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Deconstructing Beauty Standards: a Case Study of Body Shape Representation in the Film “Imperfect”

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Abstract: This research aims to elucidate the standards of beauty presented in the film "Imperfect: Career, Love & Body Weight" through the lens of Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory. The film addresses issues of body shaming and women's self-doubt regarding their body shapes, while simultaneously challenging conventional beauty norms that prioritize slim figures and fair skin. Employing a qualitative methodology, this study analyzes scenes, dialogues, visual symbols within the film, and audience reactions from online platforms. The analysis reveals that "Imperfect" effectively contests logocentrism in the construction of beauty by highlighting physical diversity and self-worth. Through the concepts of *différance* and binary oppositions such as beautiful/ugly or slim/overweight, the film deconstructs the instability of beauty's meaning and emphasizes the importance of self-acceptance. This film serves as a medium for social critique against rigid beauty standards and advocates for a more inclusive and humanistic representation of women. Keywords: Deconstruction, Beauty Standards, Body Shape, Imperfect Film, Jacques Derrida, Body Shaming.

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INTRODUCTION

Film as a medium of communication has a significant impact on its audience. In addition to serving as entertainment, film can be a means of education and information, and even has the potential to manipulate a person's views on various issues (Nafsika & Razan, 2021). In its audio-visual form, film offers a unique experience that allows audiences to interpret context and gain new knowledge, making it an effective learning process (Nafsika & Huda, 2021). In today's digital age, film also plays a role in shaping public opinion, making it an engaging communication tool (Anisa & Winduwati, 2021).

One relevant example is the film “Imperfect: Career, Love, and the Scale,” released in 2019 and directed by Ernest Prakasa. This film addresses the issue of body shaming, which is the negative behavior of making derogatory comments about someone's physical appearance

(Diputra & Nuraeni, 2021). The effects of body shaming can be highly detrimental to an individual's psychological well-being, ranging from low self-esteem to depression. When someone constantly experiences body shaming, they tend to feel the need to conform to society's beauty standards to be accepted, which can ultimately lead to a loss of self-identity (Widiyani et al., 2021). The film *Imperfect: Career, Love & Scales* tells the story of the main character's determination to pursue a better life. Various obstacles do not deter her resolve; instead, they motivate her to prove that life's difficulties are not barriers to success (Nuraini, 2024). Through the main character Rara, portrayed by Jessica Mila, the film "Imperfect" challenges existing beauty norms. Rara is depicted with a physique considered inconsistent with conventional beauty standards, such as a plus-size body and dark skin, which leads to a decline in her self-confidence. Self-confidence is a positive attitude that enables individuals to have a favorable view of themselves and their surroundings (Ugunawan et al., 2021).

This film contributes to shaping a new perception of beauty and encourages a change in public opinion. The stigma surrounding beauty that has existed for so long is beginning to be questioned. Society often associates beauty with the image of models in the mass media or social media (Anugerah et al., 2020). In this context, Rara experiences different treatment from her peers because her appearance does not conform to these standards.

The application of deconstruction in the analysis of this film refers to Derrida's thinking, which emphasizes the importance of paying attention to small and hidden details in the text. The deconstruction method aims to question and dismantle various assumptions and structures within an object (Noris, 2003: 5). In this paper, we will attempt to define deconstruction as articulated by Barker (2004: 402), namely as the process of separating and exposing assumptions and rhetorical strategies in a text. (Siregar, 2019)

Through the public perception formed by the film *Imperfect*, we can see a broader social phenomenon. This film conveys a significant message about the importance of self-love and rejecting bullying practices related to body shaming. In this way, the film has the ability to influence and change individuals' thinking and behavior. Given this context, this study aims to deconstruct the representation of women's bodies in the film "Imperfect" and analyze how the film influences audience perceptions of beauty standards, while also demonstrating that the meaning of such standards is always open to question.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach, analyzing data in the form of words and images to understand the construction of gender equality (Moleong, 2020). The research data was obtained from two sources: primary data in the form of detailed observations of the film *Imperfect*, including dialogue, character visuals, scenes, settings, symbols, and metaphors; and secondary data in the form of supporting literature such as journals, books, and articles. Data collection was conducted using three techniques: (1) direct observation of the film *Imperfect*; (2) analysis of data from audience comments on online media; and (3) documentation in the form of screenshots, dialogue transcripts, and written analysis data. Since existing data was used, the procedure was relatively short. According to M. Katherine McCaston (2005), secondary data analysis involves two main processes: collecting data and analyzing it. (Bado, S, Pd., M, Si, 2021)

