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Fern, Jared P. *Cyberbullying: Implications for School Officials*

Abstract

Technology has changed the way in which students can communicate with each other. Social media, cell phones, and internet has brought on a new phenomenon of bullying; cyberbullying. Cyberbullying has the ability to humiliate, threaten, or create fear in a victim using electronic devices.

As social media continues to evolve, so do the effects of cyberbullying on students. Adolescents who are cyberbullied can suffer detrimental effects and in serious cases it may lead to suicide. It is important for school officials, parents, and adolescents to be educated on cyberbullying and understand the latest forms of technology where it is occurring. Without immediate consequences for the cyberbully, the behavior is more likely to continue and could create harmful effects on the victim.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Bullying can be a serious problem in schools. Bullying is defined as a social construct that intends to interrupt social connections between students or physical harassment (Frey, Hirschstein, Edstrom, & Snell, 2009). A new form of bullying, cyberbullying, uses technological devices such as cell phones and the internet to bully others. In a study conducted by Kljakovic, Scheib, & Notter (2012), cyberbullying was defined as a recent variant of the traditional bullying process, in which individuals use electronic communication as a medium to harass, degrade, embarrass, and deliberately hurt others. With an increasing number of adolescents using cell phones and the internet compared to past generations, a new form of online bullying, called cyberbullying, has developed into a serious problem for students, parents, and school officials (Slonje & Smith, 2008). Unlike traditional bullying, where the perpetrator directly bullies the victim verbally or physically, cyberbullies attack using technological devices. Cyberbullies can use a number of different communicative tools, and common forms include sharing unpleasant or confidential emails, Facebook messages, pictures, videos, or text messages. These digital media can be sent directly to a victim, or shared with other peers. (Kljakovic, Scheib, & Notter, 2012).

Cyberbullying is unique in that students cannot always escape the bullying once they leave school grounds. Technology gives the perpetrator the opportunity to contact the victim from almost anywhere and at any time via internet and cell phones. Cyberbullies can also remain anonymous through the use of electronic devices (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). In cases where the cyberbully remains anonymous, victims may feel more anxiety. Perpetrators that cyberbully have the opportunity to reach large audiences, especially on social networks such as Facebook and Twitter (Bhat, 2008).

Cyberbullying is different from traditional bullying when dealing with how the bully may feel after the bullying occurs. Research shows a similar relationship between traditional bullies and cyberbullies in the amount of remorse they feel towards their victims. A bully who is remorseful is one who feels bad for their victim after the bullying has occurred and can be empathetic in how the victim is feeling. In a study conducted by Slonje, Smith & Frisen (2012), traditional bullies feel more remorseful towards their victims (69.9%) compared to cyberbullies (42.5%). This study suggests that cyberbullies are less likely to feel bad or empathetic towards their victims compared to traditional bullies after the bullying behaviors have taken place.

Cyberbullying can have detrimental effects on the victim. In a study conducted by Raskauskas and Stoltz (2007), 93% of cybervictims reported being negatively affected. This includes feelings of sadness, hopelessness, depression and anxiety (Gradinger, Strohmeier, & Spiel, 2009). Health problems and suicide have also been linked to cybervictims (Mason, 2008). Research has found a consistency with students who are traditional bully victims and students who are cyber victims (Gradinger, Strohmeier, & Spiel, 2009). If a student is a cybervictim, it is likely they are a traditional victim as well.

There is no identified formula for understanding why a person cyberbullies. However, studies have found that delinquent behavior, frequent substance abuse, failing in school, and depression were all associated with students who cyberbully (Gradinger, Strohmeier, & Spiel, 2009). Other studies have found that traditional bullies are likely to be cyberbullies (Kljakovic, Scheib & Notter, 2012).

Statement of Problem

With a high percentage of adolescents using mobile devices and the internet to communicate with each other, a new form of online bullying is becoming more prevalent.

