

# Polyculturalism and openness about criticizing one's culture: Implications for sexual prejudice

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## Abstract

Abundant research on the relationship between ideologies and sexual prejudice has not focused on intergroup ideologies such as colorblindness, multiculturalism, and polyculturalism. In three studies with racially and ethnically diverse college and community samples, endorsement of polyculturalism—an ideology focusing on the interactions, influences, and connections among racial and ethnic groups—was associated with lower sexual prejudice (as measured by affective prejudice toward gay men and lesbians, traditional heterosexism, denial of discrimination against homosexuals, and attitudes toward gay men and lesbians). Polyculturalism's relationship with lower sexual prejudice was mediated by greater openness to criticizing elements of one's culture that marginalize some groups. Polyculturalism accounted for unique variance in sexual prejudice even when controlling for colorblindness, multiculturalism, social dominance orientation, ethnic identity, conservatism, as well as race and gender. Colorblindness and multiculturalism were not consistently related to lower sexual prejudice. Future work on intergroup ideologies and sexual prejudice is discussed.

## Keywords

colorblind, ideologies, multiculturalism, polyculturalism, sexual prejudice

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Sexual prejudice continues to be a problem around the world (e.g., Haslam, 1997; Hegarty & Pratto, 2001; Herek, 2000; Herek, 2006; Herek & Berrill, 1992; Massey, 2009). Much research indicates that the study of prevalent belief systems or ideologies helps provide a fuller understanding of sexual prejudice. Conservatism, essentialist beliefs, religious beliefs, right-wing authoritarianism (RWA), and social dominance orientation (SDO) have been consistently shown to account for individual differences in sexual prejudice (e.g.,

Altemeyer, 2006; Haslam & Levy, 2006; Herek, 2000; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; Whitley, 1999; Whitley, 2009; Whitley & Ægis-dóttir, 2000; Whitley & Lee, 2000). As examples,

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SDO, or greater support for group-based inequality and hierarchy, is associated with less support for gay and lesbian rights (Pratto et al., 1994; also see Whitley, 1999; Whitley & Ægisdóttir, 2000), and greater conservatism in one's religion is associated with more negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians (Haslam & Levy, 2006; Herek, 1988).

Some of the aforementioned belief systems or ideologies have been examined for their associations with many types of prejudice, including sexual prejudice, racism, and sexism, because these ideologies are conceptualized as generally justifying bias and discrimination against numerous marginalized groups in society. "Interethnic" or "intergroup" ideologies (ideologies about racial and ethnic groups)—colorblindness, multiculturalism, and polyculturalism—have mainly been studied in relation to racial and ethnic prejudice (e.g., Rosenthal & Levy, 2010; Ryan, Casas, & Thompson, 2010; Vorauer, Gagnon, & Sasaki, 2009; Wolsko, Park, & Judd, 2006; Zirkel, 2008), although these ideologies seem to have a wider range of applicability. Some have argued that intergroup ideologies are relevant and important for understanding the persistence of other forms of prejudice because people's desire to hold onto their racial or ethnic group's traditions or customs can sometimes serve to justify continued discrimination of some groups, such as women or homosexuals (e.g., McKerl, 2007; Prashad, 2001). The main goal of the present investigation is to examine for the first time the association that polyculturalism—a relatively newly studied ideology with a focus on the mutual interactions, influences, and connections among different racial and ethnic groups (Kelley, 1999; Prashad, 2001; Rosenthal & Levy, under review)—has with sexual prejudice.

### *Intergroup ideologies*

The study of intergroup ideologies—especially colorblindness and multiculturalism—has a long history in numerous countries including Canada, the Netherlands, and the United States (e.g., Esses & Gardner, 1996; Verkuyten, 2009; Zirkel, 2008). People who believe in colorblindness think

that group categories (e.g., race) are superficial and irrelevant to understanding and getting to know others, and presumably prejudice is reduced when group memberships are de-emphasized (e.g., Ryan, Hunt, Weible, Peterson, & Casas, 2007; Wolsko, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2000). Colorblindness has taken different forms, including focusing on individuals' unique qualities, or focusing on the similarities across different groups of people (for a review, see Rosenthal & Levy, 2010). People who believe in multiculturalism think that people's race and ethnicity are relevant and nontrivial parts of people requiring attention, and presumably prejudice is lower for people who are knowledgeable and appreciative of other groups' rich histories and customs (e.g., Ryan et al., 2007; Sleeter, 1991; Takaki, 1993; Wolsko et al., 2000). Multiculturalism has also taken different forms, including a form focused on learning about the important differences between different racial and ethnic groups (for a review, see Rosenthal & Levy, 2010).

