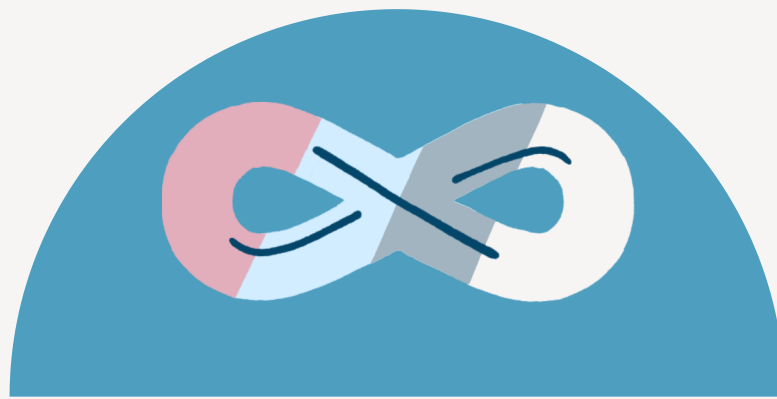


# Neurodiversity 101:

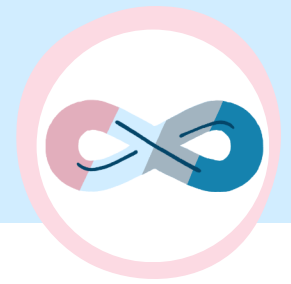
Terms and Introductory Concepts



Dr. Megan Anna Neff

# Neurodiversity 101

## A Brief History



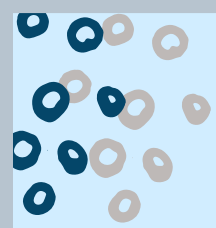
*"Neurodiversity may be every bit as crucial for the human race as biodiversity is for life in general. Who can say what form of wiring will prove best at any given moment?"*

**--Robert Blume**

The concept of neurodiversity, while often credited to Judy Singer, actually has multiple origins within the autistic community. Early discussions of **"neurological diversity"** in the 1990s contributed to the development of the idea, which has since been embraced and expanded by advocates and scholars alike (Botha et al., 2024)

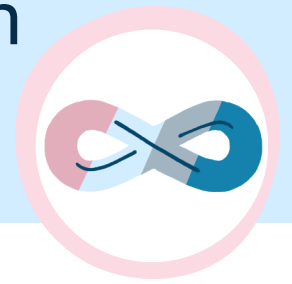
This theory has been further developed by Autistic advocates and thinkers like Nick Walker and Robert Chapman. The **neurodiversity paradigm** rejects the notion that non-majority neurotypes are deficient, instead highlighting their inherent value. It frames autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and other forms of neurodivergence as natural variations of human diversity, much like differences in race, gender, or sexual orientation. From this perspective, neurodivergence is not a disorder but a natural part of human evolution (Walker & Raymaker, 2021).

✦ Neurodiversity is often attributed to Judy Singer, who used the term in her 1998 thesis. However, similar ideas and concepts had been explored by other thinkers prior to her work. It's more accurate to view the emergence of neurodiversity as a collective evolution of thought, rather than the contribution of a single individual.



# The Neurodiversity Paradigm

## A Brief History



This approach moves away from seeing disability as a medical issue and instead views it as a valid identity. Jim Sinclair, in the article "Don't Mourn for Us," powerfully articulates this view:



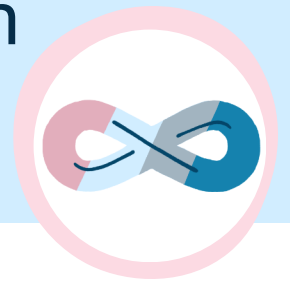
*Autism isn't something a person has, or a 'shell' that a person is trapped inside. There's no normal child hidden behind the autism. Autism is a way of being. It is pervasive; it colors every experience, every sensation, perception, thought, emotion, and encounter—every aspect of existence...autism is not something that can be separated out from the person, it's part of the person, and so you cannot meaningfully say I love my child but I hate the autism.*

-Jim Sinclair



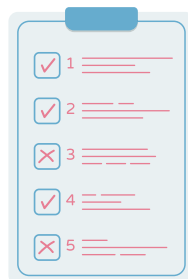
# The Neurodiversity Paradigm

## A Brief History



This shift redefines conditions like autism and ADHD from medical diagnoses to elements of social identity. New imagery and metaphors are emerging for capturing this new understanding. For instance, Robert Chapman, a philosopher from the U.K., describes autism as a different, but not lesser, **way of life**, while Leon Brenner, a Berlin-based analyst, sees it as a **mode of being**. These perspectives encourage us to understand the Autistic experience through the lens of identity versus a lens of diagnosis and pathology.

