

Lived Experiences of Physical Education Teachers Toward Societal Standard Norm in The Philippines

Jonh Paul Inte, LPT
1801387@lnu.edu.ph

Leyte Normal University, Tacloban City, Leyte, 6500, Philippines

Abstract

Societal standard norms shape individuals' perceptions of beauty, success, and behavior, often influencing their self-identity and actions. These norms are reinforced through media, culture, and social expectations affecting various aspects of life, including professional roles and personal choices. This qualitative study explores the lived experiences of 13 physical education (PE) teachers in the Philippines as they navigate societal expectations surrounding societal standard norm. In a profession where appearance is closely tied to credibility, PE teachers often face intense scrutiny that affects their mental health, confidence, and professional identity. Guided by Objectification Theory, Social Comparison Theory, and the Theory of Planned Behavior, the study employed a descriptive phenomenological design using semi-structured interviews with purposively selected physical education teachers. Thematic analysis revealed four core themes: *Expectations* which highlights prospects for PE teachers to maintain an idealized physique; *Diffidence*, reflecting body dissatisfaction due to peer and societal comparison; *Adjustment*, capturing how teachers modify teaching strategies to avoid body exposure; and *Resilience*, showcasing their shift toward body positivity and health-centered teaching. The findings displayed that societal standard norm concerns significantly influence how PE teachers engage with students, shape their teaching methods, and view their self-worth. Despite these pressures, many demonstrate adaptive coping by embracing functional fitness and promoting inclusive values in education. This study contributes to the limited literature on societal standard norm issues in non-western education systems and emphasizes the need for institutional support to foster teacher well-being and body acceptance.

Keywords: physical education teachers, societal standard norm, professional identity, coping mechanisms, Philippines;

1. Introduction

Physical education teachers hold a dual role as educators shaping students' health and as role models at the same time, often navigating societal expectations of physical fitness and appearance intersecting the professional demands and personal perceptions on body. Physical Education (PE) in the context of societal norms is recognized as an essential part of education that promotes physical activity, mental well-being, and social interaction, fostering a healthy and active lifestyle (Kirk, 2020). It contributes to societal standards by encouraging inclusivity, teamwork, and discipline, while also addressing public health concerns such as obesity and mental health issues (Trost et al., 2021). In the Philippines, Santos et al. (2021) explored how PE teachers experience heightened scrutiny due to cultural norms and expectations. Their findings indicate that Filipino educators feel compelled to model societal ideals of fitness, often at the expense of their self-confidence.

Recent studies indicate that these societal norms are inherently biased and carry underlying social and cultural influences. In the evolving landscape of education, Physical Education (PE) teachers occupy a distinct space where professional identity is inextricably linked with the body. Unlike other educators, their credibility and authority are often judged not only by pedagogical competence but also by how closely they align with prevailing societal body standards lean, athletic, energetic, and visibly "fit." (Tanucan et al., 2023). Grogan (2021) emphasizes that societal body ideals such as thinness for women, and muscularity for men are not only gendered but also deeply internalized, especially in professions where physical appearance is closely tied to credibility. In the context of education, particularly Physical Education, these ideals place disproportionate pressure on teachers to embody "fit" and "healthy" physiques, shaping both their professional identity and how they are perceived by students and colleagues. Moreover, Mills et al. (2022) emphasize that body dissatisfaction

today is not merely driven by comparison but deeply rooted in emotions such as body shame, especially when teachers fail to embody the ideals imposed by students, colleagues, or institutions. Within the framework of societal standard norms, it is considered a critical aspect of education that encourages physical activity, enhances mental well-being, and fosters social interaction, promoting a healthy and active regime. It contributes to societal standards by encouraging inclusivity, teamwork, and discipline, while also addressing public health concerns such as obesity and mental health issues (Trost et al., 2021). Filipino PE teachers often navigate conflicting expectations between professional roles and societal norms, as seen in the use of exercise as punishment, which reflects how discipline and body ideals are socially constructed within schools (Tanucan et al., 2023). These pressures are further emphasized by cultural and institutional practices that shape teachers' decisions and reinforce normative standards of physicality and control in the classroom (Tanucan et al., 2025).