Cyberbullying allows a bully to avoid face-to-face harassment, remain anonymous, and the ability to humiliate cyber victims in front of large audiences. Cyber victims usually suffer from negative psychological consequences and, in severe cases, commit suicide. Additional research is needed for school counseling prevention programs regarding cyberbullying and different interventions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this literature review is to investigate cyberbullying and the impact it has on adolescents. Purposefully, it will look at who are the cyberbullies, what are the effects on cyber victims, and effective prevention programs for school counselors. This literature review may provide school officials, parents, and students a better understanding of cyberbullying and prevention programs that have been successfully implemented in other schools.

Objectives of the Study

Six objectives will be addressed in this study:

1. How is cyberbullying defined?
2. What do statistics indicate for rates of cyberbullying?
3. What are the similarities and differences between cyberbullying and traditional bullying?
4. How does cyberbullying impact adolescent victims?
5. How can parents and educators prevent cyberbullying?
6. What are potential interventions available to school counselors?

Definition of Terms

Bullying. A social construct that intends to interrupt social connections between students or physical intimidation (Frey, Hirschstein, Edstrom, & Snell, 2009)

Cyberbullying. A recent variant of the traditional bullying process, in which individuals use electronic communication as a medium to harass, degrade, embarrass, and deliberately hurt others (Kljakovic, Scheib, & Notter, 2012)

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

It is assumed that cyberbullying is a serious issue for students who have access to technology. It is also assumed cyberbullying has negative psychological consequences on victims. Finally, it is assumed cyberbullying education is needed for school officials, parents, and students, to help these individuals become more knowledgeable on cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying relies on self- reports so many situations of cyberbullying are not reported. Since there is no concrete definition for cyberbullying, there are discrepancies in the number of reported cases. A study by Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) reported 12% of internet users between the ages of 10-17 years old were cyberbullied. However, in another study conducted by Raskauskas and Stoltz (2007), they found that 49% of students 13-18 years old had been cyberbullied. Another limitation is this review only focuses on adolescents.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Many adolescents are using technology as a way to communicate with one another. A new form of online bullying, cyberbullying, is a recent phenomenon adolescents are using to bully each other through the use of cell phones and the internet. While many adolescents enjoy communicating through social networking sites and cell phones (text messaging, email, snap chat, etc), others are suffering from the serious effects of cyberbullying. This chapter will discuss cyberbullying and the impact it is having on our youth today.

Bullying

For many years, bullying behaviors have been a concern for school officials, parents, and students. In a study conducted by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, researchers reported that 17% of students in grades 6th - 10 reported being bullied (United Press International, 2008). The study found that 19% of those students admitted to bullying others “sometimes” or “weekly” (United Press International, 2008). From a School Crime and Safety Report, researchers found that about 28% of students between 12 and 18 years old were bullied at school within the past 6 months. From those, 11% of the victims were bullied once or twice a week and 8% were bullied daily (Patchin, & Hinduja, 2010).

Defining bullying can be a challenge, but according to Snakenborg, Van Acker, and Gable, (2011) most definitions of bullying include these 3 components:

1. Bullying involves physical or verbal behavior that is aimed at another with the intent to cause harm or distress
2. These behaviors are repeated over time
3. These behaviors occur in a relationship wherein there is an imbalance of power and control

It is important to note that bullying is not limited to the above definition. Traditional bullying is said to be aggressive behavior that involves repeated exposure to a physical, social, or psychological imbalance between the more powerful bully and the victim who has trouble defending themselves (Snakeenborg, Van Acker, & Gable, 2011). Most researchers have narrowed down bullying into 3 forms: physical bullying, harassment, and relational bullying. Physical bullying includes aggressive behaviors such as hitting, kicking, or pushing. Harassment is name calling and verbal threats to others. Relational bullying is an emotional type of bullying that negatively affects the social status of a victim by damaging friendships or spreading rumors. Although traditional bullying is still common in our schools, a new form of bullying has evolved in recent years with advancements in technology. Cyberbullying is the latest form of bullying exhibited through the use of the internet and cell phones.

Cyberbullying

As technology continues to evolve, so does cyberbullying. Cyberbullying has been defined as the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group that is intended to harm others (Bhat, 2008). Technology tools used to cyberbully include, email, instant messaging, social networking sites, chat rooms, websites, blogs, text messages, pictures messages, or video clips via mobile phones. The actions of cyberbullying behaviors are intended to threaten harm, humiliate, and make the victim have feelings of fear and helplessness (Bhat, 2008). There are two types of cyberbullying: Direct and Indirect. Direct cyberbullying involves the perpetrator directly sending messages to the victim whereas indirect cyberbullying involves an instigator who gets others to bully the victim.