As the focus shifts from just checking diagnostic boxes to understanding personal experiences, it opens up opportunities for better understanding and acknowledgment of each other's diverse experiences with different neurologies.

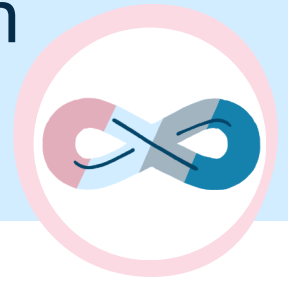


### **Celebrating Neurodivergent Identities**

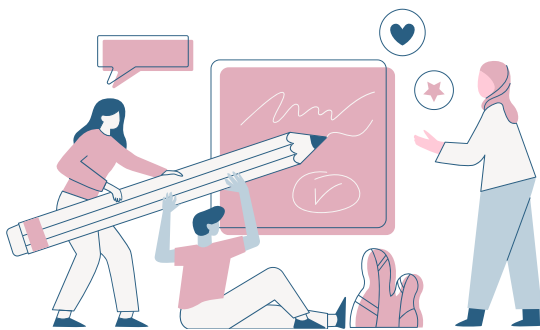
Transforming the narrative from autism being solely a medical label to an integral and celebrated aspect of identity paves the way for a thriving Autistic and ADHD culture infused with pride and solidarity.

# The Neurodiversity Paradigm

## Three Core Premises



The **Neurodiversity Paradigm**, a concept coined by Nick Walker, can be concisely summarized by several key premises: (1) Neurodiversity is a natural and inherent part of human variation; (2) there is no singular "normal" brain, as neurological diversity is the rule rather than the exception; and (3) social and power dynamics significantly influence how neurodivergent individuals are perceived and treated in society (Walker, 2014).



### Neurodiversity Just Is

Neurodiversity is simply just that—another form of human diversity. Neurodiversity is a biological fact. It is a natural (and beneficial) part of human evolution. Neurodiversity is a valuable and beneficial form of human diversity.

### There Is No “Normal” Brain

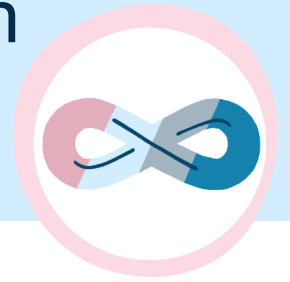
The idea that there is one “normal” or “right” brain is a social construct. There are diverse forms of processing social information, cognitions and sensory information. In the same way that there isn’t a “right” gender, race, class, or sexual orientation, there isn’t a “right” way for the brain to be wired. Neurodiversity can be a powerful asset for society, a business, or a family.



Walker, N., & Raymaker, D. M. (2021). *Toward a Neuroqueer Future: An Interview with Nick Walker*. *Autism in adulthood : challenges and management*, 3(1), 5–10. <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2020.29014.njw>

# The Neurodiversity Paradigm

## Three Core Premises



### Social & Power Dynamics

Neurodivergent people experience life as members of a marginalized neurominority and, as such, experience discrimination, minority stress, and marginalization (Chapman, 2020).

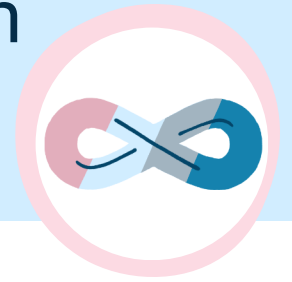
Similar to other groups with non-majority identities, neurodivergent individuals experience imbalanced social dynamics and unequal power distribution. Such power dynamics may include—unequal distribution of social power, limited social-cultural representation (or stereotyped and biased representation), and difficulty navigating environments tailored towards neurotypicals (education, work environments, conventional social practices).