People who believe in polyculturalism think that it is relevant and important to pay attention to the historical and contemporary interactions among many different racial and ethnic groups, and presumably prejudice is lower for people who focus on the ways that past and current exchanges and connections among groups have influenced their cultures (Kelley, 1999; Prashad, 2001, 2003). Similar to a belief in multiculturalism, a belief in polyculturalism focuses attention on recognizing people's racial and ethnic backgrounds, but instead of calling attention to the differences among groups, it highlights the many connections among groups due to past and present interactions and mutual influence. Although a belief in polyculturalism emphasizes connections, these are not the same connections emphasized by the cross-group commonalities (e.g., all being Americans or human beings) aspect of colorblindness; instead, a belief in polyculturalism emphasizes different racial and ethnic groups' connected pasts that have shaped those cultures and groups of people. A person who believes in polyculturalism would think of all cultures and people as the products of historical and

contemporary interactions and influences among many different racial and ethnic groups (Kelley, 1999), recognizing the ways that we are all deeply connected to people of other cultures by our intersecting histories and shared cultural influences (Prashad, 2003).

Taken together, the above brief review highlights that colorblindness, multiculturalism, and polyculturalism have some important conceptual distinctions and also some conceptual similarities. Demonstrating that there are some conceptual similarities among the three ideologies, some studies have found positive correlations among these ideologies. As examples, Ryan et al. (2007) found endorsement of colorblindness and multiculturalism to be positively correlated with each other, and we (Rosenthal & Levy, under review) have found endorsement of polyculturalism to be positively correlated with endorsement of multiculturalism. At the same time, demonstrating their conceptual distinctions, the three ideologies (with multiculturalism and colorblindness assessed using a variety of measures in the literature) have been demonstrated to load onto separate factors in factor analyses (e.g., Rosenthal & Levy, under review; Ryan et al., 2010).

Consistent with there being clear distinctions among these ideologies, research also demonstrates that the three ideologies do not have all of the same or overlapping relationships with intergroup attitudes. For example, colorblindness has been associated with lower explicit racial bias (e.g., Wolsko et al., 2000), in line with the notion that colorblindness explicitly directs attention away from racial categories, but also greater implicit racial bias, suggesting that colorblindness does not do so at the implicit level (e.g., Correll, Park, & Smith, 2008; Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004). Multiculturalism has been associated with lower explicit and implicit racial bias, consistent with theorizing that multiculturalism highlights positive aspects of racial outgroups (e.g., Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004; Wolsko et al., 2000, 2006), but also greater stereotyping (e.g., Ryan et al., 2007, 2010; Wolsko et al., 2000), consistent with criticisms that multiculturalism emphasizes group differences (e.g., Bigler, 1999).

In several survey studies, greater endorsement of polyculturalism has thus far been associated with consistently more positive intergroup attitudes, such as less support for social inequality, greater interest in, appreciation for, and comfort with diversity, and greater willingness for interethnic contact (Rosenthal & Levy, under review). The associations that polyculturalism has been found to have with these intergroup attitudes have remained significant even when controlling for other powerful predictors of intergroup attitudes, including SDO and RWA, as well as multiple measures of the other ideologies, colorblindness and multiculturalism. These prior studies were conducted with samples of racially and ethnically diverse undergraduates and community adults in New York, as well as in a sample from a United States-wide telephone survey, suggesting the relationship of polyculturalism with positive intergroup attitudes is consistent across various groups in the United States. Although the studies on polyculturalism to date have not yet found evidence of negative implications for intergroup attitudes, there are still possible weaknesses of polyculturalism that have yet to be empirically demonstrated. For instance, if people's ideas about past and current interactions among different racial and ethnic groups focus mostly or exclusively on negative interactions (e.g., intergroup violence and conflict), it is possible that a greater belief in polyculturalism could be associated with more negative intergroup attitudes and greater protectiveness of one's own ingroup members and culture (see Rosenthal & Levy, 2010 for a more thorough examination of possible weaknesses).

Within this large body of work, intergroup ideologies' implications for sexual prejudice have been noted, but for the most part gone unstudied (e.g., Banks, 2004; Zirkel, 2008). Theoretically, greater belief in colorblindness could be associated with less sexual prejudice by focusing attention away from group memberships, including those based on sexual orientation, as well as focusing attention on treating all people as individuals. But, when people avoid discussion or recognition of group memberships, they also

tend to ignore the rich histories and cultures of less dominant groups and fail to sufficiently recognize that prejudice, including sexual prejudice, still exists (e.g., Neville, Lilly, Duran, Lee, & Browne, 2000). Endorsement of multiculturalism has also long been theorized to be generalizable to appreciating all forms of diversity, and therefore lower prejudice toward many groups, including gay men and lesbians (see Banks, 2004; Zirkel, 2008). Nonetheless, greater belief in multiculturalism can lead people to focus on how social groups are different from one another and thus increase their stereotyping and prejudice (e.g., Ryan et al., 2007, 2010; Wolsko et al., 2000; also see Bigler, 1999).