Cyberbullies

Many research studies suggest that cyberbullying is an extension of traditional bullying by using technological devices. Most research supports that most cyberbullies are also traditional bullies (Mason, 2008). Traditional bullies tend to be bigger and stronger than their victims. Bullies also tend to have positive attitudes towards aggression, negative relationships with parents, and the use of drugs and alcohol (Mason, 2008). Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) reported that 39% of online harassers failed in school, 37% showed delinquent behavior, 32% showed frequent substance use, and 16% were highly depressed. In a study conducted by Patchin & Hinduja (2010), researchers found a significant relationship between cyberbullies and low self-esteem. This is important in noting that students who cyberbully are likely to have low self-esteem compared to students who are non-offenders. Since many cyberbullies struggle with emotional issues themselves, they are at risk for depression and suicidal ideation (Bhat, 2008)

Since there is limited evidence on the motivation of cyberbullies, researchers suggest cyberbullies share similar personalities as traditional bullies. Bullies tend to stick to their beliefs and are not willing to understand others' points of view. They tend to be aggressive when protecting their own image. Power and control is often a priority for bullies, and they achieve this through verbal threats or physical actions. Throughout these characteristics of bullies, they tend to feel little empathy for the problems they cause their victims (Bhat, 2008).

Not only is the cybervictim affected negatively, research suggests the same is true for the cyberbully. Since traditional and cyberbullies share many of the same motivations to bully, the long term effects of traditional and cyberbullies can be comparable. Olweus et al. (1999) conducted a longitudinal study on students who bully. The study found that nearly 60% of boys who were bullies in grades 6-9 had been convicted of at least one crime by the time they were 24

compared to only 23% of boys who were not bullies. About 40% of bullies had committed 3 to 4 crimes by the age of 24. These statistics reinforce the importance of offering support and interventions to both traditional and cyberbullies.

Effects on Cybervictims

The effects of cyberbullying on cybervictims can be detrimental and cause serious harm. Raskauskas and Stoltz (2007) reported 93% of cybervictims being negatively affected. They found cybervictims reported sadness, hopelessness, depression, and anxiety. Kowalski et al. (2008) reported cybervictims struggled with social anxiety and measured low in self-esteem. Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) found that adolescents who were both cyberbullies and cybervictims demonstrated problem behavior (44%) and depressive symptoms (16%). Patchin and Hinduja (2006) found that cybervictims felt disrespected. Cybervictims often became distracted and their academic performance tended to be negatively impacted (Darden, 2009). Although most research has found most cyberbullying behaviors happen outside of school, the effects are visible in the classroom. Classroom participation from students who are cyberbullied tended to decline (Feinberg & Robey, 2009). Cyberbullying has also been linked to psychological problems such as suicidal thoughts, eating disorders, and chronic illnesses (Mason, 2008). Cybervictims tended to have a significantly lower self-esteem compared to those who have not been bullied (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010). In addition, students who were victims of cyberbullying felt afraid or embarrassed to go to school. (Shore, 2011). Sheridan (2010) reported students who were bullied had academic and behavioral issues, such as truancy and decrease in grade point average. Mason (2008) found there were no reported gender differences when referring to cybervictims; with males (25%) and females (25.6%) reporting similar.

Unlike traditional bullying, cybervictims can be contacted by their perpetrator anywhere at any time. Many cybervictims report not having a safe place to go, because the cyberbully can contact them using technological devices from any location. Cyberbullying is unique in that it can occur 24 hours a day, 365 days in a year.

Prevalence of Cyberbullying

Researchers have found that adolescents who use the internet to socialize, have probably been involved in some form of cyberbullying (Mason, 2008). Depending on the study, the results of how often students are cyberbullies, cybervictims, or both vary. This variation can be partially explained by the definition of cyberbullying used in each study. Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) surveyed 1,501 regular internet users aged 10-17 years old in the USA. They found 15% of students were cyberbullies, and 51% of cyberbullies were also traditional victims of bullying. The 15% of adolescents who admitted to being cyberbullies, 20% of them were also cybervictims. This study shows that many cyberbullies are victims of traditional bullying.