Furthermore, individuals with intersecting marginalized identities, such as Black, Brown, and other Autistic people of color, as well as queer Autistic individuals, often face compounded disadvantages and multi-minority stress. This intersectionality can intensify the challenges within these dynamics.



# The Neurodiversity Paradigm

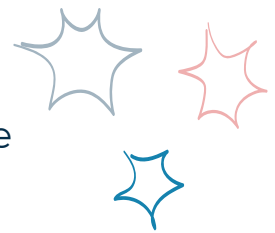
## The Neurodiversity Paradigm In Action



These ideas might leave you wondering about their practical application, particularly if you're a medical or mental health provider. To give you a clearer picture, let's explore a few ways the Neurodiversity paradigm can be implemented in real-world settings.

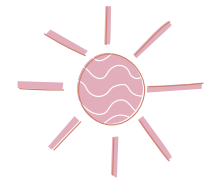
### Shifting From Pathology To Identity

- Moving away from the language of 'disorder' to describe neurocognitive variants like Autism or ADHD.
- Psychotherapists who integrate a Neurodiversity Paradigm don't label neurodiversity as intrinsically pathological.



### Moving from "Cure" to "Embrace"

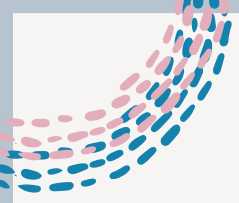
Emphasis shifts from trying to "cure" neurodivergent individuals to helping neurodivergent individuals embrace and integrate their identity. Therapists work with neurodivergent individuals to find ways of living that are more in sync with their natural neurological wiring and help them to heal from internalized ableism and oppression.



### Understanding the Context of Suffering

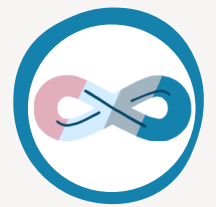
Neurodivergence doesn't intrinsically cause suffering; much of the struggle and strain comes from navigating a world built for Neurotypicals. We often experience the world as chaotic, busy, smelly, noisy, intrusive, and high-touch. Social constructs, communication patterns, and role shifting can often lead to confusion and distress and we crave authentic encounters with others. Neurodivergent people experience life as members of a marginalized neurominority which comes with distinct stressors.





# Neurodiversity 101

## Some Basic Terms and Definitions



Entering the world of Neuro-affirming practices can be intimidating, whether as a newly identified neurodivergent person, a clinician, an educator, a parent. One of the reasons for this is there is a lot of new language to learn! Here's your crash course on basic terminology:

### The Neurodiversity Paradigm

The **Neurodiversity Paradigm** is a viewpoint that sees neurodiversity as a natural and valuable form of biological diversity, beneficial to society. It frames neurological differences not as deficits, but as variations that enrich our collective human experience.

### The Neurodiversity Movement

The neurodiversity movement, a social justice movement, is rooted in the philosophical framework of the neurodiversity paradigm. The **Neurodiversity Movement** draws on the **Neurodiversity Paradigm**. The **Neurodiversity Movement** has its roots in the Autistic Rights Movement and is a social justice movement that seeks equality, respect, civil rights, and societal inclusion for neurodivergent individuals.

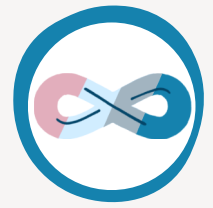
### Neurodiversity

**Neurodiversity** is a term referring to the diversity of human minds. And identifies this as a natural part of biological diversity.



# Neurodiversity 101

## Some Basic Terms and Definitions



### Neurodivergent

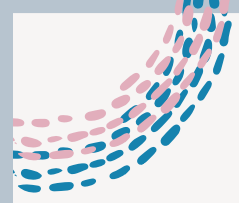
Kassiane Asasumasu coined the term neurodivergent, which encompasses people whose brain functions differ from the neuro-normative majority. ADHD, Dyslexia and Autism are all examples of neurodivergence. A person can have an **innate** (from birth) neurodivergence or **acquired** (such as in the case of traumatic brain injury or PTSD).

### Neurodiverse

**Neurodiverse** describes a group or environment where there's a mix of different brain types. It's not a label for an individual. For example, in a family where one person is Autistic, another has ADHD, a third has both Autism and ADHD, and the fourth is neurotypical, this family is neurodiverse. They have a variety of neurological experiences among them.

