

GENDER EQUALITY IN THE DIVISION OF HOUSEHOLD LABOR AND CHILDCARE WITH MARITAL SATISFACTION IN DUAL-CAREER COUPLES: SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The division of household labor and childcare with males as breadwinners and women as housewives needs to be re-evaluated in a rising number of working women which creates changes in family dynamics especially in their daily life routines. Equality becomes the key in the division of household labor and childcare for dual-career couples and to continuously work on their marital satisfaction. This research uses a systematic review following the PRISMA (The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guide published in 2020 to comprehensively present all empirical evidence and report the frameworks for gender equality in the division of household labor and childcare and marital satisfaction in particular for dual-career couples. Inclusion criteria are heterosexual and dual-career couples with child(ren) and limited to publication from 2000 to 2024. Exclusion criteria are relation with religion and inaccessible articles. Of 757 identified articles, seven studies met our eligibility criteria and were included in the analysis. All the studies were quantitative in nature. Three are not dyadic, four are dyadic, and only one is longitudinal in design. We identified 2 variables that can potentially act as determinants. They are collaborative communication and human capital.

Keywords: gender equality, household labor, childcare, marital satisfaction, dual career

1. PREFACE

In 2013 there were 2,21 million marriages in Indonesia but in 2023 the report said it is the lowest rate with only 1,58 million. Multiple factors play a part; one is individual readiness to perform family functions and roles for their future spouse (Arlinta, 2024). Wives in dual-career couples face negative impacts in the form of bigger load shares of household labor and childcare tasks (Jakiyah & Amelda, 2023). These double burdens upheld by wives are not an easy endeavor and can lessen marital satisfaction (Ginanjar et al., 2020). European Institute for Gender Equality in their Gender Equality Index 2021: Health reported employed women spend about 2.3 hours daily on housework and for employed men, this figure is 1.6 hours (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021). A survey in Indonesia in 2023 reported 97,6% of respondents agree that household labor and childcare can be divided between husbands and wives in any circumstance. However, 80% believe that women are more gentle and persevering and hence are more suitable to take care and nurture the family (International Labour Organization, 2024). Gender inequality in the division of household labor and childcare across generations Baby Boomers (1946–1965), Generation X (1966–1980), and, Millennials (1981–2000) is persistent hence a new generation and the effect of the different periods is not enough to reduce the gap (Churchill et al., 2023). It demands a re-evaluation of the division of household labor and childcare because the traditional gender-based division is no longer viable to support this family dynamic.

Studies on household labor and childcare carry different perspectives and use different terminologies to list the tasks included in domestic work. Some used traditional gender-based division, others used the amount of time required to perform the task or based on the frequency or the significance level to do it immediately or flexible to the individual's availability (Coltrane, 2000). Studies categorized household labor tasks and childcare tasks as cooking, cleaning,

washing dishes, doing laundry, and grocery shopping. Other types of household labor also presented in those studies such as house repair, tending a garden, taking care of plants, car or motorcycle maintenance, and paying bills as irregular domestic work or labeled as dominated by male, male tasks, traditionally masculine, weekly tasks, tasks outside of the house. Paying bills and driving falls into a category labeled as gender-neutral (Coltrane, 2000). All those tasks then added to throwing trash out are in a category labeled as time based on commitment and formal work with the commute time from and to the office into a category labeled time-based on contract (Chesters et al., 2009). Sleeping, eating, and personal hygiene are put into time based on needs and other activities not mentioned in free time. On top of that, there are more tasks which are taking care of family members needing emotional support, household management, and childcare and financial management (Lothaller et al., 2009). The International Labour Organization in Indonesia categorized domestic work into six groups (International Labour Organization, 2024). The first one is taking care and nurturing a child in health and sickness. The second group is taking care of the elderly. The third group is taking care of family members with disabilities. The fourth group is taking care of other family members and the fifth is educating a child at home. The last group consists of cooking, doing laundry, and cleaning the house.

