

Spousal Abuse in Nicholas Spark's *Safe Haven*

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ABSTRACT

Kevin Tierney is the male main character in *Safe Haven* who does spousal abuse toward his wife, Erin. The analysis is on what spousal abusive behavior is and what the effects of the spousal abuse are in Nicholas Spark's *Safe Haven*. The concept of spousal abuse proposed by Tina de Benedictis, Ph. D. is applied to reveal the spousal abuse done by Kevin and its effects on his spouse, Erin. In this research, I discover that Kevin does spousal abuse toward Erin that categorized into seven which are physical abuse, sexual abuse, destruction of property, verbal abuse, economic abuse, social isolation, and psychological abuse. Furthermore, Kevin's abusive behaviors cause several effects on Erin that are categorized into four which are physical effects, psychological effects, social effects, and economic effects.

Key words: Spousal Abuse, Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse, Destruction of Property, Verbal Abuse, Economic Abuse, Social Isolation, Psychological Abuse

Safe Haven, a novel written by Nicholas Sparks, is popular in America, especially in United States, since 2010. *Safe Haven* has been sold for million copies and translated into several languages. In 2012, *Safe Haven* is also adapted into a movie with the same title. *Safe Haven* movie is launched on February 14, 2013. *Safe Haven* is so popular for it represents what happens in North American families. Nicholas Sparks, as the writer of *Safe Haven*, comes up with the topic of spousal abuse in this novel.

First, in this paper, I would discuss about the abusive behaviors done by the male main character in *Safe Haven* – Kevin – toward his wife, Erin. I would talk about the spousal abuse done by Kevin in seven categories. After that, I would discover the effects of spousal abuse suffered by Erin as the victim.

Tina de Benedictis, Ph. D., Jaelline Jaffe, Ph. D., and Jeanne Segal, Ph. D. formulized their concept for American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress (AAETS). Spousal abuse is a unique case that is different from the other abuse forms since it happens between two persons that are romantic in their nature but the fact shows that one of them dominates and takes control over the other. De Benedictis, Ph. D., et all provided seven types of spousal abuse which are physical abuse, sexual abuse, destruction of property and pets, verbal abuse, economic abuse, isolation, and psychological abuse. They also said that sometimes the division of these types of abuse might be fluid.

The first type of spousal abuse is physical abuse. Physical abuse consists of trivial contacts which are “pushing, slapping, pinching, punching, kicking, biting, tripping, throwing, choking, breaking bones, and the use of weapons such as guns or knives”. Next, sexual abuse happens when the batterer forces the victim to do unwanted sexual intercourse and other sexual activities.

Destruction of property and pets is the third type of abuse. This abuse is done by the batterer in order to cause fear to the victim by randomly destructing things, especially those who have personal values to the victim. After that, verbal abuse is an abuse done through words and way of communicating. There are several kinds of verbal abuse such as withholding, making jokes, trivializing, judging and criticizing, blocking and diverting the conversation, yelling, nagging, calling stupid, talking to as a child, ridiculing appearance, telling the victim is stupid or ugly or dumb, calling names, telling the victim that no one else would want her, constantly putting-downs, threatening to kill, and belittling important things accomplished by the victim. The batterer does verbal abuse to underestimate the victim.

Next, economic abuse means financial control to keep the victim powerless and depend on the batterer. The batterer becomes the only financial source in the household so that he has the power to control it. Some applicable examples of economic abuse are such as putting all bills in the victim's name, the victim's paycheck became the batterer's, destroying belongings the victim worked for, the batterers controlled the checkbook, the victim had to account for every penny, the batterer gave not enough money for groceries, the victim was not allowed to work, and there is no money of the victim's; and all of these done without any agreement from the victim. The sixth type of abuse is isolation. The batterer isolates the victim from the neighborhood and her friends and family in order to "set the stage" so that the victim will not have any "emotional supports" and "reality checks".

The last type of abuse is psychological abuse. The batterer does psychological abuse through many things include constant verbal abuse, harassment, excessive possessiveness, isolating woman from friends and family, "deprivation of physical and economic resources", and destruction of personal property. As what has been explained before, these abusive behaviors may seem fluid with the other types of abuse. However, we can see the difference from the direct effect of the abuse.