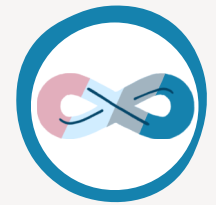
### Neurotypical

**Neurotypical** describes a person whose brain functions in ways that align with the central, most common range of the neurological spectrum. Their cognitive and social processing styles match what society generally recognizes and accepts as the norm. This means they typically find it easier to navigate social, educational, and professional environments, as these spaces are often structured to accommodate their standard neurological traits. Essentially, being neurotypical indicates that an individual's neurological development and way of processing align with what's commonly seen as “typical” in their cultural and societal context.



# Neurodiversity 101

## Some Basic Terms and Definitions



### Allistic

A non Autistic person. A person can be both neurodivergent and allistic. For example, someone who is ADHD but not Autistic is neurodivergent and allistic.

### Neurominority

A person who experiences marginalization and or is the minority in their experience of walking through the world due to their neurodivergence.

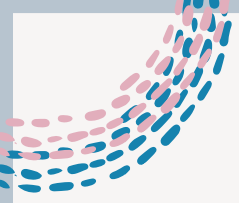
### Neuroqueer

This term has a dual application. Firstly, it describes a person who identifies as both neurodivergent (such as Autistic, ADHD, dyslexic, etc.) and queer, encompassing a convergence of neurodivergence and queer identity.

Secondly, **neuroqueer** can function as an adjective, characterizing individuals who are actively engaged in challenging and deconstructing heteronormative and neuronormative structures and norms. In this sense, **neuroqueer** can represent both an identity (e.g., "I am neuroqueer") and an action or approach (e.g., to "neuroqueer" a space or concept), reflecting a commitment to redefining and reshaping societal norms to be more inclusive of diverse neurological and gender/sexual identities.

### Neuro-Normative

Neuro-normative refers to spaces and structures that are built off the assumption of neuro-normative processing and cognitive style.



# Neurodiversity 101

## Some Basic Terms and Definitions



### Cross-Neurotype

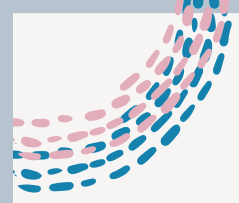
**Cross-Neurotype** as in **Cross-Neurotype Interactions** refer to exchanges or communications between individuals with different neurological make-ups. An example of this is when an Autistic person interacts with an allistic (non-autistic) person, or when someone with ADHD communicates with a neurotypical individual. These interactions can sometimes be more challenging and prone to misunderstandings, largely due to the differing communication styles and processing methods inherent to each neurotype. Understanding and navigating these differences is key to improving cross-neurotype communication.

### The Double-Empathy Problem

**The Double Empathy Problem** sheds light on the communication challenges often encountered between Autistic and allistic people. This concept, introduced by Milton in 2012, suggests that difficulties in understanding each other's communication styles are mutual. It's not just about one side struggling to communicate; it's about both sides navigating different ways of thinking and perceiving the world.

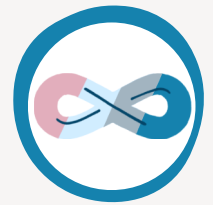
In simpler terms, when Autistic and non-autistic people interact, they often face a communication barrier due to the differences in how they process and express thoughts and feelings. This leads to a two-way communication gap. Research, including studies by Crompton et al. (2020), supports this by showing that people generally find it easier to relate to and communicate with others who share a similar neurotype.

The Double Empathy Problem challenges the view that communication issues are solely a trait of Autistic individuals. Instead, it points to a broader understanding that these challenges are about bridging the gap between different neurological experiences and perspectives.



# Neurodiversity 101

## Some Basic Terms and Definitions



### Social Disability Model

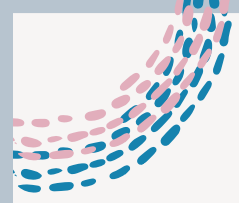
The **social disability model** offers an alternative perspective to the **traditional medical model**. Rather than viewing disability as a problem within the person, this model highlights how societal structures and attitudes can disable individuals. *It shifts the focus from strictly looking at individual impairments to considering the environmental and social barriers that limit people, emphasizing the need for societal changes to accommodate diverse abilities and promote inclusivity.*

### Ableism

Ableism refers to practices, biases, and prejudices that discriminate against individuals with disabilities, both visible and invisible. It encompasses a range of attitudes, actions, and institutional policies that devalue or limit the potential of people based on their perceived physical, intellectual, or psychological disabilities. Ableism often manifests in societal norms and structures that prioritize “typical” abilities and marginalize or exclude those who do not conform to these standards. This can lead to reduced accessibility, lack of accommodation, and social stigma, affecting various aspects of life including employment, education, and access to services. Challenging ableism involves recognizing these biases and working towards a more inclusive society that values diversity in abilities and experiences.