The analytical framework of this study draws on Derrida's theory of deconstruction, which emphasizes the uncertainty and instability of meaning in language. Derrida argues that language not only reflects reality but also shapes it. Meaning, according to Derrida, is deferred and constructed through inter-conceptual relations. Ironically, the pursuit of absolute sameness creates difference. Attempts to impose rigid and uniform interpretations of language trigger reactions that produce differences, contrary to the original goal (Vasanthan, 2023). Next, the key points of Derrida's deconstruction theory relevant to the research: 1).

Logocentrism: This concept, which underpins Western philosophy, places “logos” (reason/intellect) at the center of absolute truth. This creates a hierarchy of values, where logos is considered superior. 2). Différance: This concept, more than just “difference,” signifies the uncertainty of meaning. ‘Différance’ combines the meanings of “to differentiate” and “to postpone,” indicating that meaning is never present directly but is always postponed and shaped by its relationship with other concepts. This means that the standard of beauty in *Imperfect* is not something fixed, but rather constantly changing and shaped by its context. According to Derrida, we cannot make a clear distinction between speech and writing. Writing can stimulate people to think, initiate discussions, and present the essence of ideas to future generations. For Derrida, writing cannot be limited to external/internal; it exists beyond the reach of categories, operating beyond the logic of contradiction or binary opposition (Suyanto, 2013). Binary Opposition: Derrida criticizes binary oppositions (e.g., beautiful/ugly, thin/fat) for creating hierarchies. He argues that both sides are interconnected and neither is entirely superior. In the film “*Imperfect*,” we can analyze how the film portrays binary oppositions related to beauty and how it challenges or reinforces existing hierarchies. Binary oppositions are simply a way of viewing the world as always divided into two opposing categories. For example, there is good and bad, there is object and subject, and so on. In his book *Writing and Différance*, Derrida explains that language has layered structures that form binary oppositions from the unconscious to consciousness. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Différance*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), 25-27. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Reading Jacques Derrida: An Introduction*, 107. (Minah & Kumari, 2021)

Thus, Derrida's theory of deconstruction provides an appropriate analytical framework for examining how the film *Imperfect* constructs standards of beauty, reveals the uncertainty of meaning behind them, and challenges established value hierarchies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This discussion contains a report on the results of an analysis conducted by researchers regarding the deconstruction of beauty standards in the film “*Imperfect*.” Deconstruction of Beauty Standards: The film “*Imperfect*” deconstructs the beauty standards imposed by society by presenting a main character who does not conform to those standards. The film shows that beauty standards are social constructs that are not absolute and are always questioned. This research aims to understand and uncover the uncertainty and instability of meaning in language. Derrida argues that language not only reflects reality but also shapes it.

Based on this statement, the author analyzes the data according to predetermined categories. After watching the film “*Imperfect*,” the author identified scenes, dialogues, and information related to the deconstruction of body beauty standards, which is the theme of this research. In other words, the researcher only selected certain parts to use.

Logocentrism Body Shape

The analysis of the scene below shows Logocentrism in the context of beauty standards, which refers to the tendency to emphasize “logos” (reason or rationality) as the center of truth and value. In the film “*Imperfect*,” logocentrism is manifested in the form of widely accepted beauty standards, which dictate judgments and perceptions of body shape.



Figure 1. Scene Rara seems not confident

Source: Netflix

The following scene shows Debby's friends praising Rara's new appearance, but assuming she has had cosmetic surgery, which Rara denies, explaining that the change is due to exercise and diet, but they are skeptical.

This scene shows Debby's friends discussing Rara's appearance and praising her:

Rara: "Hai tante. Ma aku pergi dulu bareng dika ya" / "Hi Auntie. Mom, I'll go with Dika now."

