

The poverty of aspiration myth

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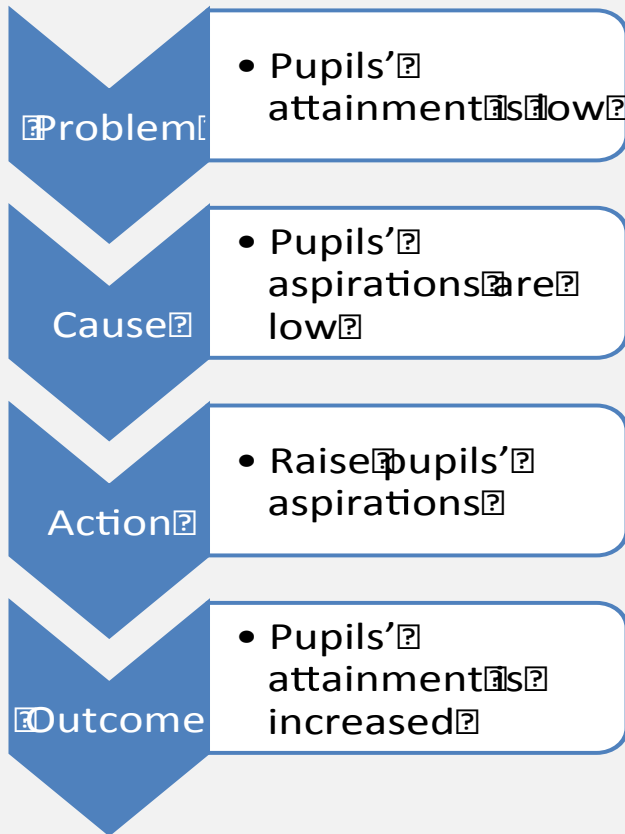


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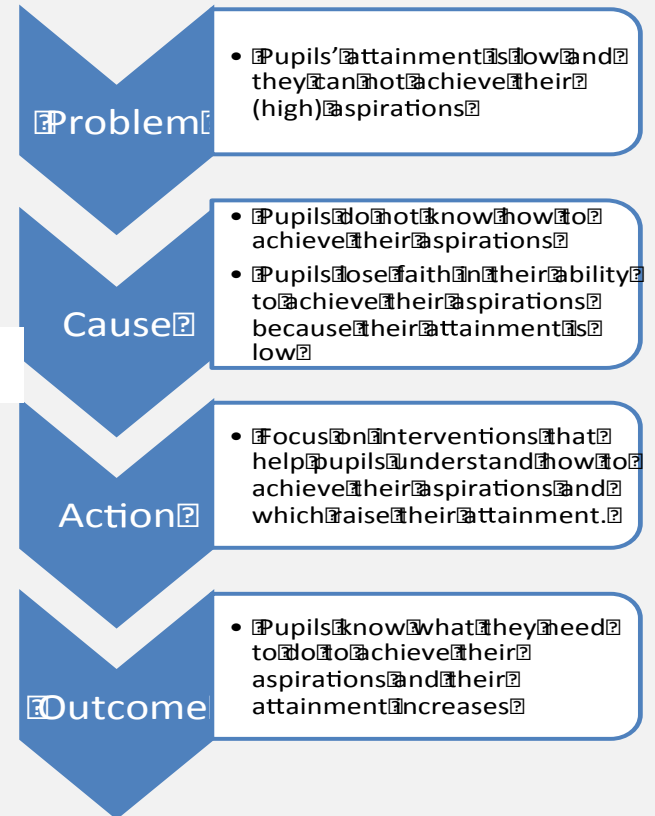


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Model A



Model B



Three main groups of decision making theories:

- Trait and factor
- Relational
- Post-rational (planned happenstance)

Myths dispelled and truths clarified

1. Aspirations are not the same as expectations
2. There are no 'high' and 'low' aspirations
3. Aspirations are not stable over time
4. Different aspirations are revealed in different contexts
5. Aspirations don't just relate to jobs and education
6. The link between aspirations and attainment flows both ways
7. Aspirations are not 'lower' in deprived areas or workless households
8. Geographical differences go beyond deprivation