This study aligns with SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being, focusing on the mental health and well-being of physical education teachers as they navigate societal pressures related to body image. It also connects to SDG 4: Quality Education, highlighting how societal standard norm concerns can affect teaching effectiveness and student interactions. Moreover, the study is also relevant to Republic Act No. 10627 (Anti-Bullying Act of 2013), which addresses bullying, including body shaming, within educational environments, promoting inclusivity and healthier relationships among educators and students.

The theoretical framework for this study draws on Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), which explains how societal appearance standards lead to self-objectification and diminished self-esteem. Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) is utilized to examine how PE teachers' comparisons to others contribute to body dissatisfaction and affect their well-being. Furthermore, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) is employed to investigate how societal and professional pressures shape PE teachers' behaviors and attitudes toward societal standard norms.

The challenges faced by physical education (PE) teachers regarding body image are influenced by both societal standards and professional expectations, leading to body dissatisfaction and self-objectification (Swami et al., 2020). Moreover, the growing influence of social media on societal standard norm, as discussed by Aubrey et al. (2020), has made it increasingly difficult for teachers to separate personal appearance from professional competence, especially in an era where digital self-presentation often dictates societal norms. As such, PE teachers are faced with the dual task of managing their own body image concerns while fulfilling their responsibilities to promote body positivity, physical fitness, and mental well-being among students. In light of these concerns, understanding how PE teachers cope with these pressures and how their professional identity is shaped by societal standards is important in improving their work environment, promoting self-care practices, and ensuring a healthy, productive teaching experience. Locally, studies have shown that societal beauty standards affect the mental well-being of PE teachers, often undermining their job satisfaction and professional identity (Clemente, 2021). Coping mechanisms employed by physical education teachers include focusing on functional fitness and promoting body positivity in their teaching (Swami et al., 2020).

Exploring how body image pressures affect physical education (PE) teachers is important, as appearance and fitness are highly emphasized in their profession. Understanding these challenges is vital for improving mental health and job satisfaction among PE teachers, leading to better teaching outcomes. The findings will help create supportive, inclusive school environments that prioritize body positivity and the well-being of both teachers and students.

In the Philippines, PE teachers also rely on social support and self-care practices to cope with the mental and emotional challenges associated with societal standard norms (Clemente, 2021). To support physical education teachers, it is recommended that schools implement mental health programs and offer body positivity training to reduce the impact of societal body image pressures (Swami et al., 2020). Additionally, Clemente (2021) recommends that educational institutions in the Philippines create policies that promote inclusive fitness standards and support teacher wellness programs to address body image-related challenges.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to improve the well-being of physical education (PE) teachers by addressing the impact of societal standard norm pressures on their mental health and job

satisfaction. It provides valuable insights for educational institutions to create more supportive environments that prioritize both teacher wellness and body positivity. The findings can benefit PE teachers by offering strategies to cope with body image concerns, ultimately improving their professional identity and teaching effectiveness. Students will also benefit as the study advocates for a healthier, more positive approach to fitness education that promotes inclusivity and well-being. Additionally, this research contributes to the existing literature on body image in non-Western contexts, particularly the Philippines, offering directions for future studies in similar educational settings.

This study sought to explore the impact of societal body image norms on physical education (PE) teachers in the Philippines, focusing on how these pressures affect their mental well-being and teaching practices. By examining the challenges and coping mechanisms of PE teachers, the research seeks to provide insights that can improve their professional experience and overall well-being.

The objectives of the study are to a; explore the experiences of physical education (PE) teachers in the Philippines regarding societal standards norm; b. identify the challenges faced by PE teachers related to societal standard norm pressures coping mechanism of the PE teachers use towards societal standard norms in the Philippines

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study used transcendental phenomenology to explore the lived experiences of thirteen (13) physical education (PE) teachers. This design captured participants' perceptions of their body image in reflection of societal standard norms, with an emphasis on their personal and professional challenges. The study relied on in-depth interviews, allowing the researcher to collect rich data about societal and professional pressures. The findings provided insights into how these teachers navigated the intersection of societal expectations and their roles as educators. Through this approach, the research captured the essence of these experiences from the perspective of the teachers themselves.

