

DENIED CURIOSITY: WHEN NEGLECTED CHILDHOOD FAVORS THE RISK OF SEXUAL ABUSE

A CURIOSIDADE DENEGADA: QUANDO A INFÂNCIA NEGLIGENCIADA FAVORECE O RISCO AO ABUSO SEXUAL

CURIOSIDAD DENEGADA: CUANDO LA INFANCIA DESCUIDADA FAVORECE EL RIESGO DE ABUSO SEXUAL

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ABSTRACT: For this work, we adopted the analysis methodology based on a bibliography on child sexual abuse, a theme that contains within itself the ambivalence of being taboo and urgent. Taboo, for being prohibited and surrounded by secrets, discrimination, prejudice and urgent, since it is necessary to provide adequate spaces, ethical and scientifically supported, given the growing and accentuated occurrence of this mode of rape and violence against children. We aim to analyze the importance of Child Sexual Education, so that its work in school education is combined with a legitimate and socially responsible device⁴ as a contribution to the fight against child sexual abuse.

KEYWORDS: Education. Sexuality. Childhood. Violence. Coping.

RESUMO: Para o presente trabalho adotamos a metodologia de análise a partir de bibliografia sobre o abuso sexual infantil, tema que encerra em si mesmo a ambivalência de ser tabu e urgente. Tabu, por ser proibido e cercado de segredos, discriminação, preconceito e urgente, pois se faz necessária a disponibilização de espaços adequados, éticos e cientificamente respaldados, dada a crescente e acentuada ocorrência deste modo de violação e violência contra a infância. Temos por objetivo analisar a importância de uma Educação

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⁴ A decidedly heterogeneous set that includes speeches, institutions, architectural organizations, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, philanthropic propositions. In short, what is said and what is not said are the elements of the device. The device is the network that can be woven between these elements (FOUCAULT, 2000, p. 244, our translation).

Sexual infantil e que, seu trabalho na educação escolar se alie como dispositivo legitimado e socialmente responsável como contribuição ao enfrentamento do abuso sexual infantil.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Educação. Sexualidade. Infância. Violência. Enfrentamento.*

RESUMEN: *Para el presente trabajo adoptamos la metodología de análisis basada en una bibliografía sobre abuso sexual infantil, tema que contiene en sí mismo la ambivalencia de ser tabú y urgente. Tabú, por estar prohibido y rodeado de secretos, discriminación, prejuicio y urgencia, ya que es necesario brindar espacios adecuados, éticos y sustentados científicamente, dada la creciente y acentuada ocurrencia de esta modalidad de violación y violencia contra los niños. Nuestro objetivo es analizar la importancia de la Educación Sexual Infantil y que su labor en la educación escolar se alie como un dispositivo legítimo y socialmente responsable como un aporte a la lucha contra el abuso sexual infantil.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Educación. Sexualidad. Infancia. Violencia. Albardilla.*

Introduction

Over the years, several actions have been taken to consolidate an instrument to protect and confront the most varied forms of child violence, including in this range of possibilities sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and adolescents. Sexual violence is a crime against human dignity, and it is a complex issue that society as a whole has yet to resolve. It is worth mentioning that we have laws and legislations planned to guide the treatment of children and adolescents, being aware of these legal provisions can contribute to improving the protection network to face sexual violence and child sexual exploitation. In order to understand the problem of the subject, we have to go into a historical perspective about the way Brazilian society sees and treats children and adolescents (SANTOS, 2011).

Brazilian legislation can be an instrument to combat sexual violence, so we understand the importance of having a consolidated base in the legal sphere with regard to mechanisms for confronting violence. In Brazil, social and political movements regarding the protection of children and adolescents began to gain notoriety in mid-1988, however there was already international pressure for better treatment of childhood, legislation was created in order to better clarify what the rights of children and teenagers.

Highlighting the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights, although the text does not bring out the specificity of the child, it states the following position in its Article 5, “No one will be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment” (BRASIL, 1948, our translation). Although the declaration does not have a general law value, it has a political burden that is considered, in view of the history that led to the need for its creation.