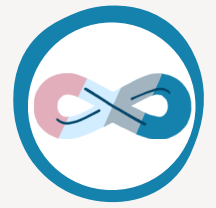
### Internalized Ableism

Internalized ableism is when people with disabilities absorb and accept negative beliefs and attitudes from society about disability. This can lead to self-doubt, low self-esteem, and feeling less worthy or capable because of their disability. It's essentially adopting society's often limiting and negative views about disabilities as one's own.



# Neurodiversity 101

## Some Basic Terms and Definitions



### Neurodivergent-Affirming

**Neurodivergent-affirming** has gained popularity in recent years as a key concept. It refers to practices that positively recognize and support neurodivergent identities, viewing them as valid and not something to be “fixed.” This perspective has led to the rise of neurodivergent-affirming professionals across various fields, including clinicians, occupational therapists, and speech therapists. These practitioners adopt practices that align with the neurodiversity paradigm, embracing a more inclusive and supportive approach to neurodivergence.

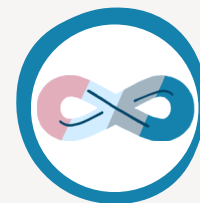
However, it's important to note that sometimes this term is used superficially, without a deep understanding of the neurodiversity paradigm. When used without genuine understanding, it can be misleading and potentially harmful, especially for neurodivergent individuals seeking support that truly resonates with their worldview and identity.

To authentically adopt neurodivergent-affirming practices, it's crucial for professionals to fully grasp what this entails and to continuously work on addressing their own ableist biases and assumptions. This ensures that the support provided is not just in name but also in action, truly affirming and respecting neurodivergent individuals.



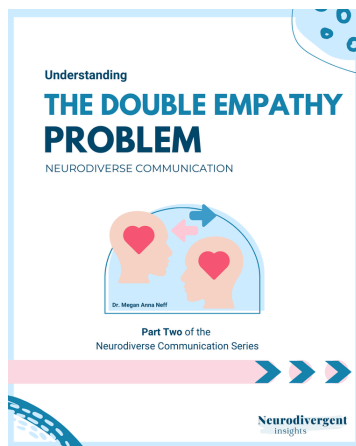
# Neurodiversity 101

For more learning

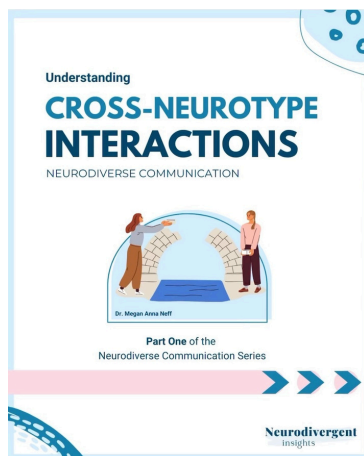


## Want to Learn More?

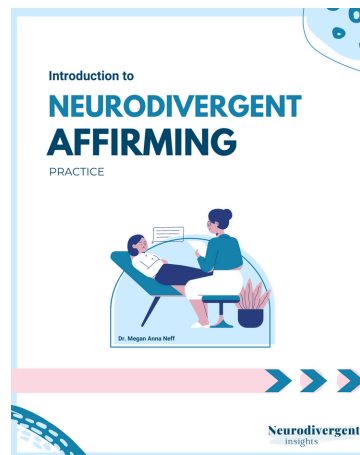
Here's a curated selection of articles I've written that provide a deeper dive into the topics discussed in this guide:



Read Here



Read Here



Read Here



## Thanks for Learning!

If you would like more neurodivergent resources here are a few helpful websites, podcasts and books.