2.2 Research locale

The research took place in the Philippines, particularly in Eastern Visayas, focusing on Physical Education (PE) teachers working in both public and private schools. This locale was chosen due to its diversity in educational institutions and the distinct societal standard norms that PE teachers faces. By exploring the experiences of the teachers, the study provided a deeper understanding of how societal standard norms influenced their professional and personal well-being.

2.3 Research Participants

The research participants included thirteen (13) physical education teachers employed in public and private schools in the Philippines, particularly in Eastern Visayas. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure the inclusion of those with relevant experiences regarding societal standard norms. Age ranging 23-35 years old, the research focused on PE teachers currently working in various public and private schools within the region. To ensure they possessed the necessary experience and insights related to the study, participants met the following criteria: first, they had at least three years of experience teaching physical education; second, they were currently teaching physical education; third, they were willing to reflect on and share their experiences regarding societal standard norms; and fourth, they were eager to participate in the study. Male, female, and gender non-conforming teachers were included to capture a diverse range of perspectives. The participants were asked to share their lived experiences on societal standard norms, both as educators responsible for promoting physical health and fitness and as individuals navigating societal standard norms.

2.4 Research Instruments

The research instrument used for this study was semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions that fostered engagement, allowing participants to share and capture the lived experiences of physical education (PE) teachers regarding societal standard norms, the interview lasted (ten) 10- (fifteen) 15 minutes. The instrument underwent content validation by three (3) experts in the field of physical education to ensure its relevance and clarity. The researcher prepared seven (7) major questions and a follow-up prompt for each major question, designed to reflect experiences during the discussion and gather participants' views on the key issues. Member checking was used to validate the findings, wherein participants reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcribed data.

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

The data gathering procedure began with obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring they understood the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted in a confidential setting and each interview lasted for (ten) 10 – (fifteen) 15 minutes, with audio recordings transcribed verbatim for accurate data capture. All data were securely stored and analyzed thematically to identify key themes related to societal standard norms, ensuring credibility and protection throughout the process. The researcher ensured protection and confidentiality of any information disclosed by the data subject. The information was used solely for the study and in compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2021, with reasonable care to prevent unauthorized disclosure. Data were shared only with individuals directly involved in the research, and all copies of personal information were destroyed after the retention period. In case of a breach, the researcher agreed to protect the data subject for damages, and legal remedies could be pursued.

2.6 Data Analysis

The data were analysed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) process. The researcher began by familiarizing themselves with the data, reading and re-reading the interview transcripts to become thoroughly acquainted with the content. Initial codes were generated by systematically identifying and labeling meaningful sections of the data relevant to the research questions. These codes were then grouped into potential themes, identifying patterns across the dataset that addressed the research objectives. The themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represented the entire dataset and aligned with the research goals. Finally, each theme was clearly defined and named to capture its essence, and the analysis linked the identified themes to the research questions, existing literature, and the theoretical framework, providing insights into the lived experiences of PE teachers regarding societal standard norms.

2.7 Ethical Consideration

The ethical integrity of this study was maintained through strict adherence to principles governing research involving human participants. Informed Consent was obtained via a comprehensive consent form that clearly outlined the study's objectives, scope, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and ethical assurances. Participants were given adequate time to review the information and provide voluntary, written consent prior to participation. Voluntary Participation and Right to Withdraw were emphasized both verbally and in writing each participant was informed of their absolute right to refuse any question or withdraw from the study at any stage without negative consequences or the need to justify their decision. Confidentiality was treated with utmost seriousness; any personal or sensitive information disclosed during interviews whether spoken or documented was considered strictly confidential. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to ensure anonymity, and no identifying information was used in any reports, publications, or presentations. All data