Still at the international level, precisely ten years after the promulgation of the declaration of human rights, the Declaration of the Rights of the Child was created in 1959, a document that deals with the protection of children and adolescents. In its 9th principle, the following note stands out: “The child will enjoy protection against any form of neglect, cruelty and exploitation. And will never be the object of trafficking, in any form [...]” (BRASIL, 1990, our translation). Those who think that the existence of laws and declarations about the rights of children and of youth are enough to stop the culture of violence instituted by society along its historical path deceive themselves. Although such documents are important to emphasize respect and dignity in youth, we must consider, if there is a declaration, it is a protection instrument developed by the State for the protection of children and adolescents, this is the result of years of neglect of childhood. Still in the light of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, principle 2 establishes that

the child will enjoy special protection and will be provided with opportunities and facilities, by law and other means, to provide him/her with physical, mental, moral, spiritual, and social development, in a healthy and normal way and under conditions of freedom and dignity. In the institution of laws aiming at this objective, the best interests of the child will be taken into account [...] (BRASIL, 1990, our translation).

Later in 1989, we highlight the Convention on the Rights of the Child, this is a document signed by the countries that belonged to the UN in 1989, representing an advance in terms of a legal subsidy that deals with sexual violence.

Member States shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, abuse or negligent treatment, mistreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while the child is in the custody of the parents, the legal representative or any other person responsible for him/her. Such protective measures should include as appropriate, effective procedures for the design of social programs capable of providing adequate assistance to children and persons in charge of their care, as well as other forms of prevention, for the identification, notification, transfer to an institution, investigation, treatment and subsequent monitoring of the aforementioned cases of child abuse and, as the case may be, for judicial intervention [...]

Member States undertake the commitment to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse. In this regard, Member States shall, specially, take all measures of a national, bilateral, and multilateral nature that are necessary to prevent

- a) The incentive or coercion for the child to engage in any illegal sexual activity
- b) Child exploitation in prostitution or other illegal sexual practices
- c) Child exploitation in pornographic shows or materials (BRASIL, 1990 Art. 19, 34, our translation).

In Brazil, in 1988, it was sanctioned by the then President of the Republic the Federal Constitution, the document brings in its text an important legal contribution, the text suggests recommendations for the treatment of childhood and the responsibility for the care of this category in a comprehensive way, considering that this is in line with the other international documents prepared and presented here. Thus, in the Constitution, it is evident that

Art. 227 - it is the duty of the family, society and the State to guarantee for children, adolescents and young people, with absolute priority, the right to life, health, food, education, leisure, professionalization, culture, dignity, respect, freedom and family and community coexistence, besides putting them safe from all forms of negligence, discrimination, exploitation, violence, cruelty and oppression (BRASIL, 1988, our translation).

After the creation of the Federal Constitution, we have the elaboration of the Child and Adolescent Statute (ECA), which succeeded the old Mello de Matos Code that was in force until then as a set of rules and conducts for the treatment of children and adolescents, emphasizing although that this was subject of constant criticism for its oppressive and punitive character, the Doctrine of Irregular Protection, since it was only concerned with punishing the crimes committed by the “juvenile offenders”. After the creation of ECA, the Integral Doctrine was consolidated, which became an international reference for the protection of children and adolescents. As a result of an alliance of several public sectors, concomitant to the interests of Civil Society and with the collaboration of several specialists, ECA resignified and expanded the principle of integral “protection” for children and adolescents. In its Art. 5 it specifies that “No child or adolescent will be object of any form of negligence, discrimination, exploitation, violence, cruelty, oppression, being punished in the form of the law, any attack, by action or omission, to their fundamental rights” (BRASIL, 1990, our translation).

Methodology

To prepare this academic article, we started from the qualitative analysis “[...] the qualitative approach delves into the world of the meanings of human actions and relations, a side that is not perceptible and cannot be captured in equations, averages, and statistics” (MINAYO, 2003, p. 22, our translation). We carried out a survey of the bibliography, because “the bibliographic research comprises: the choice of the subject, elaboration of the work plan, identification, location, compilation, file, analysis and interpretation, writing” (MEDEIROS, 2000, p. 40-42, our translation). We raised studies carried out with the theme of education,

sexuality, gender, and violence against children. Thus, we recognize that both in current legislation and in academic works, these themes, in recent years, are often of interest to the most diverse professionals and researchers, providing the possibility of understanding them from various perspectives, confirming the current nature of the theme, justifying our interest in the themes, especially, starting from violence against children and linking their many intersections with the others listed above.