There are a few factors that consistently predict equality in the division of household labor and childcare (Coltrane, 2000). The first factor is gender ideology which is known as the factor with the highest influence on motivating husbands without being asked to do household tasks and childcare tasks (Twiggs et al., 1999). Males perceived their participation in household tasks rather as a choice and as a help from a husband and not an individual responsibility (Coltrane, 2000). The second factor is demands and time allocation to fulfill the responsibilities. The gender-based division of household labor and childcare was a reaction to limited availability and time constraints (Forste & Fox, 2012). The third factor is relative resources. This means the division of household labor and childcare depends on each individual's resources able to be provided to the family such as income and education. The division of household labor and childcare is a result of negotiation between husbands and wives who are using their precious individual resources to gain the best deal for their benefit and pleasure (Greenstein, 2000). Few studies found that when wives have lower income and education level compared to their husbands, they will have more responsibilities in household labor and childcare (Lothaller et al., 2009). Culture, as the fourth factor shows the largest potential to understand household labor and childcare in each society (Coltrane, 2000).

It explains the stagnant male participation contribution in household labor and childcare that is influenced by the lack of support culturally and society's perception that household labor and childcare is a feminine activity (Coltrane, 2000). The division of household labor and childcare across various cultures depends on the context of the culture and gender (Toth, 2008). Technology is part of the culture of a society. Technology in house appliances is a convenient solution to reduce household labor and childcare load (Hyun-Ah Lee; Soonbum, 2022). The adoption of technology in household appliances and finance technology increased children's health status because it allows more time for parents to do their roles (Shi et al., 2022). Another factor related to marital satisfaction and division of household labor and childcare is the perception of fairness and not the real division of labor (Perry-Jenkins & Gerstel, 2020). Fairness perception in the division of household labor significantly predicts marital satisfaction (Solihat Eka Riani & Ratnasari, 2024).

In Indonesia, it is common for married adult children to live with their parents under the same roof. Such a situation and the availability of house-maid or other similar third-party services

smooth the path of inequality in the division of household labor and childcare in dual-career couples staying under the same roof as their parents (Simulja et al., 2014). Then, husbands are not required to contribute to household labor and childcare resulting in gender inequality in the division of household labor and childcare remains unchallenged.

Gender gaps in housework participation are the largest among couples with children, at 62 p.p., demonstrating an enduring imbalance in unpaid care responsibilities within families (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021). The impact of first childbirth is especially prominent for first-time mothers. The first childbirth increases the total hours of household labor and childcare for mothers but not fathers (Chesters et al., 2009). Depression in first-time mother is higher without the support of their spouse (Yantina et al., 2024). As the number of children increased then the share of mothers' workload grew larger hence increasing the gender inequality in the division of household labor and childcare (Bianchi et al., 2012). The egalitarian division of domestic work is the best arrangement for the family's well-being because both couples gain equal benefits (Carlson et al., 2020). Gender equality in the family plays a key role in household labor and childcare division and predicts marital satisfaction.

The big issue with this variable is that operational clarity is not readily available (Twiggs et al., 1999). Many studies create and use their tool to measure the division of household labor and childcare hence it is not consistent (Carlson et al., 2020; Nourani et al., 2019). A proper and relevant measurement to analyze the division of household labor and childcare and to measure the couple's satisfaction with that division related to gender ideology hence becomes a territory that needs to be explored further (Carreiro, 2021).

This systematic review aims to find confirmation to a few inquiries. Does the egalitarian division of household labor and childcare increase the marital satisfaction of egalitarian couples? Does the traditional division of household labor and childcare increase the marital satisfaction of traditional couples? Does the egalitarian division of household labor and childcare increase the marital satisfaction of women but not men? This systematic review also aims to report the framework based on the available empirical findings for the interconnection of gender equality in the division of household labor and childcare with marital satisfaction in dual-career couples.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

We conducted a systematic literature review by searching three databases PsychINFO, PubMed, and ScienceDirect in May 2024, following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) statement (Page et al., 2021). The following search terms were used in every three databases: (a) Gender equality; (b) Household labor; (c) Childcare; (d) Marital satisfaction; (e) Dual-earner (f) Dual-career using word variation feature and Boolean operator "And".