Because a belief in polyculturalism draws people's attention to how cultures have interacted, influenced each other, and changed over time, individuals who endorse polyculturalism may be less inclined to hold onto all cultural traditions and be more willing to criticize elements of their culture that promote discrimination against some groups, such as gay men and lesbians. Prashad (2001, 2003), who sees great promise in polyculturalism, has argued that the understanding of cultures as separate, static, and belonging solely to individual racial/ethnic groups (ideas attributed to multiculturalism) is not only a misunderstanding of the history of cultures, but can lead to the maintenance of conservative and oppressive ideas thought of as "traditional" (also see McKerl, 2007). Prashad (2001) writes that if we think of cultures as separate from each other and unchanging, "We'd have to accept homophobia and sexism, class cruelty and racism, all in the service of being respectful to someone's perverse definition of a culture" (p. xi). Building on these ideas, we examine whether lower defensiveness or possessiveness of one's own culture and its traditions is the mechanism through which greater endorsement of polyculturalism could be associated with lower sexual prejudice.

### *Current investigation*

In Study 1, as an initial test, we examined whether greater endorsement of polyculturalism is related

to lower affective prejudice toward gay men using a popular established feeling thermometer scale (e.g., Herek & Capitanio, 1999), among a large sample of racially and ethnically diverse undergraduates. In Study 2, also with a racially and ethnically diverse undergraduate sample, we tested whether greater endorsement of polyculturalism is related to lower affective prejudice toward both gay men and lesbians, as well as to lower traditional heterosexism (Massey, 2009), less denial of discrimination against homosexuals (Massey, 2009), and greater support for gay marriage. In Study 3, with a diverse community sample of adults, we tested whether greater endorsement of polyculturalism is related to less prejudice against gay men and lesbians with another established measure (Herek, 1988). In Studies 2 and 3, we additionally tested our mediation hypothesis that a belief in polyculturalism—through its focus on the ways that different racial and ethnic groups have interacted with, influenced each other, and the ways that cultures are constantly changing because of these connections—would lead people to be less defensive or tied to various elements of their culture that may be viewed as traditions, and more open to criticizing some elements, including ones that discriminate against other social groups such as homosexuals, and therefore would be associated with lowered sexual prejudice.

Because multiculturalism and colorblindness are relevant to polyculturalism and also show promise for providing a fuller understanding of sexual prejudice, we also assessed and statistically controlled for these ideologies in Studies 1 and 2. Yet as discussed earlier, theoretical criticisms of these ideologies and some mixed and null past findings do not allow for firm hypotheses that these ideologies will be related to lower sexual prejudice. Moreover, across studies, we examined and controlled for other ideologies that are related to sexual prejudice or that could confound polyculturalism's association with intergroup attitudes, including SDO, conservatism, and ethnic identification.

Consistent with prior work (e.g., Haslam & Levy, 2006; Herek & Capitanio, 1999; Kite & Whitley, 1996; Lewis, 2003; Massey, 2009), we also expected to find gender and racial/ethnic

differences in sexual prejudice, with men reporting more sexual prejudice than women across measures, and with White Americans reporting the lowest levels and Black Americans the highest levels of sexual prejudice. At the same time, we expected that the relationship between polyculturalism and sexual prejudice would remain significant even when controlling for gender or race/ethnicity.

## Study 1

In Study 1, we examined polyculturalism's relationship with affective prejudice toward gay men among a large, diverse sample of both female and male undergraduates. We examined and statistically controlled for multiculturalism and colorblindness. Since SDO has been related to greater sexual prejudice (e.g., Pratto et al., 1994; Whitley & Ægisdóttir, 2000) and lower endorsement of polyculturalism (Rosenthal & Levy, under review), we examined whether SDO was a confounding variable in the predicted relation between polyculturalism and sexual prejudice. Further, we examined the roles of gender and race/ethnicity as predictors of sexual prejudice and potential moderators of the relationship between polyculturalism and sexual prejudice.