Development

Curiosity, this feminine noun whose substance is, according to the website Dicio, the “quality of what has a great desire to know, to know something new or unknown” (our translation), this important driving force of and for human skills has been increasingly disciplined, not in the sense of a school education geared to the formation of autonomous people and aware of their social responsibility, but, rather, to the conditioning by didactic material and the interests of the institutional political-pedagogical project. In other words, the recognition of curiosity as a catalyst for the learning process is directly proportional to its conformation to the school didactic project. This is configured in a restriction of the child's spontaneous movement towards the world, in the discovery of the world, of the society in which it is inscribed, similarly portrayed in the collective space of the school and, also, in the understanding of itself as protagonist part of its relationship with the performativities and discursivities of school agents (from all school professionals, from cleaning to management, especially teachers, with whom they spend most of their time at school) although not only these - after all, are also part of their relationships: family nuclei, colleagues, friendships, etc. Paying attention only to the school system, it is as if the pedagogical availability were, a priori, addressed to listening, responding, teaching, interacting, giving privileged attention to what does not part, undermine, break with the ideal of behavior desired by school agents.

This 'addressed availability' of educators ends up corrupting the subtle and, at the same time, powerful teaching-learning relationship, because it hierarchizes in categories, not only the subjects and themes to be worked on, but also discriminates 'who is who' in the student body. In this voluntary exercise of subsumption, the didactic-pedagogical relationship is capable to delegitimize the child's spontaneous curiosity, especially when it exposes the teacher's insecurity in a certain theme(s) and, when embarrassing him, he often assumes, the attitude of one who listens in a way of not having heard, sees in the way of not having to perceive, deviates from the subject or does not respond satisfactorily to the way of having answered, thus denying

the child's curiosity. This reality is very evident when the subject is sexuality, considered a taboo subject for many people and treated and/or exercised with casualness by many others. Maia (2005, p. 121, our translation), says

Every child is very curious. We tend to stimulate this curiosity when it comes to issues such as nature, language, history etc., but we don't when it comes to sexuality. Why? Because this is a subject that inhibits adults a lot and they think it would be better if it were forgotten! However, for children, curiosity about sex is a fact, since it is a topic that naturally arouses curiosity [...].

The discomfort of a considerable part of teachers with the theme of sexuality is so evident that the solution commonly adopted in schools is to associate the teaching of the human body and its transformations with two areas of knowledge: biology and physical education. From the pedagogical point of view, this association is evident because these two fields of knowledge are also used, in addition to the peculiarities related to life, its consequences, development, reproduction and potential. Still, according to that author,

Questions such as the birth of babies, the differences between boys and girls, the sensations caused by touching the genitals, or facts such as the courtship of the older brother and the kiss seen in the novel, draw the attention of the child who feels compelled to seek answers for your questions (MAIA, 2005, p. 121, our translation).

Respecting the opportune distinctions between them, which are not confused, but rather complement each other, at least as far as the human species are concerned, they are responsible for observing this same phenomenon of the human body from important perspectives, but which do not account for this totality, for expressing themselves, this phenomenon, at other discursive and performative levels and sublevels, as scientific development has been proven.

It is evident, in the words of Augustuni and Rossi (2015, p. 1624, our translation), that due to the

authors of education, sociology, psychiatry, and psychology, from the end of the 19th century, in their studies, such as Vygotsky, Montessori, Freinet, Freud, among others, have already started a great discussion expanding knowledge about psychic, affective, social and sexual aspects beyond the biological aspect, each one with its peculiarities [...].