KEVIN'S ABUSIVE BEHAVIORS TOWARD HIS WIFE, ERIN, AND ITS EFFECTS TOWARD HER IN *SAFE HAVEN*

I would examine about Kevin's abusive behaviors toward the female main character, Erin. Based on de Benedictis, Ph. D., et al, there are seven types of abuse that are done by Kevin Tierney, as the male main character, toward Erin, as his wife. After that, in the second part, I would analyze the effects of Kevin's abuse on Erin who is his spouse. Furthermore, *Safe Haven* is focused on the spousal abuse with Kevin is as the batterer and Erin is as the victim of spousal abuse.

KEVIN'S ABUSIVE BEHAVIORS TOWARD HIS WIFE, ERIN

The seven types of abuse done by Kevin are physical abuse, sexual abuse, destruction of property, verbal abuse, economic abuse, social isolation, and psychological abuse.

Physical Abuse

Based on the tools of doing the abuse, I classified Kevin's abusive behaviors into three. In doing the physical abuse, Kevin uses his hands, his feet, and the other equipments toward Erin. At first, Kevin uses his hands to do the physical abuse. Beating his wife is the first physical abuse done by Kevin by using his hands. It is so cold in New England, the city where Kevin Tierney and Erin live, that Erin "turned up the thermostat to make the house warmer" (200). After the bills come and Kevin knows that Erin has turned up the thermostat, Kevin gets so angry that he cannot handle his own emotion. "The first time was a little less than a year after she was married, after he'd beaten her while she was cowering in the corner of the bedroom." (200). Kevin gets angry and beats Erin only because he is driven by his emotion.

Next, slapping Erin's face is also a physical abuse done by Kevin by using his hands. "Opening the freezer, he pulled out a bottle of vodka and a couple of ice cubes. The glass was nearly full by the time he stopped pouring." (152). Kevin drinks not only that glass of vodka but he drinks until several glasses. Then, Kevin comes closer to Erin. "She kissed him with a little tongue knowing he wanted her to, and didn't see the slap coming until she felt the sting against her cheek." (154). Kevin slaps Erin after he has drunk some vodka. It shows that Kevin slaps her when he is under the substance. Kevin picks Erin up from the salon and accompanies her to buy some groceries. Kevin says nothing when they come home. However, after Kevin takes some drink, he suddenly looks for Erin in the kitchen and stands close to Erin.

Punching Erin on the side way is also a physical abuse done by Kevin. When Erin tries to escape for the second time, Kevin runs after her success to catch her in Atlantic City. On the way home, Kevin stops the car on the side of a closed office building only to beat Erin before he continues his driving home. At that night, when they have arrived, Kevin pulled out his gun. "He'd handcuffed her in the backseat of the car on the drive back. He stopped once, pulling the car over to the side of a closed office

building, and beat her; later that night, the gun came out.” (201) Kevin feels that he has no more power when he cannot take control over someone. Thus, when he finally finds Erin, he punches her to make her afraid and to get his power back by abusing his wife.

Next, besides using his hands, Kevin uses his foot to kick Erin’s body. Kicking, slapping, and pulling Erin’s hair is the other physical abuse done by Kevin. Kevin understands that his kicking hurts Erin and makes her escape. “She left because she was tired of getting kicked and punched and thrown down the cellar stairs and he knew he shouldn’t have done those things and he always felt guilty and apologized but it still hadn’t mattered.” (173). Although he feels guilty, he cannot keep himself not to kick Erin.

At last, Kevin uses other equipments to hurt Erin’s body. Burning a house is a physical abuse done by Kevin by using weapon which is fire. Kevin burns house in order to kill Erin who is inside the house. . “Standing by the side of the house, he flicked the lighter and held it against the gas-soaked wall, watching as the wood caught fire.” (328). Kevin burns the house because he is jealous that Erin loves other man. Then, Kevin uses fire as an equipment to threaten his wife. This physical abuse can bring a fatal impact and death toward Erin.

Trying to shoot Erin with gun is the last physical abuse done by Kevin. Kevin also uses his Glock to kill Erin although it is failed. “He was weak now, though, and she managed to hold on. He felt the barrel graze his fingertips and instinctively scrambled for the trigger.” (345). Kevin uses equipment, in this case is a gun, to abuse his wife.