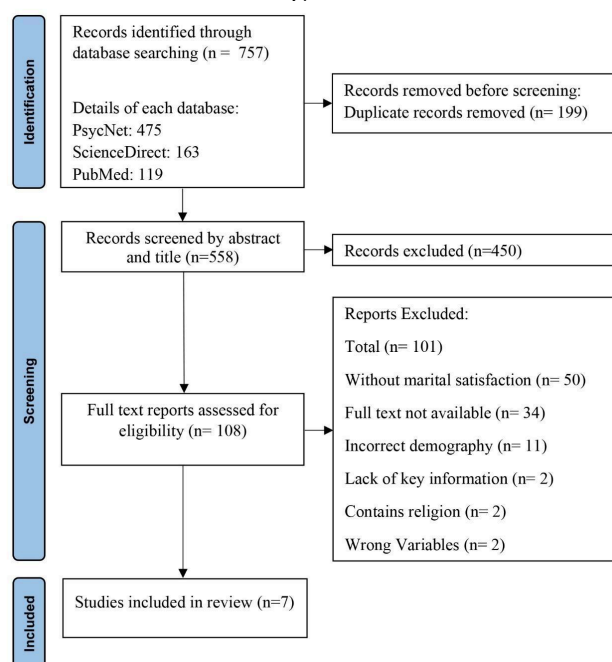
To be eligible for this systematic review, studies were required to meet the following criteria: (a) Studies published in English; (b) Articles published between January 2000 and May 2024 ;(c) Limited to married, heterosexual, and dual-career couples with child(ren) (d) Articles measured division of household labor and childcare and marital satisfaction. There were no inclusion restrictions based on geographical location.

The following exclusion criteria were applied: (a) Studies are related to religion; (b) Studies unable to be accessed. Identified studies were entered into Rayyan systematic review software and continued with the deduplication process. The abstracts and titles screening were conducted

by both authors with the blind feature in the program activated so both authors cannot see each other's review process. Conflicts were resolved by discussion between both authors. Then proceed with full-text screening by both authors on all retrieved studies with conflicts similarly resolved by discussion. Reasons for exclusion at the full-text screening stage are reported in the PRISMA flow chart (Fig. 1). The following data were extracted (a) database source; (b) name of author and year of the publication; (c) title; (d) dyadic data availability; (e) number of participants; (f) average number of working hours per week; (g) participant age (mean); (h) average duration of marriage; (i) number and age of child(ren); (j) education level.

Figure 1

Prisma 2020 Flow Diagram



Study Selection

757 studies were initially identified and entered into the Rayyan application. After the deduplication process, the title and abstract of 558 studies screened by both reviewers with the blind tool in the Rayyan application were activated at all times to prevent bias. Then proceed to a full text review of 108 studies resulting in 7 studies included in the review. 101 studies are excluded with 50 studies that do not include marital satisfaction, 34 with no access to full text, 11 with incorrect demography, 2 lacking key information, 2 with religion variable, and 2 with wrong variables.

Study Characteristics

All studies included were conducted in the United States of America and using quantitative methodology. One study is a longitudinal study. Three studies are using questionnaires. Four studies define domestic work with household labor and childcare (Frisco & Williams, 2003; Helms et al., 2010; Knutson, 2014; Minnotte et al., 2013) and three studies add emotional work (Pedersen, 2016; Shockley, 2010; Stevens et al., 2005). Most studies create questionnaires to measure satisfaction with the division of household labor and childcare. As the permeable boundaries between family and work have long been recognized, one study used family-to-work

conflict to represent the division of household labor and childcare as a form of role conflict that occurs when family experiences make it difficult to meet work responsibilities. Other details of the studies can be found in Table 1.

Overview

Compared with husbands, wives (96.6%) defined the division as unequal and reported they are not satisfied with the division arrangement because they contribute larger household labor and even more for childcare (Frisco & Williams, 2003; Helms et al., 2010; Pedersen, 2016). Whilst husbands (81.5%) reported contributing only half or less than half (Frisco & Williams, 2003).

The dual-career couples are categorized as the traditional group which comprises main-secondary 34% and ambivalent 7%. The second category is mismatched 47% and the third is coprovider 12% (Helms et al., 2010). The coprovider has a more egalitarian division of household labor and childcare and higher marital satisfaction than other groups. Wives from each group coprovider, main-secondary, ambivalent, and mismatched contribute to household labor and childcare at 59%, 81%, 81%, and 73% subsequently. In the mismatched group, the coprovider wives with a main-secondary or ambivalent husband have an equal division of household labor and childcare than those of main-secondary couples or ambivalent couples. It is assumed that coprovider wives feel they have the right to demand their husbands to increase their participation and change their behavior accordingly.

