreement on a five-point Likert scale. The scale consisted of five response categories ranging from (1) disagree completely, (2) mostly disagree, (3) neither, (4) mostly agree, (5) completely agree.

Procedure

The research study was conducted according to *The Ethical Standards for Research with Children* (2003). The questionnaires were approved by the school boards. The parents and students in both grammar and vocational schools were informed about the study and they gave their written consent. The study was conducted via anonymous questionnaire during regular classes in May, 2017. The participants were provided with a brief introduction and afterwards the participants completed the questionnaires. The questionnaires were anonymous and the participants answered questions voluntarily. After completion, the students placed the questionnaires on the classroom desk.

RESULTS

The results did not show a statistically significant relationship between the father's educational level and grammar students' degree of self-direction. However, as evident from Table 2, there was a statistically significant relationship between the mother's level of education and grammar-school students' self-direction ($p < .05$). The results did not show a significant relationship between the parents' (neither mothers nor fathers) educational level and vocational students' degree of self-direction.

Table 2 *Correlation between the parents' educational level and students' degree of self-direction*

Variable	Students	N	M	SD	Self-direction
Father's educational level	Grammar	245	3.74	1.08	-.02
	Vocational	192	3.13	.88	.03
Mother's educational level	Grammar	245	3.32	1.69	1.3*
	Vocational	195	2.96	1.18	.18

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

There was no statistically significant relationship between the parents' educational level and the grammar students' degree of conformity. Furthermore, a significant relationship between the parents' educational background and vocational students' degree of conformity also was not found. In general, an association between the parents' educational background and students' degree of conformity was not found.

Table 3 *Correlation between the parents' educational level and students' degree of conformity*

Variable	Students	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Conformity</i>
Father's educational level	Grammar	245	3.74	1.08	.00
	Vocational	192	3.13	.88	.01
Mother's educational level	Grammar	245	3.32	1.69	-.00
	Vocational	195	2.96	1.18	.06

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

The t-test data analysis did not show a statistically significant difference between grammar and vocational school students in terms of self-direction (see Table 4). However, the results showed that grammar and vocational students varied in terms of conformity values ($p < .001$). Furthermore, vocational students nurtured conformity values more as opposed to grammar school students.

Table 4 *T-test results on grammar and vocational students' value orientations*

Variable	School	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>
Self-direction value orientation	Grammar	245	38.11	4.21	.47
	Vocational	192	37.92	4.20	
Conformity value orientation	Grammar	245	26.52	5.59	-3.94***
	Vocational	195	28.52	4.99	

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

DISCUSSION

The current study aimed to explore the relationship between the parents' educational level and adolescent value orientations. It also sought to examine and compare the value orientations of grammar and vocational school students. The results did not show a significant relationship between the parents' educational background and grammar/vocational students' degree of conformity. Moreover, a significant relationship between the father's educational level and vocational students' degree of self-direction also was not noted. However, a significant association between the mother's educational background and grammar students' degree of self-direction was found. The results also demonstrated a value orientation difference based on the school type.

A significant relationship was not established between the father's educational level and grammar students' degree of self-direction. Such findings were in line with Snyder (1969:268) longitudinal study on students' value orientations and future achievement. While a significant correlation was not established between "white collar homes" and the achievement, a significant relationship was noted between "children of blue collar workers" and the achievement. However, the authors explained that such results were not equivalent to the results obtained five years later where high school values showed no significant effect for the achievement. Such lack of value congruence could be the result of identity maturation and social changes which resulted in a change of value priorities (Roest et al., 2009). Aside from the possible value differentiation in later adolescence, parents still transmit their values onto their children throughout their childhood and early or mid-adolescence. As Bourdieu (1986:253) notes, the transmission of economic

capital into social capital is a smart investment that is passed on from one generation to another. Moreover, the economic capital is transformed into cultural capital by means of funds, prolonged studies and “usable time (particularly in the form of the mother’s free time)”. This could account for the statistically significant relationship between the mother’s educational level and grammar students’ degree of self-direction. This result is consistent with Tulviste and Mizera (2010) study on the relationship between the mother’s socioeconomic status (education and occupation) and child-rearing values.