Sexual Abuse

Kevin does the sexual abuse toward Erin in two types of times. The first is after Kevin does the physical abuse toward her. After he hurts Erin physically, Kevin thinks that doing sexual activities means asking forgiveness from Erin. However, Kevin forces Erin to accept his request by forcing her to do the sexual activities with him.

Forcing his wife to do the sexual activities is the first type of sexual abuse done by Kevin. Once, after Kevin hits Erin, he presses Erin’s body against him.

“She inhaled before offering a contented sigh, because she knew he wanted her to make those kinds of sounds.”

“She could feel him pressed against her, knew what he wanted.”

“‘Not here’, she said, leaning her head back letting him continue to kiss her. ‘In the bedroom, okay?’ How about the table? Or on the counter instead?’”

“She panted and moaned and called his name, knowing he wanted her to do those things, because she didn’t want him to be angry, because she didn’t want to be slapped or punched or kicked, because she didn’t want him to know about the phone.” (158-159)

All that Erin does is only to satisfy Kevin’s lust. Erin actually has no willingness to do the sexual activities.

Forcing Erin when she is fragile and powerless is the next sexual abuse done by Kevin. Erin actually is not interested on doing the sexual activities. “‘I should clean the kitchen first.’ ‘You can do it later,’ he said.” “Minutes later, with Kevin moving a top her, she made the sounds he wanted while staring out the window of the bedroom and thinking of other things.” (188). Erin herself pays no attention toward what Kevin is doing for she is forced to do it.

Destruction of Property

Kicking the bathroom door until it is broken when Erin locks her own self in is the destruction of property done by Kevin. Kevin wants to get Erin and makes her more afraid by kicking the door. “The door would no longer close all the way. He’d kicked it in after she’d locked it, trying to get away from him.” (174). Kevin kicks the bathroom door because he is mad at Erin. He destructs it to make Erin afraid of him.

Verbal Abuse

First, underestimating Erin's capability is a kind of verbal abuse. Kevin does not appreciate what has been done by Erin for he does not like it. He also underestimates her capability for everything she does is not important and has no impacts on this life. Kevin underestimates Erin's capability by telling her that she is stupid, ugly, or numb. Kevin also underestimates her capability by belittling important things done by the victim and trivializing Erin's feelings.

Belittling all of Erin's activities is verbal abuse done by Kevin in order to underestimate Erin's capability. Telling his wife that she is selfish for she does not think before she decides something is another verbal abuse done by Kevin. "My only day off and you pick that day to get your damn hair done in the middle of the city! And then go grocery shopping!" ... "You're so damn selfish all the time!" he said, towering over her." (155).

Kevin says harsh words in order to belittle Erin's activities. Kevin has an opinion that what Erin does is only driven by emotion and not logic. "You just don't think sometimes." (157). The fact is that Erin's activities in the middle of the city are something she must do as a responsibility and as a must. She must get her hair done because she needs to and for Kevin's sake. Erin also buys groceries as a responsibility as a wife. Thus, what Erin does is actually logic.

And then, trivializing Erin's feelings and opinions is the next verbal abuse done by Kevin. What comes up in Kevin's mind is only what he wants and feels. He never cares about Erin, especially what she wants and feels. "Why the hell are you crying?" (187). Kevin does not try to understand of why Erin cries. Instead, he blames her for crying.

Next, underestimating Erin's physical appearance is another kind of verbal abuse. Kevin does not feel satisfied if his wife does not appear as what he wants. Controlling and deciding his wife's appearance is a verbal abuse done by Kevin in order to underestimate Erin's appearance. Kevin ridicules Erin's appearance by commanding Erin about what she can and cannot wear and how she has to do with her hair. "Not too much", Katie said. "Just enough to clean it up. My husband likes it long." (147). Kevin likes woman with long hair; so, Erin has to keep her hair long. Kevin wants Erin to always look sexy when she is at home even if it is cold. "When he was at work, she wore a sweatshirt and slippers around the house, but when he was home, he wanted her to look sexy." (152). Although the weather is cold, Erin still has to appear sexy for Kevin's sake.

At last, ignoring whatever his wife says is also a verbal abuse. In the conversation, if Erin tries to come up with her opinion or feeling, Kevin quickly cuts her sentences and turns the sentences into his. It means that Kevin does verbal abuse by blocking the conversation of the victim.