In a study conducted by Smith et al. (2008), 533 secondary students in grades 7-11 were surveyed. The study found that traditional victims were likely to be cybervictims, traditional bullies tended to be cyberbullies, and traditional victims tended to be cyberbullies. In a similar study conducted by Raskauskas and Stoltz (2007), 84 students were surveyed ranging from 14-18 years old in the USA. They found similar results in that most cyberbullies were also traditional bullies, and nearly all cybervictims were traditional victims.

Research by Patchin and Hinduja (2006) found that among the 385 adolescents they surveyed, 29% of participants reported being cybervictims, 11% cyberbullies, and 47% of respondents witnessed online bullying. From the survey, 20% of participants were threatened

online and 40% said the cyberbully remained anonymous. In more detail, 30% reported being called names and 18% reported having rumors spread about them

A survey conducted by the National Crime Prevention Council reported that more than 40% of teens in the United States were victims of cyberbullying. However, only 10% of the victims reported the incidence to their parents. This study suggests that mostly all cyberbullying incidents go unreported to the victim's parents. This study also found nearly 50% of teens reported that cyberbullies engaged in cyberbullying because a lack of consequences for their behavior (United Press International UPI, 2008).

A study conducted by Li (2006), who surveyed 264 seventh to ninth grade students, found that nearly half of the students were cyberbullied. About half of the students who were cyberbullied, were cyberbullied on school grounds. This study found that of the cyberbullies in this school, 22% were males and 12% were females. Even though cyberbullying is not done face to face, many of the incidents are still taking place on school property.

Cyberbullying Tools

With the advancements in computers and mobile phones, cyberbullying behaviors continue to thrive. Senders may expect a message to stay private but, for various reasons, the recipient can send it to others. With the click of a mouse or a key pad button, these messages can reach a large audience in a short amount of time. In some occasions, the victim may not even know someone is taking a photograph or recording a video of them on an ipad or cell phone. These messages can be forwarded to hundreds of people in a matter of seconds without the victim even knowing.

Instant messaging is a conversation that occurs on the internet between 2 or more people. There are several different versions of instant messaging including Windows Live Messenger

and Facebook messaging. Instant messaging allows cyberbullies to set up fake profiles and to hide their identity. Bullies can save and print the conversations that were intended to stay between the sender and receiver and can be given to anyone (Bhat, 2008).

Mobile phones are popular devices used to cyberbully. Bullies can send text messages, pictures, or video messages to a large audience without the permission of the victim. The intention behind forwarding these messages is to hurt or embarrass the victim. Cyberbullies have the access to take pictures of their victims and send them to large audiences. This can have detrimental effects on a person's self-esteem (Bhat, 2008).

Email is a common way for people to communicate in today's society and has the opportunity to reach large audiences in very little time. By clicking the "forward button" an email can be sent to an infinite number of people. Emails can be typed out, contain videos, or have pictures attached to them. This form of communication can allow private messages to be sent intentionally to other people with the purpose of hurting or embarrassing the original sender (Bhat, 2008).

Social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter are popular amongst all age groups of people. Cyberbullies have the opportunity to create "fake profiles" so they can remain anonymous. People can put information about anyone or anything on social networking sites that a large audience can see. Cyberbullies have the opportunity to post hurtful or embarrassing messages, videos, and pictures without the consent of the victim (Bhat, 2008).

Policy Implications

Many youth who are being cyberbullied believe they should deal with the problem alone. According to Juvonen & Gross (2008) about 90% of respondents who reported they were cyberbullied, never told a parent or adult about the situation. In their study, 50% of cyberbullied victims

said they agreed with the statement because “I need to learn to deal with it myself” (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Another 31% of victims said they did not report cyberbullying to a parent, because they thought their parents would restrict their internet use (Juvonen & Gross, 2008). This belief can be detrimental to youth because nothing is being done about the cyberbullying behaviors.