### Method

**Participants and procedure** A total of 353 (269 women; mean age = 21.35,  $SD = 2.82$ ) undergraduates (166 White, 69 Asian, 47 Latino, and 36 Black American, and 35 Other or Mixed) in Psychology classes at Stony Brook University completed a paper survey during class time for course credit. Before consenting to participate, participants were told that the survey was about their own personal beliefs and attitudes, that their participation was completely voluntary, and that the surveys were completely anonymous. Because of the culturally-bound nature of intergroup ideologies, for all three studies, we only included participants living in the U.S. for six or more years (following the inclusion criteria of Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004). In this study, participants were

not asked about their sexual orientation; we estimate based on other samples of students at the same university that approximately 10% would not identify as heterosexual (instead as homosexual, bisexual, or unidentified).

**Measures (in order presented to participants)** For all studies, the items of measures with more than one item were averaged to create composite scores for those measures.

*Polyculturalism* Participants completed a 5-item scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree) measuring endorsement of polyculturalism (e.g., "Different cultural groups impact one another, even if people in those groups are not completely aware of the impact";  $\alpha = .88$ ; Rosenthal & Levy, under review). This measure of polyculturalism focuses on a "neutral" form of this ideology (not including positive or negative elements, but only neutral ones), and as described earlier, has been found in past studies to measure a distinct construct from several other measures of multiculturalism, colorblindness, as well as other ideologies (Rosenthal & Levy, under review).

*Multiculturalism* Participants completed a 5-item scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree) measuring endorsement of multiculturalism in its form of recognizing important differences between racial and ethnic groups, but not other forms such as appreciating the contributions and maintaining the cultures of different racial and ethnic groups (for a review, see Rosenthal & Levy, 2010). The items were designed to be free of valence (e.g., "There are differences between racial and ethnic groups, which are important to recognize";  $\alpha = .77$ ; Rosenthal & Levy, under review). This measure of multiculturalism is positively correlated with several other measures of multiculturalism (Rosenthal & Levy, under review).

*Colorblindness* Participants completed a 5-item scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree) measuring endorsement of colorblindness in a combined form of treating people as unique

**Table 1.** Bivariate correlations, means, and standard deviations of study variables for Study 1 ( $n = 335$ )

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Polyculturalism	_____				
2. Multiculturalism	.32**	_____			
3. Colorblindness	-.01	-.26**	_____		
4. Social dominance orientation	-.25**	.02	-.11*	_____	
5. Warmth toward gay men	.14**	-.08	.15**	-.23**	_____
Means	5.96	5.40	3.46	-2.11	75.37
SD	0.81	0.89	1.53	0.91	21.76

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

**Table 2.** Regression analysis for Study 2 ( $n = 353$ )

	Warmth toward gay men	
	R <sup>2</sup>	<i>b</i>
Model	.03**	
Social dominance Orientation		-.17**
Polyculturalism		.12*
Multiculturalism		-.08
Colorblindness		.11*

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

individuals and recognizing similarities across groups, and was designed to be free of valence (e.g., item focusing on uniqueness: "All human beings are individuals, and therefore race and ethnicity are not important";  $\alpha = .87$ ; Rosenthal & Levy, under review). This measure of colorblindness is positively correlated with another established measure of colorblindness (Rosenthal & Levy, under review).

**SDO** Participants completed the 16-item SDO scale ( $-3 = \text{Very Negative}$ ,  $3 = \text{Very Positive}$ ) measuring support for social inequality (e.g., "It's OK if some groups have more of a chance in life than others";  $\alpha = .92$ ; Pratto et al., 1994).

**Affective prejudice toward gay men** Participants evaluated their feelings toward gay men on a thermometer ranging from 0 (Very Cold) to 100 (Very Warm); e.g., Herek & Capitanio, 1999.

**Demographics** Participants were also asked their race/ethnicity, gender, age, whether they were

born in the United States, and how long they have been living in the United States.

### Results and discussion

Table 1 displays means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations for all Study 1 measures. We conducted a regression analysis to examine polyculturalism's relationship with sexual prejudice. We included SDO (as a control variable), polyculturalism, multiculturalism, and colorblindness as simultaneous predictors in the model, with thermometer ratings of gay men as the outcome (see Table 2). SDO was a significant predictor of lower thermometer ratings. Even when controlling for SDO, polyculturalism was significantly associated with higher thermometer ratings of gay men. Additionally, colorblindness was significantly associated with higher thermometer ratings, and multiculturalism was not a significant predictor but demonstrated a trend toward a negative relationship with thermometer ratings.

Thus, this study provides preliminary support for our hypothesis that greater endorsement of polyculturalism is associated with lower reported sexual prejudice, and suggests that colorblindness may be also.