"That's not very romantic."

'But it's sexy', he said.

'What if someone sees us through the window?'

'You're no fun', he said." (158)

When Erin rejects Kevin to have a sex in the kitchen, Kevin does not want to listen. Kevin forces his will without thinking about Erin's sentences.

Economic Abuse

Kevin controls all the economic things so that Erin depends on him in financial context because he is the only financial source in the household. Not allowing his wife to have her own income is the first type of economic abuse done by Kevin. "I don't have a job", Katie answered." (145). Kevin wants to be the only one giving financial income in the house.

Later on, giving Erin little money for the groceries is also an economic abuse done by Kevin. It is not because Kevin has no money because he can still buy bottles of vodka. "Money was tight and Kevin would be angry if she spent too much... He refused to eat leftovers and it was hard to make the budget stretch. She had to plan the menu carefully, and she cut coupons from the newspaper." (151). Kevin makes it hard for Erin to manage the daily needs shopping.

The last thing, not trusting his wife financially is the last economic abuse done by Kevin. Locking the money is the economic abuse done by Kevin for he does not trust Erin. Kevin is afraid if he does not keep it, Erin can take it and she can escape further using his money. "He usually kept the money

locked away and started tracking her whereabouts obsessively.” (201). Controlling the checkbook is the last economic abuse done by Kevin since he gives no trust toward Erin. “From the first day they were married, he’d controlled the money.” (210). Kevin always asks the bill from Erin and he counts whether the return is right or not. “When Kevin paid for the groceries, she handed him the change from the salon and the receipt. He counted the money, making sure everything was there.” (151). In Kevin’s mind, his money is more important than giving trust toward his wife.

Social Isolation

Keeping his spouse in the house all the time is the first form of social isolation done by Kevin. Putting an end of Erin’s visits and building fence around his yard are social isolation done by Kevin toward his wife. “In her first year of marriage, Kevin rarely hit her and sometimes she went for walks without him.” (188). At that time, Erin makes friends with her neighbors who are the Feldmans. However, “Kevin didn’t like her to walk around the neighborhood but he let her garden in the backyard because of the privacy fence.” (188).

Furthermore, not allowing Erin goes to the same salon after several times because Kevin is afraid if Erin makes friends there. “... , or that he was the one who made her switch salons because he didn’t want her making friends.” (155). Kevin isolates Erin from the chance to have any friends in the salon. He closes all access making Erin has any friends.

Not allowing Erin to drive is the last social isolation done by Kevin in order to make perfect his isolation. “I don’t drive. My husband drives me when I need to go somewhere.” (145). Kevin’s social isolation makes Erin need him to drive her. Erin cannot go to any places that are quite far from their house. “She didn’t have a car or even a license and he swung by their house whenever he was in the area, just to make sure she was at home.” (173). Kevin abuses his wife by giving her social isolation which is not letting her to drive.

Psychological Abuse

Stalking Erin is a psychological abuse done by Kevin. Kevin stalks Erin in several ways which are visiting her, phoning her, and tracing her. “He made random calls to the house throughout the day and...” “... and he swung by their house whenever he was in the area, just to make sure she was at home.” (173). Kevin is curious whether Erin is at home or not. “Kevin called from the precinct three minutes later.” (190). Kevin calls Erin in a frequent time. “... and started tracking her whereabouts obsessively.” (201). When Erin is in the house, Kevin is also curious about what Erin does.

Intimidating Erin from his gesture and body language is the last psychological abuse. “As she opened the door, she noticed Kevin in the kitchen behind her, leaning against the doorjamb that led to the dining room. He took a long drink, finishing his vodka and continuing to watch her, his presence all-encompassing.” (153). Every time Kevin talks to his wife, he shows that he is the powerful one in the house so that Erin is intimidated and feels that she is no one in that house.

THE EFFECTS OF KEVIN’S SPOUSAL ABUSIVE BEHAVIORS TOWARD ERIN

The abusive behavior done by the batterer will mark some effects on the victim. The effects could be temporary or long-lasting. According to the list given from the concept of spousal abuse of de Benedictis, et al; I categorize the effects into four which are physical effects, psychological effects, social effects, and economic effects.