The union between the rational and the emotional, as proposed, goes against the hegemonic culture aimed at prioritizing the world of work, production, and consumption, thus forcing society, through the massification of pragmatic and reifying values, to dynamize it is analogous to a mechanical device and the school, as a device referenced to the disciplined

acculturation of bodies, is driven by a similar logic. That is, the entire school system is structured in its organization, didactics, resources, among others, to reproduce, in the very sense of the term, not only the adequacy of bodies to hegemonic culture, but also as a legitimate space for maintaining the *status quo*. In this sense, school education in the service of market interest works to condition human capital that fulfills, available and disciplined, with the functions assigned to it. Augustuni and Rossi (2015, p. 1629, our translation), help to elucidate this dynamic assuming that

Currently, schools have hardly changed their conceptions about the moral conduct they wish to conquer, or rather, develop coercively in their students. In this way, freedom of expression finds no space to manifest itself, compromising the experience of pleasures and desires that could be fully experienced, were it not for the conditioning exercised by society in search of politically acceptable civilizing standards.

In the current context, few schools are insubordinate to this logic. Nevertheless, education, which goes beyond the space and practices inscribed within institutions, takes place within societies, cultures, families. Since birth, the baby begins to receive care according to the symbolic repertoire of its caregivers. From the manipulation of the baby's body to the words directed to him/her, from the clothes to the decoration of the room, communication, contact, all interaction, in short, the *modus vivendi* experienced with this new being and member of the family nucleus occurs according to the symbolic repertoire referring to this same new being. Lucifora, Reina, Muzzeti and Silva (2005, p. 1397-1398, our translation), write that

Gomes (2006) assumes *Habitus* as the learning that occurs from the first moments of life and can start even before the birth of the subject, with the social aspirations that are formed from the discovery of the baby's sex. The family institution with its values and beliefs builds positive and negative behaviors from early childhood, using subtle and refined means in the naturalizations that permeate the primary *habitus*.

In the words of Fernandes, Reina e Mokwa (2005, p. 1666, our translation)

From the moment a woman becomes pregnant, a sexual education begins with the anxiety to distinguish sex, [in] principle. After this definition, a world of possibilities is created, such as the name to be given, the color of the room, the appearance, in short, a new life already previously defined, or better said, heteronormatively defined.

There are pre-established decoration models for girls and boys. The colors, the cartoon themes, the toys, the way to educate each gender, the princess and the “male stallion”, is still perpetuated in our century.

Still by these same authors (FERNANDES; REINA; MOKWA 2005, p. 1667) it is possible to understand in an analogous way that the *modus vivendi*, to which we refer and of which the symbolic repertoire is immanent, finds in Bourdieu's habitus (2007) appropriate expression because

The *habitus*, the product of a historical acquisition, is what allows the appropriation of the historical legacy. [...] The inherited heir, appropriate to the inheritance, has no need to want, that is, to deliberate, choose and consciously decide, to do what is appropriate, what is in the interests of the inheritance, of its conservation and of its magnification. Strictly speaking, he may not even know what he does or says and, nevertheless, end up doing or saying exactly according to the requirements of perpetuation of the inheritance.

In other words, the performativities and discursivities inscribed in each culture will find more immediate development in the same culture in which they are inscribed. This phenomenon of acculturation in the mediatized society has multiple resources that can be used to access the largest number of people and without necessarily being limited to borders or territorial limits when connected to the internet. The ease of access to culture or, better, to cultures, virtually unlimited, favors contact, real and/or virtual, with the many faces of itself and in its plurality. Ease of access to the plurality of the many faces of culture, understood as a product and conveniently made possible by market interest, exposes this same society to mass culture, of fast consumption and without greater intellectual demands for its appreciation.

In the daily life of a culture still deeply marked since its colonial birth by machismo, sexism, misogyny, and racism, we have as one of the possible results what Lucifora, Reina, Muzzeti e Silva (2005, p. 1396-1397, our translation) well describe when they reflect

about how gender inequalities reinvent themselves socially and culturally so that they often assume ideological strategies so strong that they are easily impossible to recognize. [...].

Studies in the field of education, culture and society point to an unequal context in Brazil, regarding relations between genders and, starting with family formation, ends up advancing through several other institutions such as school, church, hospital, media etc., who continue to prune more just and egalitarian relationships between different subjects.

Gonini and Ribeiro (2014) point out, in the historiography of Sexual Education in Brazil, that exacerbated machismo and naturalization of female submission weighs on relations in this context. It is possible to recognize various forms of subjugation of women, which results in a high rate of violence against women and various social justifications as if they deserved such violence. There are many daily reports of women suffering sexual abuse by strangers and relatives, being assaulted by their partners or for saying no to a man, for what they wear, for the work they do and various other reasons that put them in a situation of insecurity and suffering.