1. Aspirations are not the same as expectations

I would like my child to go to university



Mothers at child's birth

MILLennium Cohort Study 2010

My child is likely to go to higher education



Poorest 5th of parents



Richest 5th of parents

Parental attitudes (child aged 14). Chowdry et al 2010

2. There are no 'high' and 'low' aspirations

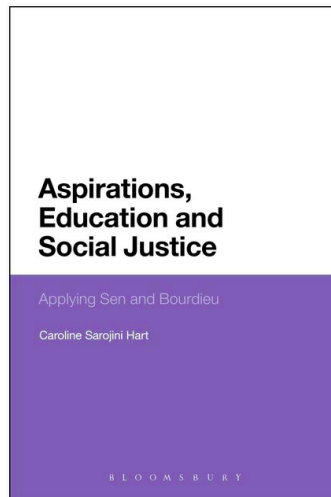
“Yeh, I like, I enjoy doing stuff like that... It's not just about the money is it? You want to do something you enjoy. Don't want to go to a job that you don't enjoy, do you? Cos if you're stuck with a job you don't enjoy for the rest of your life you're going to be miserable aren't you?”

“My mum struggles to even survive. And I don't want that life for my kids.”

3. Aspirations are not stable over time

when I grow up I want to be a teacher
hair dresser

4. Different aspirations are revealed in different contexts



- Different aspirations are ‘revealed’ and ‘concealed’ in different contexts
 - To teachers
 - To parents
 - To friends

British Educational Research Journal
Vol. 37, No. 3, June 2011, pp. 509-517



Performing desires: the dilemma of aspirations and educational attainment

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The authors critique the mechanistic notion of aspirations running through much research and policy-making on educational and vocational objectives. They present a performative model, with individuals drawing on limited social resources to express aspirations within constrained contexts. This argument is illustrated by discussion of the findings of a longitudinal empirical investigation of the aspirations of 489 young people in three UK schools. Five themes from this analysis are presented and it is argued that these need to be explored in order to enrich and expand our understanding of young people's expression of aspirations.