**Auxiliary analyses with gender** Given the pervasiveness of gender differences in sexual prejudice, we then conducted *t*-tests to examine gender differences in all study measures. As expected, men rated gay men significantly lower than women did on the thermometer ratings [ $t(351) = -2.72, p < .01$ ] and also scored higher on SDO [ $t(351) = 2.99, p < .01$ ; see Pratto et al., 1994]. There were no significant gender differences for polyculturalism or multiculturalism, but men reported significantly greater endorsement of colorblindness than women did [ $t(351) = -2.42, p = .02$ ].

Because of the significant gender differences found, we tested whether controlling for gender changed the results of the regression analyses, and it did not. Last, we tested whether gender moderated the relationship between polyculturalism and temperature ratings of gay men, and this interaction was nonsignificant.

**Auxiliary analyses with race/ethnicity** Given past findings of racial/ethnic differences in sexual prejudice, we then conducted a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to test for racial/ethnic differences in all study measures among four groups (Asian, Black, Latino, and White Americans). There were significant racial/ethnic differences for polyculturalism, colorblindness, SDO, and thermometer ratings, but not multiculturalism. Black Americans endorsed polyculturalism to the greatest extent ( $M = 6.21, SD = 0.80$ ), followed by White ( $M = 6.03, SD = 0.67$ ), Latino ( $M = 5.85, SD = 1.01$ ), and Asian ( $M = 5.75, SD = 0.91$ ) Americans. On the other hand, Asian Americans endorsed colorblindness to the greatest extent ( $M = 3.63, SD = 1.65$ ), followed by White ( $M = 3.49, SD = 1.37$ ), Latino ( $M = 3.27, SD = 1.38$ ), and Black ( $M = 2.77, SD = 1.67$ ) Americans. Similarly, Asian Americans scored highest on SDO

( $M = -1.98, SD = 0.89$ ), followed by White ( $M = -2.04, SD = 0.96$ ), Latino ( $M = -2.29, SD = 0.73$ ), and Black ( $M = -2.45, SD = 0.60$ ) Americans. For the thermometer ratings, White Americans rated gay men the highest ( $M = 81.43, SD = 17.60$ ), followed by Latino ( $M = 74.85, SD = 24.69$ ), Asian ( $M = 66.03, SD = 22.27$ ), and Black ( $M = 63.46, SD = 25.61$ ) Americans.

Because of the significant racial/ethnic differences found, we tested whether controlling for race/ethnicity (using dummy-coded variables for being Asian, Black, Latino, and White American) changed the results of the regression analyses, and it did not. Last, we tested whether race/ethnicity (being White American) moderated the relationship between polyculturalism and temperature ratings of gay men, and this interaction was nonsignificant.

Although we did find significant mean gender and racial/ethnic differences in sexual prejudice, controlling for these differences did not change the results, and these variables did not significantly moderate the relationship between polyculturalism and lower sexual prejudice. Therefore, the relationship between polyculturalism and sexual prejudice seems to be consistent across groups and is not confounded with group membership.

## Study 2

In Study 2, we examined polyculturalism among a diverse sample of both female and male undergraduates, this time specifically identifying as heterosexual, and using a wider variety of measures of sexual prejudice targeting both gay men and lesbians. We again examined multiculturalism, colorblindness, and the gender and race/ethnicity of participants. We controlled for conservatism because of its association with greater sexual prejudice (e.g., Haslam & Levy, 2006; Herek, 1988). As well, because polyculturalism is a belief system about racial and ethnic groups' mutual influences and connections, we examined ethnic identification both as a control variable and possible moderator (see Tremble, Schneider, &

Appathurai, 1989 for the relevance of ethnic identity to sexual prejudice).

In this study, we also aimed to take a step toward understanding why greater endorsement of polyculturalism is related to lower sexual prejudice. Consistent with our aforementioned hypothesis, we tested whether openness to criticizing one's own culture is a mediator of the relationship between polyculturalism and sexual prejudice.

### Method

**Participants and procedure** A total of 222 (175 women; mean age = 21.05,  $SD = 2.56$ ) undergraduates (88 White, 62 Asian, 25 Black, and 22 Latino American, and 25 Other or Mixed) identifying as heterosexual completed a survey for course credit in Psychology classes at Stony Brook University. The same procedure was used as in Study 1. In this study, because participants indicated their sexual orientation, only data from participants identifying as heterosexual were used for analyses.

**Measures (in order presented to participants)** Participants completed the same scales from Study 1 to measure endorsement of polyculturalism, multiculturalism, and colorblindness ( $\alpha = .90, .78, \text{ and } .86$ , respectively).