Debby: "Oke, sayang" / "Alright dear"

Tante 1: "Rara? Kamu... Rara?" / "Rara? You're... Rara?"

Tante 2: "Kamu ke dokter siapa?" / "Which doctor did you go to?"

Tante 3: "Kamu sedot lemak ya?" / "You had liposuction, right?"

Rara: "Tidak tante, hanya olahraga dan jaga makan. Aku pergi dahulu" / "No, auntie, just exercise and watch what I eat. I'm leaving now."

Tante 3: "Bagaimana bisa?" / "How so?"

In the following scene, the reactions of Debby's friends (Rara's mother), including her aunts (Debby's friends), who immediately associate Rara's appearance with liposuction, demonstrate logocentrism. They judge body shape based on certain standards, namely the ideal slim body, and assume that rapid changes in appearance can only be achieved through drastic methods, not natural efforts such as exercise and a healthy diet.

The following supporting data is presented, showing how logocentrism operates in the film *Imperfect*, through dialogue and scenes that highlight dominant beauty standards that marginalize different body shapes.

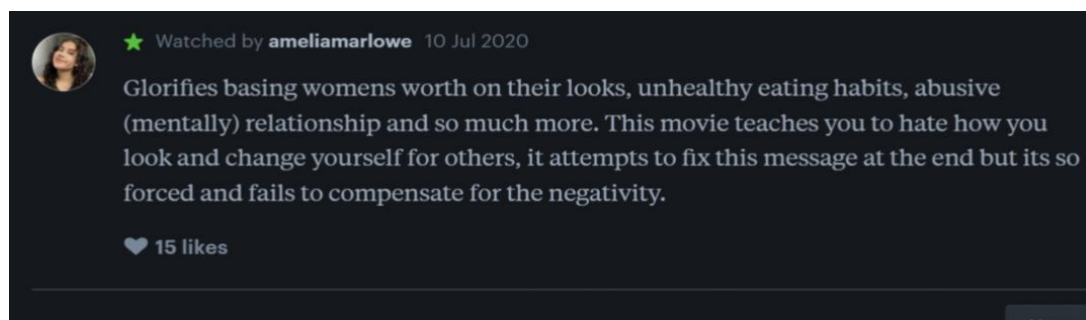


Figure 2. Data Supporters of Logocentrism

Source: Letterboxd

Letterboxd user @ameliamarlowe criticized the film "Imperfect" for promoting the judgment of women based on physical appearance, unhealthy eating habits, and poor mental health. She argued that the film teaches viewers to hate their own appearance and strive to change for the sake of others, thereby reinforcing a hierarchy of values that prioritizes appearance over other aspects of identity. The film is seen as reinforcing the idea that

meeting certain beauty standards is the key to happiness and social acceptance. While the film attempts to soften its message toward the end, the commentator views this as “forced” and insufficient to counteract the negative impact of the initial message. This highlights the influence of logocentrism in shaping perceptions of beauty and self-worth. In this context, director Ernest Prakasa emphasizes the importance of questioning whether happiness must be achieved by meeting increasingly demanding physical standards, especially on social media. According to Ernest Prakasa, the director of the film *Imperfect*, he states, “The message is a bit heavy and serious. I tried to raise the question of whether to achieve happiness, we must meet the demands to be physically perfect, especially for women. Because now the pressure of beauty standards is getting crazy, especially on social media. So, do we have to meet those standards to be happy? That is the question we must answer.” (Ernest Prakasa, 2019).



Figure 3 YouTube Thumbnail Image
Source: YouTube CINEMA 21

This statement shows how imposed beauty standards, which are considered absolute truths, become the center of judgment and shape a person's perception of happiness. This creates a hierarchy in which bodies that do not conform to the norm are considered in need of improvement.

Différance Concept of Body Shape

The concept used in this section refers to Derrida's theory of *Différance*. This concept asserts that meaning is not something fixed and certain, but rather something that is created through relationships and differences with other concepts, as in the following scene.



Figure 4. Scene when Rara Compares Her Body Shape
Source: Netflix

The following scene shows how societal beauty standards make Rara feel insecure when comparing herself to Dika's friends. Dika supports her, emphasizing compatibility over appearance. Rara, though hesitant, accepts his support and chooses to remain true to herself.