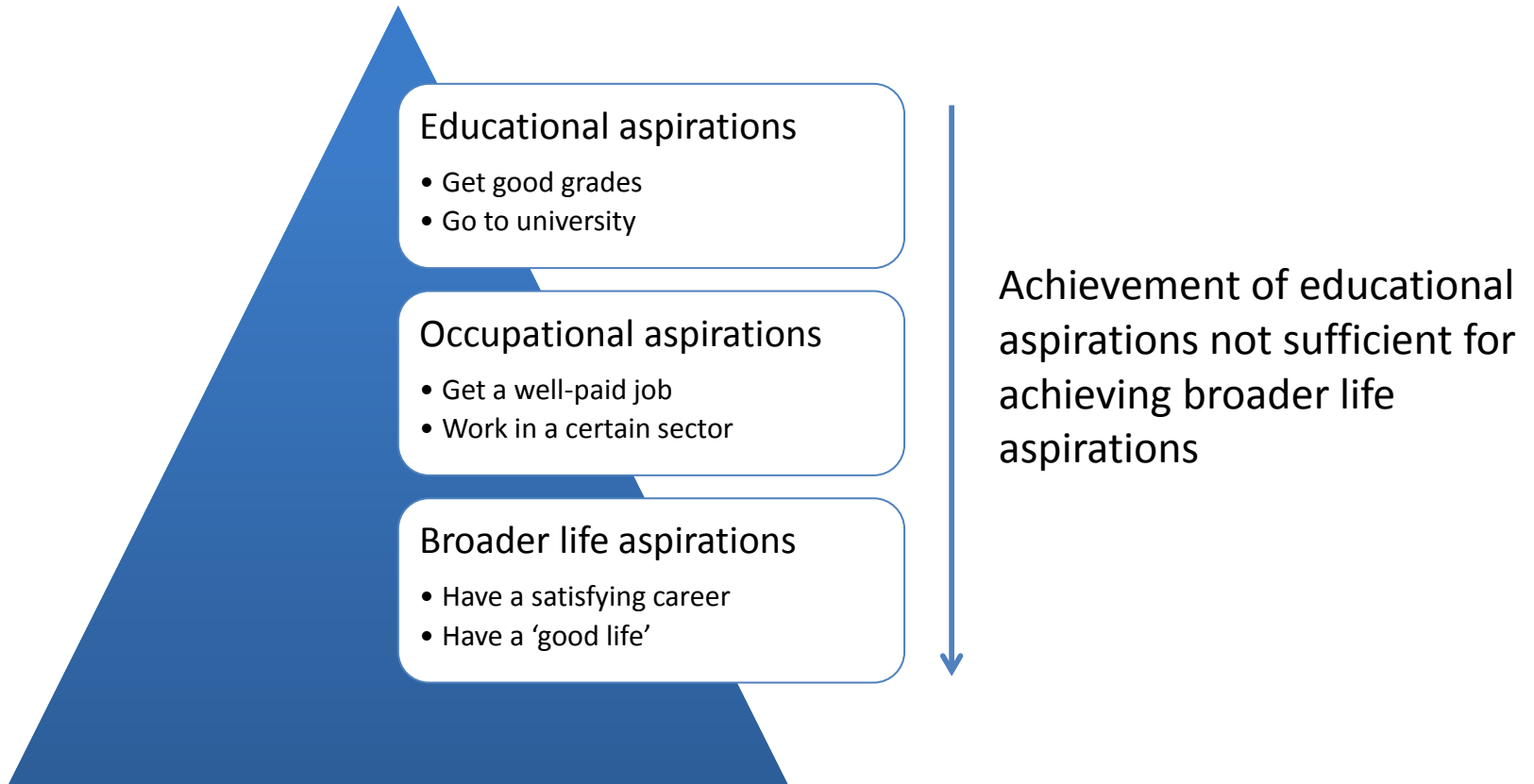
Introduction

Aspirations have become a key educational policy driver in the UK and are seen as one of the critical levers for improving educational attainment and raising skills. Increasing aspirations is at the heart of educational policy, as shown by the recent *Higher standards, better schools for all* White Paper (Department of Education and Skills [DfES], 2005a), the *Education and Skills* White Paper (DfES, 2005b) and *Youth matters*, the *Green Paper on young people* (DfES, 2005c). Educational success and the factors supporting that success are recognised as crucial contributions to social mobility for disadvantaged groups. This aspect of education policy also chimes with social inclusion policy and urban policy, where the stated aim of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal is to ensure that 'success should be seriously disadvantaged by where they live' (Cabinet Office, 2001, p. 5). The emphasis on aspirations shows no signs of abating—in 2009 the UK government set out plans for public reform intended to lift the aspirations of 2.4 million children (Cabinet Office, 2009).