*Conservatism* Participants completed a 3-item measure of conservative ideology, indicating their views on three types of issues: "foreign policy issues," "economic issues," and "social issues" (1 = Very Liberal, 7 = Very Conservative;  $\alpha = .84$ ; Pratto et al., 1994). The mean for all items was calculated to create a composite score on the measure, as was done for all of the measures below with multiple items.

*Ethnic identification* Participants completed a 12-item measure of ethnic identification (1 = Strongly Disagree, 4 = Strongly Agree; e.g., "I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic/racial group";  $\alpha = .90$ ; Phinney, 1992; Roberts et al., 1999).

*Openness to criticizing one's culture* Participants completed 3 items measuring openness to discussing and criticizing possibly negative aspects of one's own culture (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree; e.g., "Although my culture's traditions are important to me, I think that it is okay for people to criticize traditions that might be unfair or discriminate against some groups of people [for example, traditions that discriminate against homosexuals]";  $\alpha = .63$ ).

*Affective prejudice toward gay men and lesbians* Participants completed feeling thermometers reporting on a scale of 0 (Very Cold) to 100 (Very Warm) their feelings toward gay men and lesbians.

*Traditional heterosexism* Participants completed a 19-item measure of traditional heterosexism (1 = Totally Disagree, 5 = Totally Agree; e.g., "Male homosexuality is a perversion" and "Female homosexuality is detrimental to society because it breaks down the natural division between the sexes";  $\alpha = .96$ ; Massey, 2009).

*Denial of discrimination* Participants completed a 9-item measure of denial of discrimination against homosexuals (1 = Totally Disagree, 5 = Totally Agree; e.g., "Most lesbians and gay men are no longer discriminated against";  $\alpha = .79$ ; Massey, 2009).

*Attitudes toward gay marriage* Participants also reported, in response to a single item, how much they support the legalization of gay marriage (1 = Oppose Strongly; 4 = Favor Strongly).

*Demographics* Participants were also asked their race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, whether they were born in the United States, and how long they have been living in the United States.

### Results and Discussion

Table 3 displays means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations for all measures in Study 2.

We conducted a series of regression analyses, including conservatism, ethnic identification (as control variables), polyculturalism, multiculturalism, and colorblindness as simultaneous predictors, and with thermometer ratings of gay men and lesbians, traditional heterosexism, denial of discrimination against homosexuals, and support for gay marriage as the five outcomes (see Table 4). Only greater ethnic identification significantly predicted lower thermometer ratings of gay men; the relationship for polyculturalism was nonsignificant even though it demonstrated a trend with higher thermometer ratings. Ethnic identification was also significantly associated with lower thermometer ratings of lesbians, but even when controlling for the contribution of the other variables, polyculturalism was significantly associated with higher thermometer ratings of lesbians. Greater conservatism and greater ethnic identification were each significantly associated with greater traditional heterosexism, and even when controlling for these predictors, polyculturalism was significantly associated with less traditional heterosexism. Greater conservatism and greater ethnic identification were significantly associated with greater denial of discrimination against homosexuals, and even when controlling for these predictors, polyculturalism was significantly associated with less denial of discrimination. Only greater conservatism and greater ethnic identification were significantly associated with less support for gay marriage; the relationship for polyculturalism was nonsignificant even though it demonstrated a trend with more support for gay marriage. Multiculturalism and colorblindness did not demonstrate significant relationships with any outcome variables.

The results of this study extend the findings of Study 1 specifically among people identifying as heterosexuals, supporting polyculturalism's association with several indicators of lower sexual prejudice, but not supporting the associations of multiculturalism and colorblindness with lower sexual prejudice.

Next, we used regression analyses to test our hypothesis that openness to criticizing one's culture would mediate the relationship between

polyculturalism and sexual prejudice (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Because polyculturalism only significantly predicted thermometer ratings of lesbians, traditional heterosexism, and denial of discrimination against homosexuals (satisfying the first step of testing mediation), we continued testing for mediation with those three variables. For the second step of testing mediation, we tested whether polyculturalism (predictor) significantly predicted openness to criticizing one's culture (mediator), which it did ( $b = .20, p < .01$ ). For the third and fourth steps of testing mediation, we ran another set of regression analyses, with polyculturalism and openness to criticizing one's culture as simultaneous predictors for each of the three measures of sexual prejudice being tested. In these analyses, openness to criticizing one's culture was significantly associated with all three outcomes in the predicted directions ( $b = .16, p = .02$  for thermometer ratings of lesbians;  $b = -.26, p < .01$  for traditional heterosexism;  $b = -.16, p = .02$  for denial of continued discrimination), satisfying the third step for testing mediation. Polyculturalism remained significantly associated with less traditional heterosexism, but the associations with higher thermometer ratings of lesbians and less denial of discrimination against homosexuals became only marginally significant. Using the *z*-prime method for the Sobel test with a revised critical value of .97 (for a *p* value of .05), which corrects for the low power of the Sobel approach to testing mediation (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002), the mediated effects were statistically significant for all three outcome variables ( $z' = 1.89$  for thermometer ratings of lesbians;  $z' = -2.40$  for traditional heterosexism;  $z' = -1.85$  for denial of discrimination against homosexuals).