The marital satisfaction decreased for egalitarian husbands and wives when family-to-work conflict for husbands increased (Rosenbluth et al., 1998). When family-to-work conflict for wives increases, marital satisfaction is only reduced significantly for traditional husbands (Minnotte et al., 2013). Marital satisfaction becomes lower only for husbands holding traditional gender ideology when there's a family-to-work conflict from their wives because it means they have to re-negotiate the initial division of household labor and childcare and demand a larger contribution from the husbands. When the family-to-work conflict occurs from the husband's side there is no significant effect on the marital satisfaction of husbands with traditional views. Husbands have higher marital satisfaction compared to their wives when wives do a larger share of household labor and childcare tasks (Frisco & Williams, 2003; Knutson, 2014; Pedersen, 2016; Stevens et al., 2005).

Most studies revealed that the egalitarian division of household labor and childcare increases the marital satisfaction of both husbands and wives with egalitarian gender ideology but one study found that the more equal the division of household labor and childcare then the lower the marital satisfaction with the individuals who contribute larger share has lower marital satisfaction compared to their spouse (Shockley, 2010). This inconsistency can be explained by one study that found couples with an egalitarian division of household labor and childcare who have higher marital satisfaction for themselves and their spouse are communicating collaboratively (Knutson, 2014). Collaborative communication is needed in the division of household labor and childcare tasks to enhance the possibility of achieving and nurturing marital satisfaction for both couples.

A study unveiled the complexity of the false assumption that dual-career couples are predominantly egalitarian and brought clarity through an understanding that human capital upholds the categorization of provide role attitudes. It confirmed findings of previous studies that

human capital which are education level, earnings, working hours per week, and occupational prestige tends to align with provider role attitudes (Helms et al., 2010). Human capital is not instantaneous. Decades of endeavours and abundant resources are invested to crystallize human capital. Gap in human capital can intrude the power dynamic of egalitarian dual-career couples and gets them shifted back to traditional division of household labor and childcare (Daminger, 2020).

These two studies presented two possible determinants which explained and completed the connections between fairness in the division of household labor and childcare and marital satisfaction. From this review, we identify collaborative communication and human capital as possible determinants.