Although the results revealed that all the mothers prioritized self-direction and self-expression values, a contrast was still noted in terms of conformity. While mothers with mid-socioeconomic status highly prioritized self-direction, they also strongly highlighted the importance of tradition and conformity. Tudge, Hogan, Snezhkova, Kulakova and Etz (2000) comparative study on the parents’ values for self-direction and conformity in US, Russia, South Korea and Estonia confirmed Pearlin and Kohn (1966) previous results on parental class and child-rearing values. Middle class parents’ valued self-direction more as opposed to working class parents. Furthermore, the results also showed that a higher (parental) educational level led to an increase in self-direction. Middle class parents emphasized values such as freedom and curiosity, and did not rely on a firm discipline. Middle-class mothers were less prone to control or restriction, whereas working-class mothers were more focused on control and conformity. Moreover, based on the mean scores in Table 2, parents of grammar school students were more prone to ascribing importance to self-direction as opposed to parents of vocational students.

A statistically significant association between the parents' educational level and grammar and vocational students' degree of conformity was not found. The study was not able to replicate the results found in the previous research on parents' educational level and adolescents' degree of conformity (Pearlin & Kohn, 1966; Pineo & Looker, 1983; Tudge et al., 2000). Pineo and Looker (1983) study on the relationship between the parents' social class and values demonstrated a significant correlation between the parents' occupation and education, and a degree of importance ascribed to self-direction. However, such a relationship was not visible in terms of conformity. Their results were in contrast with the results obtained by Kohn and Schooler (1969) in American families. The authors explained that a cultural shift could be responsible for lower mean scores in terms of conformity. Moreover, their findings were similar to the results found in Wright and Wright (1967) study on social class relations and values. Wright and Wright (1976) indicated that the apparent weakening of conformist values could be a result of societal changes. Tudge et al. (2000) explained that socio-structural changes led to a change in parental values. The authors argued that economic changes in Russia have resulted in a higher degree of value similarity between Russian and American parents. Russian parents witnessed a shift from collective to individualistic values, and this led to a personal shift in value priorities. This emphasis on autonomy, competition and individuality as opposed to obedience and control forced parents to revise their values. Park and Lau (2016:44) further explained that in individualistic societies the self was viewed as a self-regulating entity, whereas in collectivistic societies the self was observed in relation to the social surrounding and people inhabiting it. The authors noted that in "the

current era of social change and globalization” families needed to adapt to new values.

Tulviste and Mizera (2010) stated that this co-existence of both self-direction and conformity values could be typical of transitional societies, but it could also serve as a reflection of the past of a country. Furthermore, the authors also highlighted the importance of other socialization agents which implicitly or explicitly transmitted values onto the adolescents. Barni et al. (2011:106) argued that value acquisition was previously viewed from a “deterministic perspective”, where “the parent (the ‘source’) provided the child (the ‘recipient’) samples of completed knowledge, and the recipient of such messages was expected to passively accept these as given“. Barni et al. (2011:106) explained that value transmission was interactive and collaborative and a “two-step process”. All of these aforementioned findings could provide an explanation for the lack of relationship between the parents’ educational level and vocational and grammar students’ degree of conformity.

A significant value orientation difference was found based on the school type. Mean scores revealed that vocational students ascribed a higher importance to conformity values as opposed to grammar students (see table 4). The results are in line with Houtte and Stevens (2010) who have discovered that vocational students exhibit a higher feeling of futility as opposed to students’ from general schools. This “higher sense of futility” is related to the students’ feeling of control over the success or failure to function within the school system (Houtte & Stevens, 2010:24). The authors note that vocational students are often put into these devalued positions where they experience negative feelings towards the school system.

Moreover, the school's futility culture is shown to affect the students' studies and school involvement. The authors explain that societal factors, for instance lower employment rates and socially overrated white-collar jobs, have led to vocational education being seen in a negative light, or being seen as lesser than general education.