were securely stored in password-protected digital folders accessible only to the researcher. Data Protection followed the stipulations of the *Data Privacy Act of 2021*, ensuring that all personal data would be used solely for academic purposes and retained for only six (6) months before being permanently deleted or destroyed. In the event of a breach or unauthorized disclosure, the researcher committed to indemnify the data subject, who may pursue legal or equitable remedies. To promote methodological rigor and transparency, a comprehensive Research Documentation Plan was implemented. This included maintaining a reflexive journal to account for researcher bias and positionality, preserving an audit trail of research decisions and processes, and conducting member checking to allow participants to verify the accuracy of transcriptions and thematic interpretations. Collectively, these ethical measures ensured respect for autonomy, confidentiality, and data integrity throughout the research process. To ensure transparency, trustworthiness, and accountability throughout the research process, a comprehensive research documentation plan was implemented. Each interview was audio-recorded with the participants' consent and transcribed verbatim, providing the primary data source for analysis. The researcher also maintained a reflexive journal to record personal insights, emerging observations, and methodological decisions, which helped enhance the credibility and reflexivity of the study. In addition, an audit trail was established by systematically documenting every stage of the research process from data collection and coding to theme development and interpretation ensuring dependability and confirmability. To validate the findings, member checking was conducted, allowing participants to review and confirm the accuracy of their transcriptions and the thematic representations of their experiences.

2.8 Research Documentation Plan

To ensure transparency, trustworthiness, and accountability throughout the research process, a comprehensive Research Documentation Plan was implemented. Each interview was audio-recorded with the participants' consent and transcribed verbatim, providing the primary data source for analysis. The researcher also maintained a reflexive journal to record personal insights, emerging observations, and methodological decisions, which helped enhance the credibility and reflexivity of the study. In addition, an audit trail was established by systematically documenting every stage of the research process from data collection and coding to theme development and interpretation ensuring dependability and confirmability. To validate the findings, member checking was conducted, allowing participants to review and confirm the accuracy of their transcriptions and the thematic representations of their experiences.

2.9 Trustworthiness

To establish the study's trustworthiness, the researcher utilized techniques such as member checking and triangulation to verify the accuracy and consistency of the findings across various data sources and interpretations. Credibility was enhanced by maintaining a comprehensive audit trail, which documented every phase of the research process from data collection to analysis allowing for transparency and replication. Furthermore, dependability was achieved by rigorously applying the same methods and procedures throughout the study to ensure consistency. The study also emphasized the right to withdraw, making it clear to participants that they could choose to cease participation at any time without any consequences, thereby further reinforcing the ethical integrity and authenticity of the research process.

2.10 Reflexivity

The researcher engaged in reflexivity by critically examining their own prejudices, values, and assumptions, and by considering how these factors might have influenced the research process and interpretation of data. A detailed reflexive journal was maintained, documenting evolving thoughts, experiences, and potential biases throughout the study. This reflective practice focused particularly on how the researcher's background and perspective may have shaped interactions with participants. Through continuous self-awareness and

acknowledgment of positionality, the researcher aimed to minimize personal bias, strengthen the authenticity of the findings, and uphold ethical standards, including respecting each participant's right to withdraw at any stage of the research.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the lived experiences of physical education (PE) teachers in the Philippines towards societal standard norms. The data, gathered through semi-structured interviews, was analyzed using thematic analysis, revealing three primary themes aligned with the study's objectives: experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms. Each theme is supported by significant participant narratives and grounded in contemporary academic literature.

3.1 Lived Experiences of Physical Education Teachers toward Societal Standard Norms.

The lived experiences of physical education teachers reflect how societal standard norms influence their professional identity and teaching practices. These teachers often face pressures to align with societal ideals while promoting physical health and well-being. Their experiences provide valuable insights into the challenges of navigating societal standard norms in both their personal and professional lives. This lived experience aligns with Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), suggesting that PE teachers are vulnerable to internalizing the gaze of others, leading to body dissatisfaction and emotional distress. The societal expectation of being a 'walking role model' adds psychological pressure and influences how teachers engage in their roles.

Theme 1: Expectations

PE teachers are perceived as physical embodiments of fitness, which intensifies societal standard pressure on their appearance. According to Swami et al. (2020), this expectation can contribute to chronic body monitoring and lowered self-worth, especially in professions where the body is central to occupational identity. For Filipino educators, these pressures are magnified by cultural norms linking authority and professionalism with physical appearance (Santos et al., 2021). Participants described feeling obligated to maintain a lean and athletic body, believing it affects how they are evaluated by peers, students, and administrators. Their roles as health exemplars placed them under continual visual scrutiny, leading to internalized pressure to meet external ideals.