The same culture capable of producing in its midst the many faces of machismo and its unfolding, is also capable of producing femism in whose unfolding lies its meaning, namely: antonym of machismo in the sense, now it is women against men, oppression operated against men. This apparent reversal of the social framework, even if circumstantial and restrict, was quickly assimilated by the cultural industry under the mask of historical reparation, and proposed as if its legitimacy was directly proportional to the similarity with the oppression suffered by female bodies over time. This phenomenon of femism finds neither support nor parallel with feminism for which the empowerment of female bodies is in the historical repair guided by gender equity in all fields of social and human relations. In music, cartoons, series, films etc., it is possible to find many of these examples whose female protagonists demonstrate developments like those of male protagonists. The arts favor us in contact with the sociocultural dynamism embedded in the societies in which they are developed.

It turns out that this dynamism is both a cause and a consequence of the tensioning of the social fabric, in fact, it presents itself to us as violence, commonly spilling over the symbolic field and materializing in many performances and discursivities that reiterate the *status quo* very well placed by Bourdieu (2014 *apud* LUCIFORA; REINA; MUZZETI; SILVA, 2005, p. 1398-1402, our translation)

The constitutive divisions of the social order and, more precisely, the social relations of domination and exploitation that are instituted between genders are thus progressively inscribed in two different classes of habitus, in the form of opposite and complementary body *hexis* and principles of vision and division, which lead to classifying all things in the world and all practices according to reducible distinctions between male and female.

Male domination thus finds all the conditions for its full exercise. The primacy universally granted to men is affirmed in the objectivity of social structures and productive activities, based on a sexual division of biological and social production and reproduction work, which gives men the best part, as well as in the schemes immanent to all, the *habitus* shaped by such conditions, therefore objectively agreed, they function as members of society, as historical transcendentals that being universally shared, impose themselves on each agent as transcendent.

Still in the words of Bourdieu (2007 *apud* FERNANDES; REINA; MOKWA, 2005, p. 1668-1669, our translation)

When powers are unevenly distributed, instead of showing themselves as a universe of possibilities equally accessible to any subject - positions to be occupied, studies to be done, markets to be conquered, goods to be consumed, properties to be exchanged, etc. - the economic and social world presents itself as a marked out universe, sown by injunctions and prohibitions, by signs of appropriation and exclusion, by mandatory meanings or insurmountable

barriers, in a word, profoundly differentiated, especially on the degree to which it proposes stable and competitive opportunities to favor and fulfill stable expectations. Under its different species, capital is a set of preemptive rights over the future, guaranteeing to some the monopoly of certain possibilities that, however, are officially guaranteed to all (such as the right to education).

We underestimate education when we believe it is limited, in its know-how, to the institutional environment. However, it is in this field of pedagogy as a reflected educational process that there is an extraordinary source to be explored in the most diverse sectors of human knowledge, and sexuality is part of this inexhaustible range. We know that learning is so much more efficient as significant is the knowledge to be experienced and the modes of that experience favors the intelligibility of the learner. Lucifora, Reina, Muzzeti e Silva (2005, p. 1397, our translation), explain to us that

It is necessary to reflect on the bases that anchor this sexist context and thus clarify the symbolic constructions marked by the sex of the subjects, which continue as arbitrary throughout their lives. Men and women are constructed in different ways since they are recognized as sex; constructions are reinforced throughout life, forming a social recognition and naturalization with a very well-defined delimitation.

The dominant ideology takes care to naturalize relations as if they were organically distinct between men and women; that which, due to a social maintenance initiated in the family and reinforced by other institutions, remains throughout history and culture as a biological data inherent to individuals.

From the foregoing, we recognize that there are innumerable overwhelming evidences of feedback from the *modus operandi* and *modus vivendi* in operation at the many performative and discursive levels to maintain the hegemonic face of our culture, in the family bosom and of the institutions, in short, in the varied relations proper to human societies competing with other performativities and discursivities willing to dialogue about these same and equally possible faces that, by minority interests, in operation, subvert the massified logic inscribed in this same culture. And it is in this intersection that the field favorable to sexual education in the first school years is, with special attention to the respective representatives of two of the links in this chain, the school device and children.