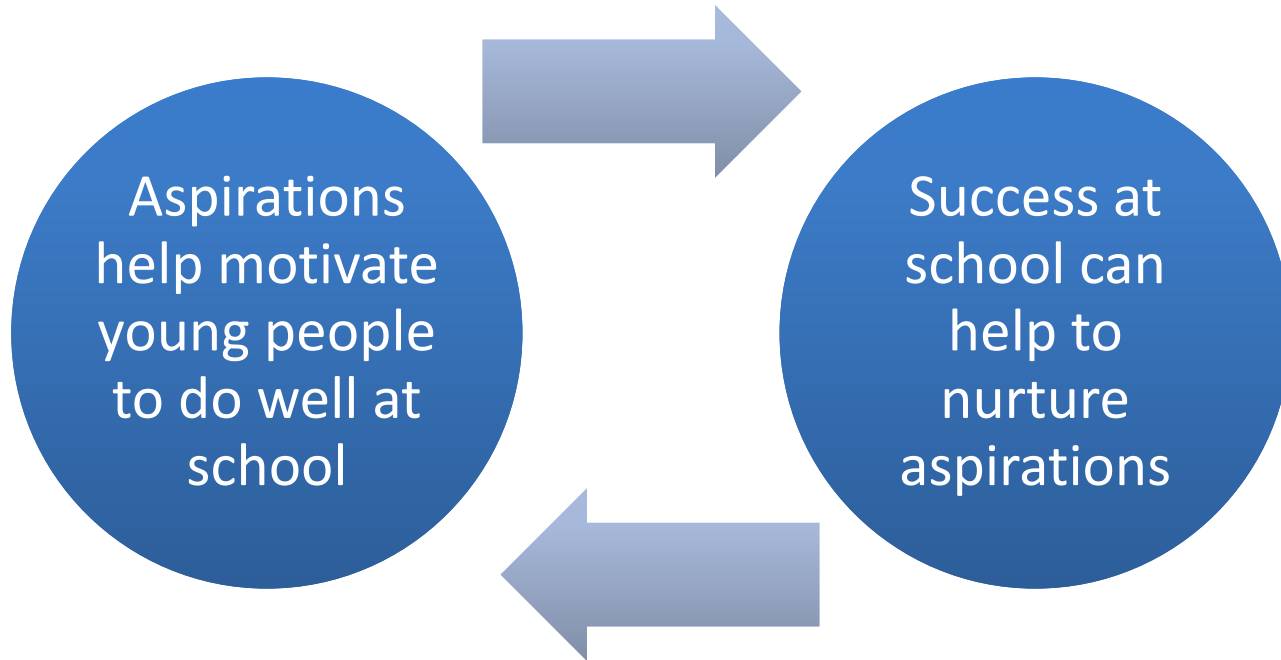
The assumption underlying the current policy emphasis is that aspirations are generally too low, particularly among children from disadvantaged backgrounds and neighbourhoods, and that raising them is key to high achievement in education and

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5. Aspirations don't just relate to jobs and education