Significant Statement 1: "Society expects physical education teachers to maintain a lean and athletic body type." (Society expected na physical education teachers has to maintain a lean and athletic body type no.)—TP7.

Significant Statement 2: "Expectations to PE teachers to focus on having a lean, muscular body." (Expectations to PE teachers to focus on having a lean, muscular body) – TP8.

Significant Statement 3: "As a PE teacher, I feel like my appearance is under constant scrutiny, even from students and colleagues." (As a PE teacher, I felt that my appearance is under constant scrutiny and judgement, even from students and colleagues.) – TP1.

3.2 Challenges Faced by PE Teachers towards Societal Standards Pressures.

Physical education (PE) teachers face significant challenges due to societal standard pressures, which can affect their professional identity and self-esteem. These pressures often stem from societal expectations of physical appearance, influencing how PE teachers are perceived by students and colleagues. As role models for physical health, they must balance personal body image struggles while encouraging students to embrace fitness and self-acceptance. This reflects Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), in which individuals

evaluate their self-worth based on others' attributes. Such comparisons intensify self-objectification and diminish perceived competence, particularly in appearance-centered professions like PE. As confirmed by Santos et al. (2021), this often results in avoidance behaviors, such as reducing physical visibility in class.

Theme 2: Diffidence

While professional development and awareness may prepare teachers, the actual practice of aligning with societal expectations can be overwhelming. Teachers often struggle to balance personal health, self-perception, and professional image amid ongoing comparison and unrealistic ideals (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2020; Swami et al., 2020). Many teachers shared that persistent comparison with colleagues or fitness influencers led to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. These perceptions negatively affected their confidence and sometimes their willingness to participate in physical demonstrations or events.

Significant Statement 1: "I compare myself to other teachers who seem more physically fit, and it makes me question if I'm good enough." (I compare myself to other teachers who seem more physically fit, and it makes me question if I'm good enough)– TP6.

Significant Statement 2: "When I compare myself to other PE teachers, I feel something is wrong with me." (When I compare myself to other PE teachers, I feel something is wrong with me.)– TP6.

Significant Statement 3: "I see others who are fitter, and it makes me think I'm not doing enough." (I see others who are fitter, and it makes me think I'm not doing enough) – TP3.

3.3 The Coping Mechanism of the PE Teachers use towards Societal Standard Norms

Physical education teachers cope with societal standard norms by promoting body positivity and self-acceptance among their students. They often focus on encouraging healthy lifestyles and fitness rather than appearance-based ideals, helping students embrace diverse body types. To manage these pressures themselves, some PE teachers turn to personal coping strategies such as mindfulness practices or seeking support from colleagues, fostering a positive and inclusive environment in their classrooms. This shows evidence of active coping and professional adjustment. Teachers redefined their roles to reflect realistic, inclusive values rather than aspirational appearance standards.

Theme 3: Adjustment

Despite these challenges, teachers employ various strategies to cope with societal expectations. As Tylka and Wood-Barcalow (2020) suggest, shifting focus from aesthetics to functionality can promote a healthier body image and improve teaching efficacy. Teachers described modifying their teaching methods, prioritizing student engagement over physical demonstration, and reframing success through health-centered rather than appearance-based goals.

Significant Statement 1: "I try to be a role model for health, not perfection." (I try to be a role model for health, not perfection)– TP8.

Significant Statement 2: "These forces affected my confidence and self-perception, but acknowledging them has helped me shift my focus toward my skills, health, and the positive influence I have on my students". (These forces affected my confidence and self-perception, but acknowledging them has helped me shift my focus toward my skills, health, and the positive influence I have on my students.)-TP8.

Significant Statement 3: "I respond it by focusing on my personal fitness goal rather than what other people expect" (Occasionally I compare myself to others. I respond by focusing on my personal fitness goal rather than what other people expect.)-TP7.