Rara: “Mereka cantik-cantik” / “They’re all so pretty.”

Dika: “Aduh, mulai” / “Not again.”

Rara: “Memang benar, langsing, putih” / “That’s true though, slim, fair skin.”

Dika: “Lalu?” / “So?”

Rara: “Ya, tidak apa-apa. Kenapa kamu tidak malu bawa aku?” / “Yeah, well. Aren’t you embarrassed bringing me along?”

Dika: “Sebenarnya malu. Tapi mau gimana lagi. Ra, kalau kamu kerjanya seperti aku, selalu ketemu mereka. Kamu akan lihat banyak sekali hal menarik yang tidak kelihatan di permukaan. Cari yang cantik itu gampang, yang susah itu mencari yang cocok. Kamu itu cantik, cocok lagi” / “I mean, yeah. But what else could I do? Ra, if you work the same like I do, you’ll always see the likes of them. You’ll see a lot of interesting things that couldn’t be seen in the surface. To find one that is pretty is easy, but to find one that is compatible, now that’s difficult. You’re pretty, and compatible besides.”

Rara: “Apa sih Dika” / “Oh, you.”

Dika: “Jangan berubah ya” / “Never change, alright?”

Rara: “Iya”. / “Of course.”

In the following scene, Rara's concern (“Aren't you embarrassed bringing me along?”) and her comparison with her slim and fair-skinned friends reveal *Différance* and expose doubts about common standards of beauty. Rara does not directly express dissatisfaction with her body, but the comparison reveals her uncertainty about social acceptance. Dika, as the respondent, avoids a simple definition of the ideal body shape, instead emphasizing the importance of compatibility and suitability.

The supporting data presented in this section will show how *Différance* plays a role in deconstructing rigid beauty standards in the film *Imperfect*.

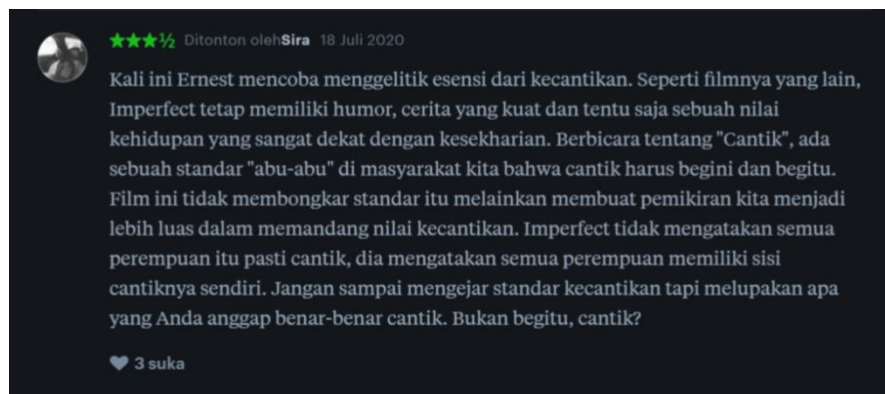


Figure 5. Supporting data *Différance*

Source: Letterboxd

Letterboxd user Sira links the film “*Imperfect*” to Derrida's concept of *différance* in the context of beauty standards. Sira argues that the film does not dismantle existing beauty standards, but rather expands our understanding of the value of beauty. The film demonstrates that beauty is not a singular definition but rather something diverse and complex, with the statement that “every woman has her own unique beauty.”

Thus, the meaning of beauty is fluid and context-dependent, derived through difference and relation to other concepts. Sira highlights that the “gray” beauty standards reflect the uncertainty of beauty's meaning itself. The film encourages viewers to transcend narrow definitions and appreciate the diverse manifestations of beauty.

Dika's statement in the film, who loves Rara's imperfections and calls her “perfect,” aligns with director Ernest Prakasa's view that feeling satisfied with oneself is the key to feeling “perfect,” even though we know nothing is perfect. This encourages us to see the positive aspects of ourselves. Ernest Prakasa's perspective, as he puts it, “Being perfect is feeling satisfied with ourselves, because we know we won't be perfect. So for me, there are already many reasons to be grateful, and maybe when we're satisfied with ourselves, we feel

perfect. We have to see the positive aspects of ourselves, because we often get too used to focusing on the negative aspects of ourselves without realizing it, and we tend to forget about the good things or our own strengths.” (Ernest Prakasa, 2019).