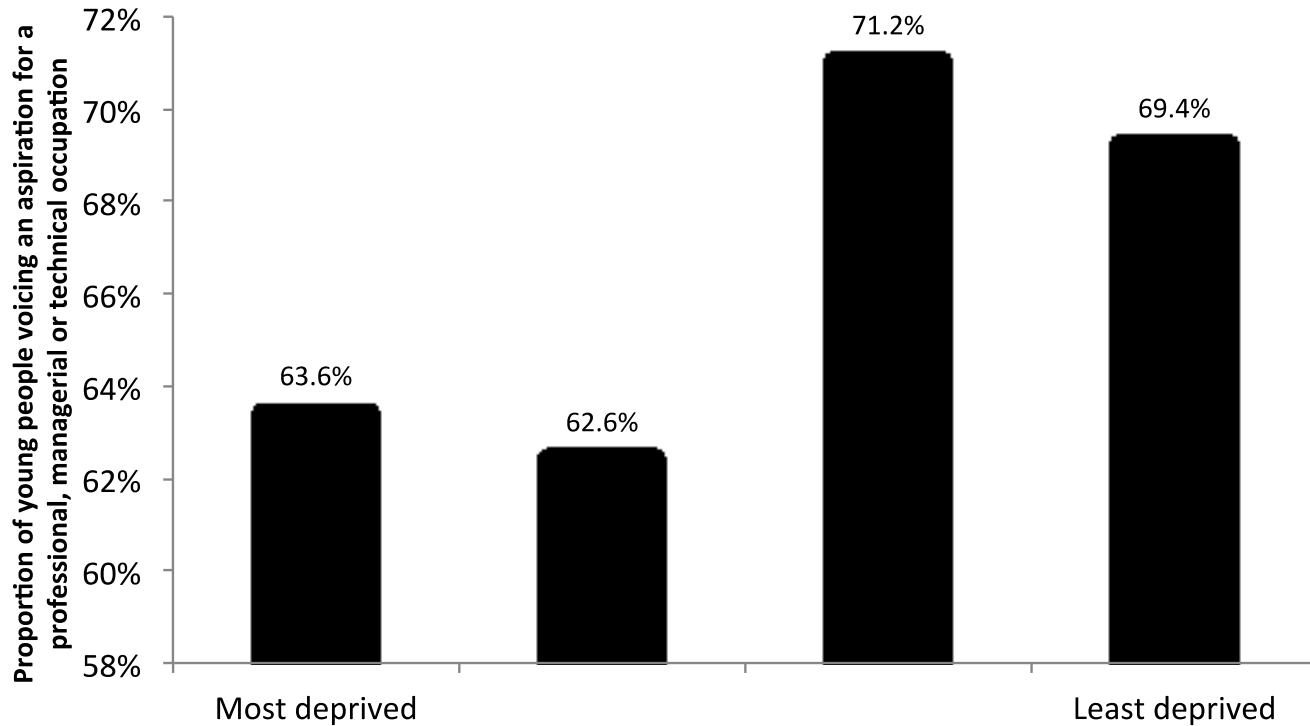


6. The link between aspirations and attainment flows both ways



7. Aspirations are not 'lower' in deprived areas...

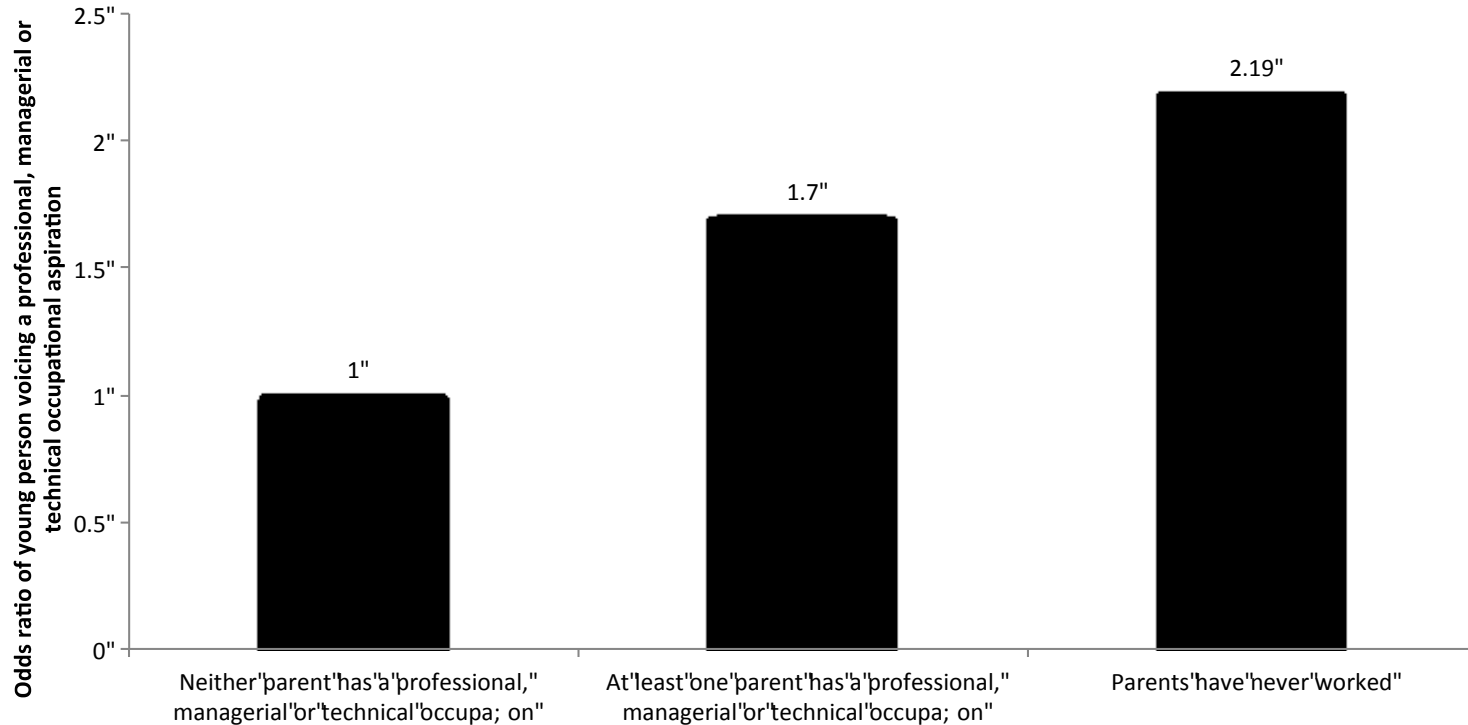
'High' aspirations by deprivation quartile, England