The school counselor can serve as an advocate for all students and parents who are seeking help. It is important for school districts to revisit their cyberbullying policies to make sure they are current. Schools are encouraged to include cyberbullying behaviors into their anti-bullying policies (Mason, 2008). Some schools are making students and parents sign acceptable use policy (AUP) forms. These forms outline the appropriate use of the internet and other technological devices while at school (Mason, 2008). It is also recommended schools have an anonymous reporting system for cyberbullying behaviors. This way a student can report cyberbullying behaviors and remain completely anonymous. (Chibbaro, 2007). Educating students, parents, teachers, and administrators on district policies of cyberbullying is important. By collaborating with these individuals, it educates and keeps everyone on board with the current school policies regarding cyberbullying (Juvonen & Gross, 2008).

Implementing cyberbullying curriculum into the school counseling program is important. Not only does this raise awareness about cyberbullying, it educates students on what to do if they become a cybervictim. In order for this to be effective, counselors should attend developmental trainings on cyberbullying (Campbell, 2005).

Kowalski, Limber, and Agaston (2008), suggest giving a school wide survey to find out the current problem of cyberbullying. They recommended the questionnaire be anonymous to get the most accurate results possible. Since technology is changing quickly, having the survey

revised each year is recommended. Kowalski et al. (2008) suggested students should be aware of what the definition of cyberbullying, so they are aware of what constitutes cyberbullying behaviors. From this assessment, the school counseling program can address the areas of concerns regarding cyberbullying.

Many researchers have also suggested using multiple resources such as “Cyber Bullying and Schools – Bullying NO Way!” and the “I-Safe Curriculum that focus on cyberbullying prevention (Bhat, 2008; Smith et al., 2008). It is recommended school counselors lead the programs because of their relationship with students, parents, teachers, and community resources.

Legal Issues

It is important for school officials to understand the legal ramifications when dealing with cyberbullying issues. Since cyberbullying behaviors often occur off school grounds, the question commonly raised is “What disciplinary actions can a school take on cyberbullying behaviors happening off campus?” The First Amendment places restrictions on school personnel when responding to cyberbullying behaviors off school grounds. In the simplest form, school officials can place restrictions on student speech that appear to be school sponsored or are necessary to maintain a positive school atmosphere (Willard, 2003). According to Willard (2003), if the cyberbullying does occur on school grounds, “School officials may impose educationally based restrictions on student speech and may impose discipline for violation of those restrictions, but they may not engage in viewpoint discrimination” (p. 331). In many legal cases regarding cyberbullying happening off school grounds, the court systems need to have clear evidence the speech was materially and substantially disruptive to the school learning environment.

Prevention and Intervention

Cyberbullying should be a joint effort with schools, families, and the community when dealing with prevention and intervention of cyberbullying. School officials are encouraged to take a leadership role when working cooperatively with parents, students, and the community in educating them on what is cyberbullying, how it effects victims, where it occurs, and what to do when they identify the behavior. According to Mason (2008), helping students develop pro social attitudes, behaviors, and healthy relationships is important for students both on and off school grounds.

From current and past court rulings, it is important for school officials to intervene in cyberbullying in order to maintain a safe school and positive learning environment (Li, 2006). School officials are encouraged to investigate all forms of bullying, including cyberbullying, in order to hold the bully accountable and offer the victim help (Willard, 2003).

The development of anti-bullying programs is critical for all schools. Educating students about the policies of cyberbullying and how students can be held accountable for their actions for things happening online or through cell phones is important. Since most cyberbullies also bully face-to-face, having an effective curriculum that focuses on bullying can help eliminate cyberbullying. Programs such as Bully-Proofing Your School and the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program have been found to reduce bullying behaviors (Mason, 2008; Olweus et al., 1999) In the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, it educates teachers, students, and parents by increasing the awareness on bullying, increasing supervision of students, and limits unacceptable behavior (Mason, 2008). This program has been shown to reduce levels of bullying by 25% to 50% (Mason, 2008). Through this program, the school atmosphere improved, students' attitudes towards learning were more positive, and positive social relationships increased.