Figure 6. Ernest Prakasa’s Statement
Source: YouTube CINEMA 21

This statement shows how the meaning of “perfect” is relative and depends on individual perception. “Being perfect” here is associated with self-satisfaction and gratitude, not with meeting external standards. This is in line with the concept of Différance, which states that meaning is not fixed and is formed through relationships with other concepts.

The Binary Opposition between “Beauty” and “Body Shape”

This section discusses Binary Opposition, which is a key concept in Derrida's theory of deconstruction. In the film *Imperfect*, the binary opposition between “beauty” and “body shape” plays an important role in reinforcing narrow and judgmental standards of beauty.



Figure 7. Rara and her colleagues
Source: Netflix



Figure 8. Rara’s speech
Source: Netflix

This section discusses Binary Opposition, which is a key concept in Derrida's theory of deconstruction. In the film *Imperfect*, the binary opposition between “beauty” and “body shape” plays an important role in reinforcing narrow and judgmental standards of beauty.

Figure 7 Dialogue	Percakapan Gambar 8
<p>Irene: “Ra, inget lemak, tapi gapapa nutrisi buat ibu hamil” / “Ra, remember your body fat, Well that’s fine, pregnancy requires that nutrition.</p> <p>Fey: “Kamu diam saja diejek hamil?” / “You’re fine being mocked as if you’re pregnant?”</p> <p>Rara: “Kalau aku protes, dibilang</p>	<p>Rara: “Menjadi perempuan memang tidak mudah. Begitu banyak sekali ekspektasi yang membebani. Standar kecantikan yang sering kali tidak masuk akal. Cantik itu langsing, cantik itu putih. Padahal, perempuan sangat beragam. Ketika perusahaan ini berdiri. Ibu Melinda memilih nama Malathi bukan tanpa alasan. Malathi diambil dari bahasa Sansekerta yang artinya “teman yang baik”. Itulah cita-cita kami untuk perempuan Indonesia. Teman yang baik tidak menghakimi, teman yang baik tidak menyudutkan, dan teman yang baik membantu kita mengenal siapa kita sesungguhnya. Dan ini dia</p>

sensitif, Serba salah”. / “If I fight her I’ll be called out sensitive, everything’s wrong.	wajah baru dari Malathi”. / Being a woman is not easy. There are so many expectations that weigh us down. Beauty standards that are often unreasonable. Beautiful means slim, beautiful means fair-skinned. Yet women are so diverse. When this company was founded, Melinda chose the name Malathi for a reason. Malathi comes from Sanskrit and means “good friend.” That is our vision for Indonesian women. A good friend doesn’t judge, a good friend doesn’t corner, and a good friend helps us discover who we truly are. And here’s the new face of Malathi.”
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And the scene during Rara's speech, where she calls for acceptance of female diversity, rejects narrow beauty standards, and introduces “Malathi's new face” as a symbol of non-judgmental support.

In this scene, there is a binary opposition between “slim” and “fat,” where “slim” is considered superior, and Irene's statement indirectly reinforces this view. Rara's discomfort and Fey's response show how this binary opposition creates imbalance and oppression. However, in the speech scene, Rara rejects the view that beauty is only associated with slim and white bodies, and challenges the rigid division between “beautiful” and “not beautiful.” By emphasizing women's diversity, Rara introduces the “new face of Malathi,” which offers a more inclusive representation and redefines beauty to embrace various body shapes.

The supporting data presented in this section will provide an analysis of how “Binary Opposition” operates in the film “Imperfect,” and how the film challenges and deconstructs this binary opposition.