Thus, this study also supports the idea that openness about criticizing one's culture at least partially mediates the relationship between endorsement of polyculturalism and lower sexual prejudice.

**Auxiliary analyses with gender** Using *t*-tests, we found that as expected, men rated gay men significantly lower [ $t(220) = 3.72, p < .01$ ], reported greater traditional heterosexism

**Table 3.** Bivariate correlations, means, and standard deviations of study variables for Study 2 ( $n=222$ )

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Polyculturalism	_____										
2. Multiculturalism	.38**	_____									
3. Colorblindness	-.11	-.20**	_____								
4. Conservatism	-.20**	-.04	-.08	_____							
5. Ethnic identification	.04	.12 <sup>†</sup>	-.14*	.08	_____						
6. Openness to criticizing one's culture	.20**	.14*	.04	-.19**	-.18**	_____					
7. Warmth toward gay men	.10	-.03	.03	-.17*	-.23**	.19**	_____				
8. Warmth toward lesbians	.15*	.01	.04	-.13 <sup>†</sup>	-.23**	.18**	.74**	_____			
9. Traditional heterosexism	-.19**	.02	-.06	.31**	.27**	-.28**	-.66**	-.55**	_____		
10. Denial of discrimination	-.16*	-.02	.07	.18**	.22**	-.18**	-.28**	-.17*	.46**	_____	
11. Support for gay marriage	.13 <sup>†</sup>	-.05	.03	-.34**	-.23**	.29**	.64**	.50**	-.83**	-.33**	_____
Means	5.93	5.52	3.14	3.16	3.07	5.48	70.86	69.35	1.90	2.05	3.33
SD	0.93	0.95	1.41	1.36	0.64	1.13	27.31	27.04	0.90	0.58	0.97

<sup>†</sup> $p < .10$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

**Table 4.** Regression analyses for Study 2 ( $n=222$ )

	Warmth toward gay men		Warmth toward lesbians		Traditional heterosexism		Denial of discrimination		Support for gay marriage	
	R <sup>2</sup>	<i>b</i>	R <sup>2</sup>	<i>b</i>	R <sup>2</sup>	<i>b</i>	R <sup>2</sup>	<i>b</i>	R <sup>2</sup>	<i>b</i>
Model	.01		.02		.02		.04*		.01	
Conservatism		-.13 <sup>†</sup>		-.08		.26**		.14*		-.31**
Ethnic Identification		-.23**		-.22**		.24**		.20**		-.19**
Polyculturalism		.11		.15*		-.16*		-.17*		.10
Multiculturalism		.00		.03		.03		.00		-.05
Colorblindness		.00		.01		-.01		.10		-.01

<sup>†</sup> $p < .10$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

[ $t(220) = -2.06$ ,  $p = .04$ ], and reported less support for gay marriage than did women [ $t(220) = 3.88$ ,  $p < .01$ ]. Men also scored significantly higher on conservatism than did women [ $t(220) = -2.41$ ,  $p = .02$ ].

Because of the significant gender differences found, we tested whether controlling for gender changed the results of the regression analyses for any outcomes, which it did not. Last, we tested

whether gender moderated the relationship between polyculturalism and the three outcome variables with which it had a significant relationship, and all of these interactions were nonsignificant.

**Auxiliary analyses with race/ethnicity** Using a MANOVA, we found that there were only significant racial/ethnic differences for ethnic