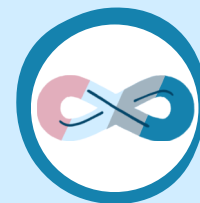
### Podcasts

- [Divergent Conversations](#)
- [The Neurodivergent Women Podcast](#)
- [Squarepeg Podcast](#)
- [ADHD For Smart Ass Women](#)



# Neurodiversity 101

## More Resources



## Thanks for Learning!

If you would like more neurodivergent resources here are a few helpful websites, podcasts and books.

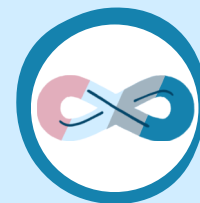
### Websites

- [Neurodivergent Insights](#): At Neurodivergent Insights, I share a variety of infographics focused on [autism](#) and [ADHD](#), as well as maintain a [blog](#) that dives into neurodivergent wellness and self-care.
- [NeuroClastic](#): This Autistic-led organization reframes autism as natural neurological variation, advocating for autistic rights and providing free resources for understanding neurodiversity.
- [Neuroqueer](#): Neuroqueer.com showcases Dr. Nick Walker's works on Neuroqueer Theory, featuring essays with insightful content on the neurodiversity paradigm.
- [LivedExperienceEducator](#): Run by Sonny Jane, focuses on neurodiversity advocacy and education, offering resources on neurodiversity.
- [Reframing Autism](#): This website provides educational resources and information on autism written through a neurodivergent-affirming lens.

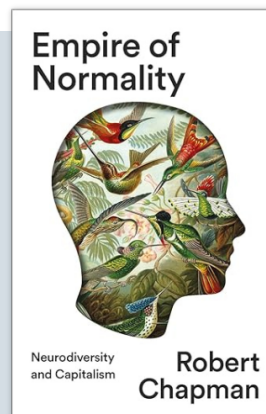
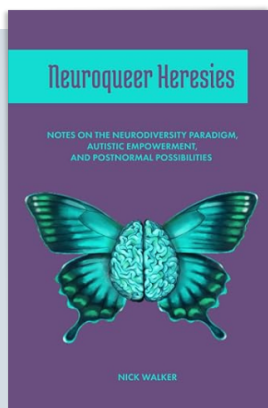
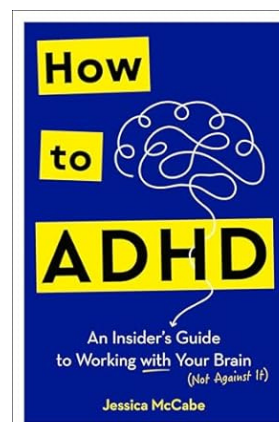
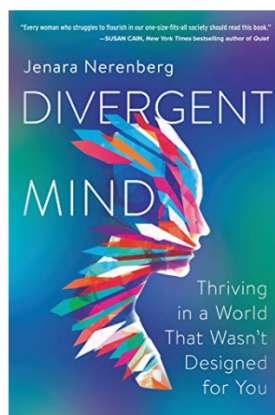
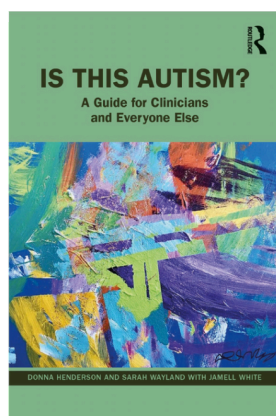
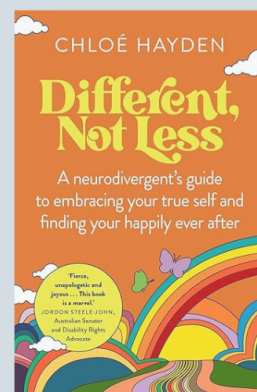
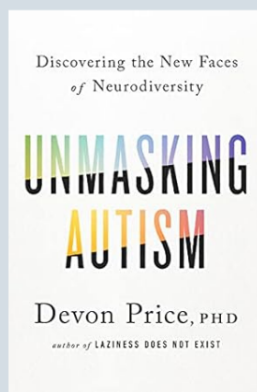


# Neurodiversity 101

## More Resources

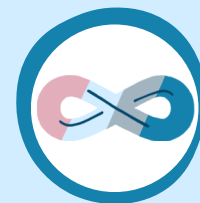


# Books



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