Source: Understanding Society Youth Questionnaire

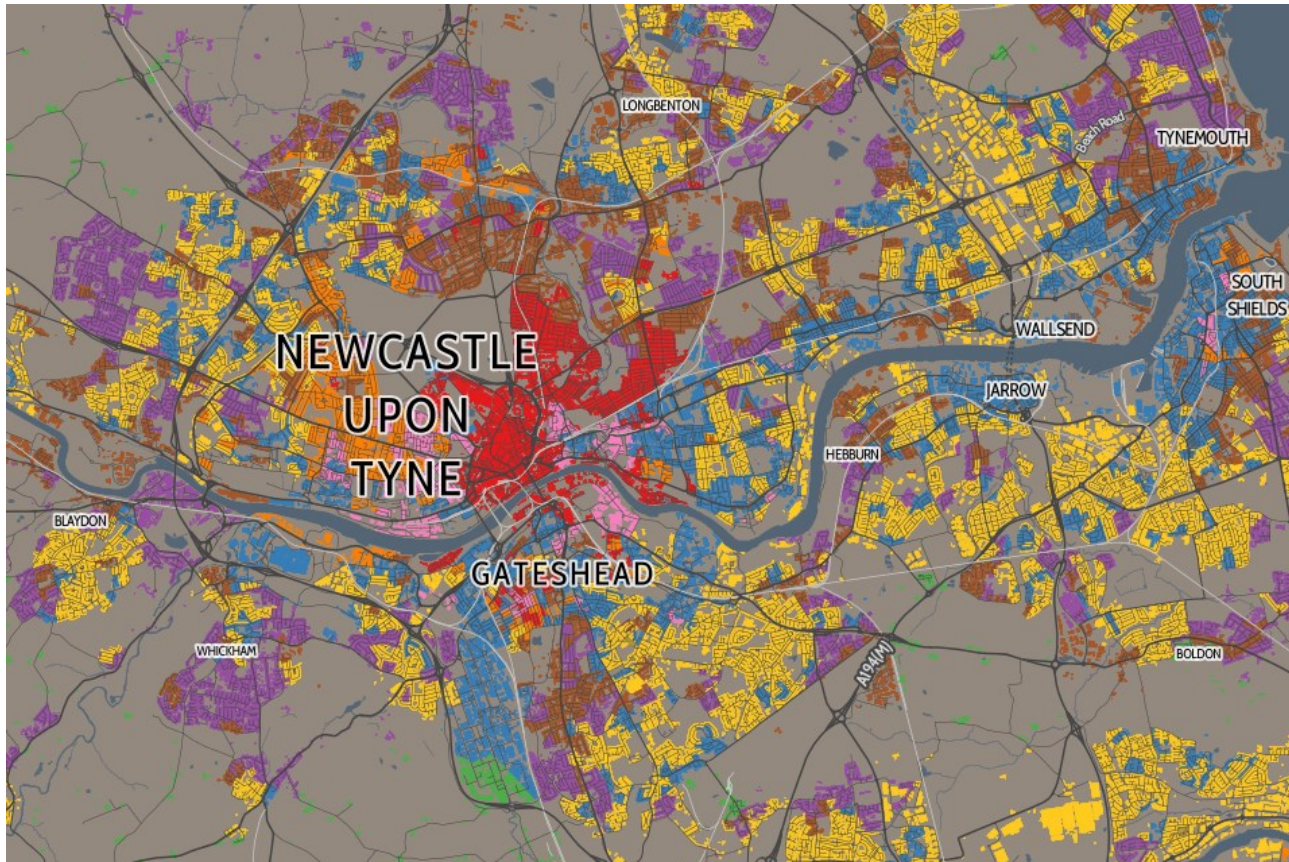
...or workless households

Likelihood of a young person voicing a 'high' aspiration by parents' occupational status



Source: Understanding Society Wave 1 Youth Questionnaire, N=3266

8. Geographical differences go beyond deprivation





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