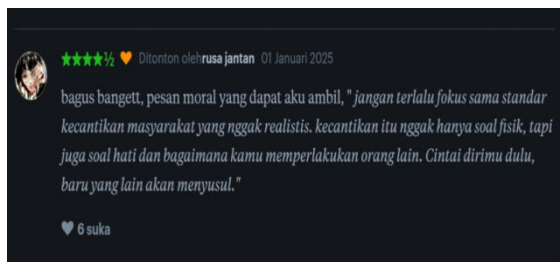


Figure 9. Supporting data for Binary Opposition “beautiful”
Source: Letterboxd

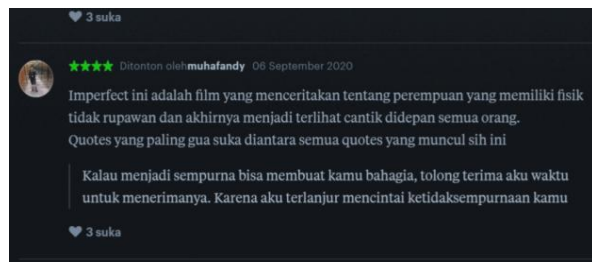


Figure 8. Supporting data for Binary Opposition “body shape”
Source: Letterboxd

Comments from Letterboxd users @muhafandy and @rusa.jantan provide insight into how the film “Imperfect” deconstructs the binary opposition between ‘beautiful’ and “not beautiful.” @muhafandy notes that the film depicts a woman who is initially considered “unattractive” but is later deemed beautiful, challenging traditional views of beauty. A quote from the film stating, “If being perfect can make you happy, please accept me as I am,” highlights a shift in values from ‘perfection’ to “imperfection.”

Meanwhile, @rusa.jantan emphasizes that the film rejects unrealistic beauty standards, stating that beauty is not just about physical appearance but also about the heart and how one treats others. This message expands the definition of beauty beyond physical appearance, encouraging viewers to love themselves first before loving others.

These two comments collectively demonstrate how the film “Imperfect” challenges and deconstructs the long-standing binary opposition between ‘beauty’ and “body shape.” The scene where Rara's office colleagues comment on her body shape reflects oppression based on rigid beauty standards, but Rara's speech calling for acceptance of women's diversity reinforces this message. Ernest Prakasa also highlights the importance of focusing on strengths and accepting weaknesses as part of ourselves, emphasizing that insecurity is

normal and should not hold us back. As Ernest Prakasa states, "Insecurity is normal; everyone experiences it, and it will never disappear. However, it should not hold us back. Everyone has weaknesses. What we see on social media from people who seem perfect is just a facade. Behind that, everyone has their own weaknesses. So, we just need to focus on our strengths, not just acknowledge our weaknesses, but also identify and maximize our strengths. There are definitely strengths, but sometimes we just dwell on our weaknesses" (Ernest Prakasa, 2019).



Figure 9. Statement by Ernest Prakasa
Source: YouTube CINEMA 21

This statement challenges rigid binary oppositions and asserts that everyone has strengths and weaknesses. Focusing on strengths and maximizing one's potential, rather than fixating on weaknesses, is an effort to transcend narrow binary oppositions and appreciate the complexity of human beings.

CONCLUSION

The film *Imperfect* effectively deconstructs conventional beauty standards through Derrida's theoretical approach. The analysis of this film shows how logocentrism, or the excessive emphasis on reason and widely defined beauty standards, influences perceptions and judgments of body shape. The dominant beauty standards, as portrayed through the characters in the film, create a hierarchy of values where body shapes that do not conform to norms are deemed in need of improvement. The film also offers an alternative to logocentrism by introducing the concept of *Différance*, which emphasizes the fluid and relative nature of meaning. The ambiguous beauty standards depicted in this film also invite the audience to transcend narrow and rigid definitions and to appreciate diverse manifestations of beauty.

The film also challenges the long-established binary opposition between beautiful and not beautiful by showcasing the diversity of body shapes and questioning the meaning of beauty through dialogue, visuals, scenes, and symbols. This demonstrates that beauty is not determined solely by physical attributes but emphasizes the importance of self-acceptance, valuing differences, and rejecting rigid judgments based on appearance. The film successfully opens new avenues for valuing diversity and acknowledging the internal worth of individuals. "Imperfect" is a meaningful and relevant work for today's times, exploring the complexity of social constructs surrounding beauty standards and encouraging viewers to develop a more critical and inclusive understanding of beauty's meaning. The film "Imperfect" serves as an example of how deconstruction can be used to challenge dominant beauty standards and promote more diverse and realistic representations.

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