Table 1
Characteristics of Included Studies

Source	Author & Year	Title	Dyadic	Number of Participant	Hours per week (Mean)	Age (Mean)	Average Duration of Marriage	Number and Age of Child(ren)	Education level	Domestic Work Division Satisfaction	Marital Satisfaction
PsycNET	Frisco & Williams (2003)	Perceived Housework Equity, Marital Happiness, and Divorce in Dual-Earner Households	Not Dyadic	779 people	Not available	Male 34.97 years old. Female 34.76 years old.	13.01 years	Minimum 1 child under the age 18 years old	Average duration of education female 13.70 years and male 14.28 years	Women have lower satisfaction than men. The division does not affect men.	Egalitarian division of domestic work is significant and positively correlated with marital satisfaction for both male and female
PsycNET	Stevens et al. (2005)	Domestic Labor and Marital Satisfaction: How Much or How Satisfied?	Not Dyadic	96 male and 96 female	Male 45 hours. Female 31 jam.	Male 34.5 years old. Female 32.3 years old.	8.7 years	Average 2 children under the age 18 years old	Average duration of education female 14.4 years and male 15 years	Men have higher satisfaction with the division than women	Egalitarian division of domestic work is significant and positively correlated with marital satisfaction for both male and female
PsycNET	Knutson (2014)	The effects of collaborative and non-aggressive communication on the relationship between the division of labor(s) and marital quality for dual-earner couples	Dyadic	120 husbands and 120 wives	Husbands 45.36 hours. Wives 36.19 hours.	Husbands 36.16 years old. Wives 34.9 years old.	9 years	Average of 2 children under the age of 5 years old	Average of bachelor degree	Men have higher satisfaction with the division than women	Husbands and wives with egalitarian division of domestic work who are using collaborative communication have higher marital satisfaction.
PsycNET	Minnotte et al. (2013)	Marital Satisfaction among Dual-Earner Couples: Gender Ideologies and Family-to-Work Conflict	Dyadic	156 husbands and 156 wives	Husbands 45.75 hours. Wives 36.20 hours.	Husbands 38.65 years old. Wives 36.19 years old.	13 years	Minimum of 1 child	Average of college degree	Husbands and wives with a more equitable division of domestic work are satisfied with the division.	Husbands and wives have marital satisfaction score of 26 and 27 from a scale of 7 to 35. High numbers means high satisfaction.
PsycNET	Shockley (2010)	You can't always get what you want, but does it matter?: The relationship between pre-child preferences and post-child actual labor division fit and well-being	Dyadic	126 husbands and 126 wives	Husbands 42.69 hours. Wives 38.52 hours.	Husbands 35.88 years old. Wives 34.65 years old.	8 years	1 child under the age of 6 years old	Average of bachelor degree	When husband/wives contribute lower than the spouse expected than the satisfaction is lower.	The higher the gender equality in division of domestic work, the lower the marital satisfaction.
PubMed	Helms et al. (2010)	Provider Role Attitudes, Marital Satisfaction, Role Overload, and Housework: A Dyadic Approach	Dyadic	272 husbands and 272 wives	Husbands 48 jam. Wives 38 jam.	Husbands 41 years old. Wives 38 years old.	16 years	Minimum 2 children under the age of 12 years old	Average of high school degree	Husbands and wives with a more equitable division of domestic work are satisfied with the division.	Coprovider (provider role attitudes) couples reported higher levels of marital satisfaction.
PsycNET	Pedersen (2016)	Quantity and Quality: A More Nuanced Look at the Association Between Family Work and Marital Well-Being	Not Dyadic	66 male and 78 female	Male 46.40 hours. Female 34 hours.	Male 36.51 years old. Female 35.29 years old.	11 years.	Average of 2 children	Majority of bachelor degree	Women have lower satisfaction of domestic work division than men.	Men have higher marital satisfaction than women.

Discussions

This systematic review captured the broad picture of empirical knowledge in gender equality in the division of household division and childcare and its relation with marital satisfaction,

especially for dual-career couples between the years 2000 to 2024. The equal division of household labor and childcare between husbands and wives is quantified by two studies as 35:65 (Risman & Johnson-Summerford, 2016) and 41:59 (Helms et al., 2010). Through these two findings we conclude that the ratio for egalitarian division of household labor and childcare in dual-career couples is 38:62. Twelve years apart between these studies, we can assume the gap has decreased by 3%.