Mizera and Tulviste (2012) longitudinal study on value priorities during high school showed that both student groups did not differ in terms of self-direction values. Such findings were consistent with the results of this study (based on mean scores from Table 4). The authors also noted a positive relation between self-direction and conformity values which could be a product of the school environment. The presence of such a correlation could be explained by the fact that students were taught to excel academically in an orderly and respectful manner. While analysing the positive and negative aspects of vocational education, Castro (1987) noticed the disparity between the employment market and the training program in vocational schools. Specifically, the training programs failed to provide the students with the necessary skills which were demanded by the employment market. This incongruence is also seen in the relationship between general schools and the employer's demands, but it still not as visible since most grammar students enrol into college later. Cheng (2014) explains that vocational students are educated and encouraged to be adaptive to the needs of the company. In his attempt to analyse the Japanese vocational school system, Leclerq (1989) add that vocational students are provided with a part-time or a full-time employment during their studies. However, during such periods the students are not provided with any general subjects which could enhance their skills sets.

Mittendorf and Beijaard (2010) explained that the static school program and the teachers implementing such syllabuses emphasized *the blue collar* education, as opposed to grammar school programs which prepared students for the *white collar* university education. Their findings stemmed from the analysis of conversations between vocational teachers and their students during classes. Such emphasis on adaptation, time-efficiency, and discipline in vocational schools could serve as a probable explanation for higher mean scores in terms of conformity. Therefore, the results suggested that future pedagogical research should focus on the effect the school ethos had on conformity values, since vocational students were more prone to ascribing importance to such values as opposed to grammar school students.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the possible relationship between the parents' educational background and students' self-direction and conformity values. A significant relation between the parents' educational level and vocational students' self-direction values was not noted. The results identified a significant relationship between the mother's level of education and grammar students self-direction values. Such a significant relationship was not found in terms of the father's educational level. However, mean scores indicated that parents of grammar school students valued self-direction more, as opposed to parents of vocational school students. A significant relationship between the parents' educational level and students' conformity values was not established. The reasons for such findings could stem from the social surrounding, contributing socialization factors, and personal economic and social capital. Future pedagogical research should investigate the parents' child-rearing

values in order to achieve a more integrated view of value acquisition and transmission in adolescence. Value orientation differences based on the school type were confirmed, as vocational school students ascribed a higher importance to conformity values. This finding bears deeper pedagogical implications, because this rise in vocational students' conformity could stem from the static school curriculum that encourages obedience and compliance, unmotivated teachers, or the overall school climate. Future research could therefore investigate the teacher effect on adolescents' value orientations in order to provide an in-depth view of the value transmission in vocational schools. Such research could shed light on the teachers' implicit or explicit values, and also possibly provide further explanation as to why vocational students are more prone to conforming as opposed to grammar students.

STEPEN OBRAZOVANJA RODITELJA I VREDNOSNE ORIJENTACIJE ADOLESCENATA

APSTRAKT

U radu se istražuje povezanost nivoa obrazovanja roditelja i vrednosnih orijentacija adolescenata, te analiziraju vrednosne razlike između adolescenata prema vrsti škole. U istraživanju je sudelovalo 437 učenika iz stručnih škola i gimnazija (194 dečaka, 44.4%; 243 devojčice, 55.6%). U istraživanje su uključeni srednji i kasni adolescenti čija dob varira od 14. do 19. godine ($M=2.32$, $SD=1.16$). Anketom su se ispitala socio-demografske karakteristike te vrednosti konformizma i nezavisnosti. Teorijska analiza pruža pregled ranijih radova na temu adolescentskih vrednosti i roditeljske klase (obrazovanje i zanimanje). Rezultati su ukazali na statistički značajnu povezanost između majčinog stepena obrazovanja i nezavisnosti kod gimnazijalaca. Statistička značajna povezanost između očevoog stepena obrazovanja i konformizma kod gimnazijalaca i učenika stručnih škola nije zapažena. Pronađene su statistički značajne razlike u vrednostima učenika prema vrsti škole gde učenici stručnih škola iskazuju snažniju sklonost ka konformističkim vrednostima. Rezultati sugerišu da bi buduća istraživanja mogla da ispituju razloge zbog kojih su učenici stručnih škola skloniji konformizmu. Nadalje, buduća istraživanja treba da se okrenu ka roditeljskim vaspitnim vrednostima i vrednostima nastavnika jer bi ono pružilo dublje razumevanje o transmisiji vrednosti tokom obrazovanja.

KLJUČNE REČI: roditeljsko obrazovanje, adolescenti, vrednosti, škola.

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