3.4 Resilient Behaviours PE Teachers Exhibit in Overcoming Societal Standards Norms.

Physical education teachers exhibit resilient behaviours in overcoming societal standard norms by embracing diversity and focusing on holistic well-being. Modelling self-confidence and body positivity, encouraging students to value fitness and health over appearance. By creating inclusive environments and fostering open dialogue, PE teachers demonstrate resilience, turning societal pressures into opportunities for empowerment and positive change within their classrooms. This theme aligns with Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior, where changes in belief and self-perception influence intentions and behavior. The development of self-compassion and advocacy demonstrates professional growth and resilience in the face of appearance-based pressures.

Theme 4: Resilience

While societal standard norm expectations may lead to negative outcomes, many teachers demonstrate resilience by consciously rejecting societal standard norms and choosing to emphasize self-acceptance and advocacy for body diversity (Swami et al., 2020). Participants described a transformative process in which they moved from internalizing judgment to promoting inclusive and empowering practices. They began encouraging students and themselves to embrace health and functionality over physical aesthetics.

Significant Statement 1: "I realized that perfection is unattainable, and it's more important to be confident in who I am." (I realized that perfection is unattainable, and it's more important to be confident in who I am.)—TP4.

Significant Statement 2: "By recognizing that nobody has a perfect body. I think acceptance is the key. It's either personal, cultural or social" (By recognizing that nobody has a perfect body. I think acceptance is the key. It's either personal, cultural or social.)—TP5.

Significant Statement 3: "I now focus on promoting self-acceptance and body positivity to my students." (I now focus on promoting self-acceptance and body positivity to my students)—TP5.

4. Conclusion

This study uncovered the nuanced and often unspoken realities faced by physical education teachers as they confront societal standard norms expectations. The lived experiences of participants revealed how deeply rooted norms around physical appearance influence not only personal identity but also perceptions of professional credibility. Teachers consistently reported feeling scrutinized expected to exemplify the "ideal" physique, regardless of their pedagogical effectiveness. Amid these pressures, teachers encounter significant challenges including constant comparison, self-doubt, lack of institutional support, and the emotional burden of conforming to narrow standards. These obstacles have real consequences affecting their confidence, participation, and even the way they design and deliver instruction.

Yet, within these constraints, PE teachers exhibit remarkable action. Many employ coping mechanisms such as modifying teaching methods, setting personal health-based goals, and fostering inclusive environments. Over time, this leads to a more resilient attitude, where teachers actively reject societal standard ideals and instead embrace authenticity, functionality, and advocacy for body positivity. In essence, PE teachers are not passive recipients of societal judgment they are active agents reshaping the narrative. Their voices highlight the urgent need for schools and education systems to re-evaluate how societal standard norms are reinforced and to implement policies that prioritize mental health, equity, and inclusive professionalism. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how cultural expectations intersect with education and offer a call to action for systemic change.

5. Recommendation

It is recommended that educational institutions implement comprehensive mental health support programs

and body positivity training as integral components of professional development for physical education (PE) teachers, helping them effectively cope with societal standard norms. These programs should address self-esteem enhancement, resilience-building, and stress management techniques, empowering teachers to navigate the complex relationship between body image and their professional roles. Moreover, schools should foster an inclusive and supportive environment that prioritizes holistic health and functionality, ensuring that both teachers and students are encouraged to reject superficial beauty standards in favor of mental and physical well-being, thereby creating a more positive and sustainable approach to fitness education.

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8. Bio Note

Jonh Paul Inte is a dedicated graduate school student at Leyte Normal University, currently pursuing a degree in Master of Arts in Education-Physical Education. With a deep commitment to advancing educational practices, his research primarily explores the intersections of pedagogy, student engagement, and curriculum development. He is particularly focused on implementing innovative teaching strategies that foster critical thinking and promote inclusive learning environments. As an educator and researcher, Jonh Paul is passionate about addressing the unique challenges within the educational system, striving to create learning spaces that are both supportive and transformative. Through his work, he seeks to empower students and communities, advocating for education that is not only effective but also equitable and accessible to all.

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