Classroom lessons are effective times for counselors and teachers to tie cyberbullying behaviors into anti-bullying programs. Having students understand what it means to have respect for one another, conflict resolution skills, and positive communication skills is important when teaching about cyberbullying. According to Mason (2008), those schools that used classroom time to teach students about anti-bullying lessons, saw greater reductions of bullying behaviors.

Chapter III: Summary, Discussion and Recommendations

Summary

Cyberbullying is a relatively new form of bullying that can cause serious consequences to both the bully and victim. The impact cyberbullying behaviors have on cybervictims is similar to those of traditional bullying. Low self-esteem, high anxiety, feelings of hopelessness, depression and in severe cases suicide are all effects of cyberbullying. School counselors must serve as advocates for students. Because cyberbullying can affect a student both physically and psychologically, school counselors need offer help and support to students who are being bullied through technological devices even if it is happening off school grounds. School counselors should be aware of warning signs, potential victims, and potential cyberbullies in their school.

As legislation and school policies continue to develop regarding cyberbullying, it is important for school officials, parents, and students to understand and stay updated on laws and consequences regarding cyberbullying.. School counselors can help school administrators and teachers understand the effects of cyberbullying, legislation, and current district policies. By having school officials understand the district policies and state and federal legislation regarding cyberbullying, it will allow districts to discipline students in an appropriate manner.

Discussion

School counselors are often responsible for educating and assessing bullying behaviors within their school. It is recommended for school counselors to give a school-wide assessment that addresses both traditional and cyberbullying behaviors. Since technology is constantly changing, so are the ways in which students bully each other. These assessments can be critical in identifying how students are being cyberbullied. The effects of cyberbullying can be felt both on and off campus. School counselors should work with cyberbullies and victims in order to

maintain a positive learning environment. All students have a right to feel safe and comfortable at school.

Educating students through a bullying curriculum has proven to be effective. Since students are communicating through text messages, social networks, and email, school counselors should include cyberbullying in their bullying prevention curriculums. Students should be aware of the detrimental effects cyberbullying behaviors can have on a person. They should also be educated on school policies that focus on cyberbullying along with how to report cyberbullying behaviors. Through bullying prevention programs, school counselors can deliver classroom lessons on cyberbullying to help educate and prevent cyberbullying from occurring.

Addressing and educating the issue of cyberbullying is not something solely a school counselor should deal with. By collaborating with school administrators, teachers, and support staff, this will offer more support when dealing with the issue of cyberbullying. Although it is recommended the school counselor present cyberbullying lessons to students, other school members will be able offer support when an issue with a student does occur.

Recommendations

Since technology is constantly changing, future research should focus on the devices and methods students are using to cyberbully. Because of the rapid technological changes, researchers may struggle on staying up-to-date with the latest devices used to cyberbully. Also, as social networking sites, cell phone communication, and online chat rooms continue to become popular, research is needed to examine exactly how cyberbullying behaviors are being conducted. With the ability to send embarrassing and unwanted pictures to a large audience without the victim aware of it, research is needed to see how often this form of “behind your back” cyberbullying behavior is occurring.

Another area of research needed when addressing cyberbullying is current legislation and school policies. Because cyberbullying continues to evolve with advancements in technology, so do many federal, state, and school policies. Many schools are including cyberbullying into their bullying policies; however the way in which a school district can discipline a student depends on federal and state legislation. Future research is needed to look more in depth with the legislation and policies changes.

Since cyberbullying is a rather new phenomenon, finding out what the long term effects of cyberbullying on both the cyberbully and cybervictim is needed. Most current research focuses on cyberbullying effects on victims to be very similar to that of traditional victims. However, research is needed to compare and contrast the long term effects of traditional bullying compared to cyberbullying.

Finally, evaluating cyberbullying programs is crucial in understanding if these programs are making a difference. Many bullying programs have incorporated cyberbullying as a key component, but it is unclear on whether or not these programs have been effective in reducing cyberbullying behaviors. Many traditional bullying programs have been found to produce positive results in reducing bullying behaviors but research is needed to see if cyberbullying programs are doing the same. Since most students use technological devices to communicate with each other, a question each school counseling program should consider is “Are students being taught the importance of using technology in a safe and appropriate manner when communicating with each other?” By preventing and reducing behaviors, we can help students improve academically, socially, and psychologically.

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