Physical Effects

Erin’s broken finger and bruises are the first physical effect of the spousal abuse. “He couldn’t remember breaking two of her fingers, even though it was obvious that he had. But he wouldn’t let her go to the hospital for a week, not until the bruises on her face could be covered by makeup and she’d had to cook and clean one-handed.” (175). When Kevin abuses Erin, he does not mean to break her finger, but his abusive behaviors create the broken bone in Erin’s finger.

Vomiting is the next physical effect suffered by Erin because of the spousal abuse. “She fingered the bruises on her ribs and on her wrist.” (192). Kevin hits Erin on her ribs until it leaves bruises there. “Hit me so hard that I vomit!” (193). When Kevin hits Erin on her ribs, he hits it so hard that Erin vomits because of Kevin’s abusive behaviors.

Then, sleeping problem is also the physical effect suffered by Erin because of the spousal abuse. “She lay in bed, staring at the ceiling, until he finally woke and staggered in, flopping onto the mattress. He fell asleep immediately, one arm dropped over her, and his snores sounded like a warning.” (191). Erin cannot easily fall asleep because Kevin’s abuse has made her stay alert.

Psychological Effects

Getting depressed is the first psychological effect of the spousal abuse. Crying easily showing that Erin’s emotion is not stable is one of the symptoms that Erin gets depression. “For some reason, he had the strange impression that she was about to cry.” (23). Erin cannot handle her emotion because she is depressed as the effect of Kevin’s spousal abuse. “She’d spoken through her tears, though he doubted she even knew she was crying.” (160). Erin’s feelings and emotions have been pressed for years and now she cannot hold her tears anymore.

Weight-changing is the second symptom of depression. Losing her weight significantly is experienced by Erin. “The first time he’d seen her, she was pale and gaunt, almost desperately thin.” “But she wanted none of those things; instead; she kept her head down as she walked toward the grocery aisles, as if trying to remain unseen, a ghost in human form.” (22). In the first time Alex, who later will be Erin’s new spouse, meets Erin, he sees a woman that is pale, gaunt, and thin.

Getting anxiety attacks is the last symptom of depression. Erin suffers the anxiety attacks when she is still in Kevin’s house. “She would make sure no other neighbors were watching before darting across the street to their front door. She felt like a spy when she visited with them.” (188). Her anxiety has shadows her thought and life.

Next, having a low self-esteem is as the second psychological effect. For feeling insecure of her past, Erin defends her own self when there are people talking about her past life or things related to her past life. “With Jo’s words, Katie felt a finger touch her heart. All at once, it seemed hard to breathe. ‘Are you talking about me?’ she finally croaked out.” (69). Lying is a topic taking part of Erin’s past life. Erin feels insecure and quickly makes a defense of herself because she feels insecure.

Being unable to receive her past wholly is experienced by Erin. “With his word, she inhaled sharply and lowered her head, her shoulders heaving up and down. ... She was fragile, on edge. Vulnerable.” (161). Spousal abuse makes Erin fragile if she has to talk about her past. Her past becomes a nightmare for Erin so that she does not want to talk about it.

Having no confidence of her own self is the next psychological effect of spousal abuse. She becomes nervous of any things includes when actually there is nothing to worry about. “She frowned, and as she was debating what to buy, he noticed the fingers of her right hand twisting around her left ring finger, toying with a ring that wasn’t there.” (52). Erin plays her left ring finger because she does not feel confident of her own self.

Later on, feeling of abandonment is also a psychological effect of spousal abuse. “She felt happy and safe and thought again how enjoyable the evening had been.” “She had a friend, a real friend, someone who laughed ... it had been so long since she’d experienced something so easy and natural.” (67-68). Erin needs acceptance of others and friends. She does not feel that she is worthy except there is someone who is care to her.

After that, being sensitive to rejection as the psychological effect of spousal abuse is also experienced by Erin since she has a low self-esteem.

“Do you have any dry beans?’ she asked.

‘I’m sorry’, he’d answered. ‘I don’t normally keep those in stock.’

As he bagged her items after his answer, he noticed her staring out the window, absently chewing her lower lip. For some reason, he had the strange impression that she was about to cry.” (23)

Alex actually does not reject Erin since he is honest that he does not keep dry beans in his shop. However, Erin feels that Kevin has rejected her by not giving her what she needs.