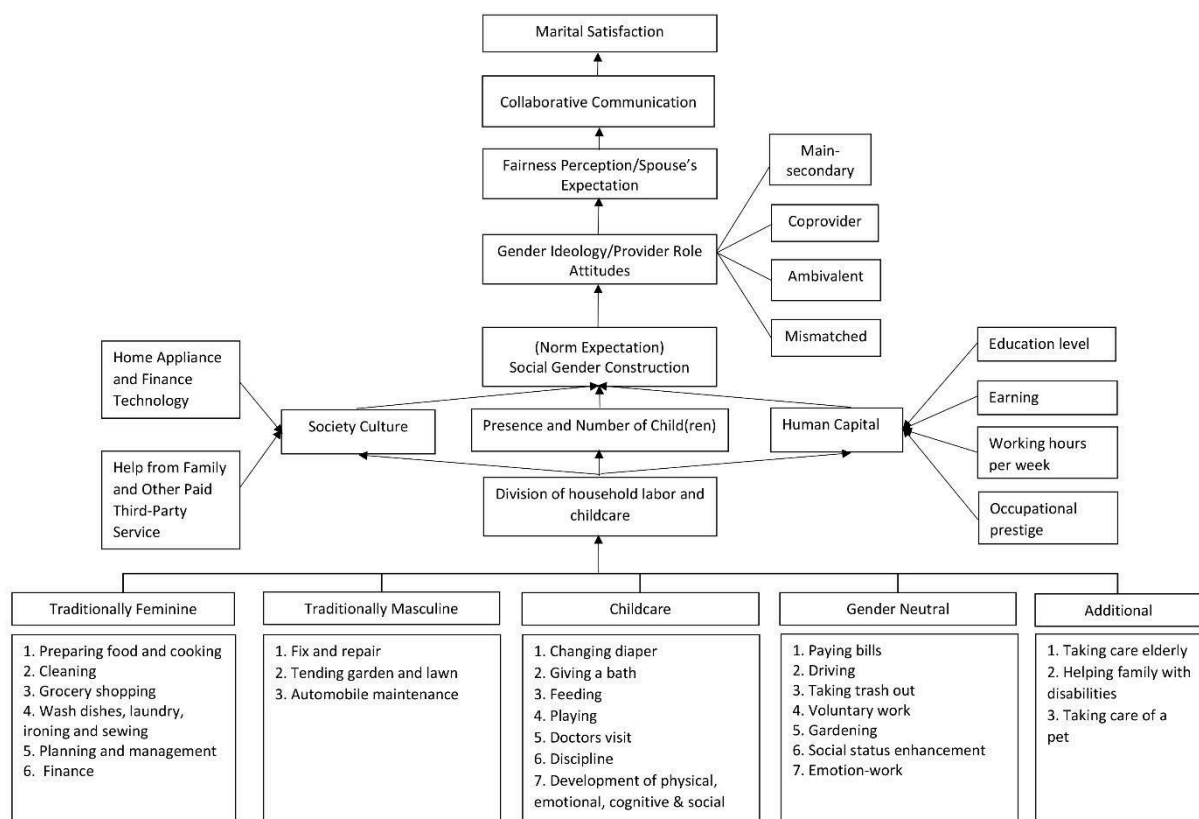
The everyday battle to choose between equality and efficiency is at the expense of marital satisfaction (Minnotte et al., 2013) because it could create disagreements, blame their spouse, and silently grow hatred between couples (Haddock et al., 2003). Making efforts to achieve a more equal division of household labor and childcare requires teamwork, negotiation, and conflict to create a successful marriage (Pedersen, 2016). The daily pressure from said efforts for both couples creates escalating tensions (Rosenbluth et al., 1998). The risk of these negative outcomes can be resolved by having wisdom. Wisdom is defined as the intelligence of an individual in using his or her mind based on experience and knowledge, together with the integration of thoughts, feelings, and behaviour, as well as a willingness to evaluate oneself, in assessing and deciding on a problem, to create harmony between individuals and the environment (Sahrani et al., 2014).

Couples need to see with clarity the benefit of equal division of household labor and childcare to gain high motivation to put efforts in planning, discussion, and reaching healthy arrangements (Stovell, 2021). Currently there are no apt measurement tools available to assess the division of household labor and childcare, the satisfaction for the division, a chore list breakdown based on gender stereotypes, and gender role beliefs (Carreiro, 2021). To the best of our knowledge, the representation of the interconnection of gender equality in the division of household labor and childcare with marital satisfaction presented in this systematic review has not been shown by other studies. Four out of seven studies included are dyadic. A couple is a dynamic unit hence a measurement tool with a dyadic design will reflect potential reciprocity in relationships to support change longitudinally.

Further exploration including the new possible determinants remains through primary studies to complete this body of knowledge. By incorporating human capital and collaborative communication researchers can obtain a more precise conclusion. We hope the mapping in Figure 2 would contribute as an agency to create the appropriate measurement tool. This review is limited to reaching more relevant studies due to the various interchangeable terminologies and a few unobtainable full-text studies within our inclusion criteria due to limited access. Consequently, there are relevant studies unable to be included in this systematic review.

Figure 2

Representation of Interconnection of Gender Equality in Division of Household Labor and Childcare with Marital Satisfaction



4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Its correlations need to be confirmed yet collaborative communication and human capital have practical implications. Family counselors may benefit from adding collaborative communication exercises to help couples navigate these daily challenges. We also hope this systematic review may inspire and help educators to create a program to introduce and train children in the tasks of organizing household and family life through mutual respect and the awareness of working together. Especially, to build a sense of individual responsibility for young male adults towards household labor and childcare tasks. To support this program then a congruous measurement tool is crucial to help identify and analyse the changes in gender equality in the division of household labor and childcare and also marital satisfaction.

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