Children have at least three characteristics of their development that are interesting to the educational process: initial acculturation, neuronal plasticity and curiosity. These three characteristic elements temper childhood predisposing to receive new information with less resistance than a young person, adult or mature. In a similar way to the fertile ground that receives the seeds, favoring their germination, the child opens more easily to the new, to what

provokes and sharpens his/her curiosity, desire and will. The school system is responsible for generous solicitude, just as the farmer who, aware of his responsibility in relation to the land he cultivates, is willing to take care of it, understanding that the success of the harvest does not depend entirely on himself, as he leans against the rocking chair placed balcony and contemplate the vastness of its lands, it will be sure way for the empty silo.

The responsibility of the school system to favor mediated contact, scientifically grounded and ethically supported in its practices with regard to the theme of sexuality, concerns not only the appropriation of information about genders and their social relations, but the acculturation in favor of the child's recognition by itself in the midst of the complexity of social relations and, also, of its violating face. Educating in sexuality is also to favor the child's body's recognition by the child itself and its limits and the limits of the other in relation to it. Sex education, especially in childhood, favors that the child understands the importance of the limit in, and of, the intervention of the adult in the relation with the infantile body. In the words of Sánchez and Pérez (1996 *apud* MAIA, 2005, p. 146-147, our translation)

Children are easy victims because they just lack the information and skills to help them defend themselves in time. We think that a long time has already been waited to act, now we cannot allow the silence to continue; the victims are already too many. Why offer Sex Education and thus prevent child sexual abuse? It is time to talk about how babies are born, how girls are different from boys, what sexual abuse is like and how to say no to abuse. Do not allow strangers to teach children in a biased or wrong way something so delicate... do not wait for your son or daughter to be the victim of sexual abuse before seeking this type of help or if it has already occurred, it will happen again if there is no prevention.

On this subject Maia (2005, p. 147-148, our translation) says

It is risky to say that it is entirely possible to prevent sexual abuse from occurring, but it is certainly desirable and necessary. Parents and educators should talk to their children and students, clarifying what sexual abuse is. It would be great if we did not have to talk about it, or about sexually transmitted diseases and other bad consequences related to sexuality, but it is wrong to omit these things from children, because if they have clarification they have a good chance of avoiding it.

The big challenge is to make children better able to identify the abuse situation as an inappropriate situation. This eventually happens only too late, since the abuser, in general, is a known person, who can seduce and deceive the child. How can a child understand sexual abuse as wrong when it happens with someone known, trusted, and loved? How, then, to prevent sexual abuse?

Some key elements are present in practically all situations of abuse: the touch, which is not always unwanted by the child (it must be remembered that a child also takes pleasure when someone touches his/her genitals), and especially, threats and requests for secrecy. It is necessary to guide them and teach them

to differentiate an open dialogue about sex from an unwanted touch from an older person or an adult, followed by threats and requests for secrecy.

Final considerations

Thus, the challenge faced daily in the fight against child sexual abuse is clear and it is unlikely to be successful without the responsible and ethical cooperation of the school, family or guardians and children, as the school can collaborate to facilitate contact by the family and children with this taboo theme that needs to be talked about: sexuality. As our objective in this article is to analyze the contribution of Child Sexual Education, we believe that we have made some contributions possible for the reflection of this important theme.

Given the above and given the complexity of the theme of child sexual abuse, understood here as all genital, anal or breast caress and manipulation for sexual purposes, without or with penetration, as well as voyeurism, exhibitionism aiming at the sexual gratification of an adult or young person (older than the child), it is important to remember that the abuser and/or rapist is usually a member of the family or person with whom the child lives or even someone who frequents the family circle. So, this reality is closer than you can imagine. For this reason, ethically responsible and socially critical sex education should start as soon as possible and, better, with the involvement of the whole community, families and etc., participating in this favorable process at the same time by the child's self-perception and self-care, for adequately qualifying the conversations on this taboo theme in our culture and for providing an opportune space to express the anxieties of those responsible.

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