Last but not least, having a lack of trust to others is the last psychological effect of spousal abuse. Becoming so afraid of Kevin as the proof that Erin has a lack of trust to the batterer is a psychological effect. "... because she didn't want him to be angry, because she didn't want to be slapped or punched or kicked, because she didn't want him to know about the phone." (159). What Erin does is to please Kevin. Erin is afraid if Kevin gets mad and he starts to abuse her again. "..., focusing only on the fear that had been left behind. She didn't want to remember Kevin, didn't want to think about him." (160). Kevin's spousal abuse marks Erin's psychic so that she always feel fear of her past and Kevin.

Next, having no trust toward the neighbors is the second proof that Erin has a lack trust of others. When Erin firstly meets Jo as her neighbor, Jo is also the one starting the conversation. Jo is the one dominating the conversation. Erin is actually not interested to have a chat with her neighbor. Because Erin has no trust toward her neighbor, especially Jo as her new neighbor, she closes her own self so that Jo will not ask her too many questions.

Last but not least, having no more trust to other men is suffered by the Erin. "Why not? 'I had a bad experience once", Katie said. "Dating a guy from work I mean" (5). Erin is in a trauma to have a date with men who she meets at work since she meets Kevin when she works as a cocktail waitress. Erin keeps a distance from men because she does not believe them and she is afraid of them no matter who he is. "Either she was still married or she wasn't, but he had an undeniable hunch that Katie was still afraid of him." (53). Erin's relationship with Kevin makes her afraid to start any new relationship with man.

Social Effects

Being isolated is the social effect of spousal abuse. Erin's life depends on Kevin. "She wished she could talk to someone." (197). When Erin runs away, she has no body to talk to although she deeply wants it. "The cottage wasn't much, but it was hers and out of the way and that was enough." (7). When Erin has been escaped, she chooses to live in a remote area of a small city so that no one will recognize her attendance.

Furthermore, having poor relationship with other loved ones is suffered by the victim of spousal abuse as the social effect. "Now she visited the Feldmans only when she knew Kevin was busy at work, when she knew he couldn't call." (188). The relationship between Erin and the Feldmans becomes poor since Kevin tries to end that relation.

Economic Effect

Having insufficient resources is the economic effect of spousal abuse experienced by Erin. When Erin still lives with Kevin, perhaps this problem is not too real. Nevertheless, after Erin runs away, her insufficient resources to live is really felt. "At the time, she was broke and hadn't eaten in two days." (2). When Erin is firstly run away, she does not have enough money with her. She even feels hungry on her first night for she has to limit her spends.

Erin needs someone to tell that she is hungry but she has insufficient resources to live. Erin is actually afraid to escape from Kevin. "She wanted to tell them that she was terrified because she didn't know where she was going to sleep tonight or how she was going to eat when the money run out." (197). Erin has a difficulty in paying room for several days. "She knew she had to make it last, though, so she put the rest of it away, even though she was still hungry. She had enough money to stay three nights, four if she could somehow survive on the little food she'd brought from home." (198). Erin has a financial problem for her resources to live be insufficient.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Kevin does spousal abuse toward Erin by doing several things that are physical abuse, sexual abuse, destruction of property and pets, verbal abuse, economic abuse, isolation, and psychological abuse. I also categorized the effects of spousal abuse toward Erin into four effects. First

of all, Erin gets physical effects such as bruises, broken bone, and other impacts on skin, and sleeping problem. Next, Kevin's abuse makes Erin get psychological effects which are depression, cried easily, fear of the batterer, and lack of trust of others, low self-esteem, feelings of abandonment, sensitivity to rejections, and anxiety attacks. As the social effects, Erin is isolated from other people and she has a poor relationship with her loved ones. At last, Erin also has insufficient resources to live because of Kevin's abuse. From this analysis, I identify that every type of abuse has at least one type of effect. I also get a lesson that every human being has to have his or her own self. Kevin does spousal abuse in order to intimidate and to be looked powerful. He needs an acknowledgement because his self is not complete. Next, I also come across the fact that spousal abuse is not only physical abuse. The common thought in the society is that spousal abuse is similar to physical abuse is totally wrong since Kevin also does several types of spousal abuse.

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