identification, thermometer ratings of gay men and lesbians, traditional heterosexism, and attitudes toward gay marriage. Black Americans reported the highest ethnic identification ( $M = 3.45$ ,  $SD = 0.39$ ), followed by Asian ( $M = 3.24$ ,  $SD = 0.56$ ), Latino ( $M = 3.09$ ,  $SD = 0.61$ ), and White ( $M = 2.83$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ ) Americans. For the thermometer ratings, White Americans rated both gay men and lesbians the highest ( $M = 82.86$ ,  $SD = 19.24$  gay men;  $M = 79.64$ ,  $SD = 20.21$  lesbians), followed by Latino ( $M = 70.48$ ,  $SD = 27.29$  gay men;  $M = 70.48$ ,  $SD = 27.29$  lesbians), Black ( $M = 69.58$ ,  $SD = 26.45$  gay men;  $M = 69.58$ ,  $SD = 26.45$  lesbians), and Asian ( $M = 58.62$ ,  $SD = 25.65$  gay men;  $M = 58.62$ ,  $SD = 25.65$  lesbians) Americans. White Americans also reported the lowest traditional heterosexism ( $M = 1.58$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ), followed by Latino ( $M = 1.83$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ), Asian ( $M = 2.10$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ), and Black ( $M = 2.44$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ) Americans. Similarly, White Americans reported the greatest support for gay marriage ( $M = 3.65$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ), followed by Latino ( $M = 3.52$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ), Asian ( $M = 3.12$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ), and Black ( $M = 2.96$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ) Americans.

Because of the significant racial/ethnic differences found, we tested whether controlling for race/ethnicity (using dummy-coded variables for being Asian, Black, Latino, and White American) changed the results of any of the regression analyses, which it did not.

Next, we tested whether race/ethnicity (being White American) moderated the relationships between polyculturalism and the same three outcome variables. Race/ethnicity did not moderate the relationship between polyculturalism and thermometer ratings of lesbians, but did significantly moderate the relationships that polyculturalism had with traditional heterosexism and denial of discrimination against homosexuals, although in both of these cases, the main effects of polyculturalism still remained significant. Follow-up, separate regression analyses for White Americans and non-White Americans revealed that the relationship between polyculturalism and lower sexual prejudice was stronger for non-White Americans ( $b = -.37$ ,  $p < .001$  for traditional heterosexism;  $b = -.34$ ,  $p < .001$  for denial

of discrimination against homosexuals) than White Americans ( $b = -.15$ ,  $p = .24$  for traditional heterosexism;  $b = .05$ ,  $p = .72$  for denial of discrimination against homosexuals), for whom these relationships did not remain significant.

### Auxiliary analyses with ethnic identification

We then tested whether ethnic identification significantly moderated the relationships between polyculturalism and the same three outcome variables. Ethnic identification only significantly moderated the relationship between polyculturalism and thermometer ratings of lesbians (not for traditional heterosexism or denial of discrimination against homosexuals), although even for thermometer ratings of lesbians, the main effect of polyculturalism still remained significant. Follow-up, separate regression analyses for people high and low in ethnic identification (based on a median split) revealed that the relationship between polyculturalism and higher thermometer ratings of lesbians was stronger for people high in ethnic identification ( $b = .29$ ,  $p < .01$ ) than those low in ethnic identification ( $b = -.04$ ,  $p = .77$ ), for whom this relationship did not remain significant.

Similar to Study 1, although we did find significant mean gender and racial/ethnic differences in sexual prejudice, controlling for these differences did not change the results for polyculturalism. In this study we did find some evidence that race/ethnicity might moderate the relationship between polyculturalism and lower sexual prejudice, with this relationship being stronger among non-White Americans. As well, ethnic identification significantly moderated the relationship between polyculturalism and higher thermometer ratings of lesbians, with this relationship being stronger among those high in ethnic identification.

### Study 3

Study 3 sought to replicate the findings from Studies 1 and 2 demonstrating polyculturalism's association with lower sexual prejudice

in a community sample of adults identifying as heterosexual, and using another established measure of sexual prejudice. We again considered the gender and race/ethnicity of participants and tested for the possible mediating role of openness to criticizing one's own culture on the relation between polyculturalism and sexual prejudice.

### Method

**Participants and procedure** A total of 198 (107 women; mean age = 25.51,  $SD = 7.82$ ) adults (123 White, 31 Asian, 18 Black, and 17 Latino American, and 9 Other or Mixed) from numerous towns in Long Island, New York and that identified as heterosexual, completed surveys in public places (e.g., train stations, malls, parks) and were offered a candy bar as appreciation. Researchers went to a specified place (e.g., a train station) for several hours at a time, approached potential participants, and explained that the voluntary and anonymous survey was about participants' own personal beliefs and attitudes. Approximately 70% of people approached agreed to participate. Individuals who were with one or more people were invited to participate but were directed to complete the survey in private. As with Study 2, only data from participants identifying as heterosexual were used for analyses.

**Measures (in order presented to participants)** Participants completed the same 5-item scale measuring endorsement of polyculturalism as in Studies 1 and 2 ( $\alpha = .86$ ) and the same 3-item scale used in Study 2 to measure openness to criticizing one's own culture ( $\alpha = .60$ ).

*Negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians* Participants completed the 20-item measure of negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians (1 = Strongly Disagree, 9 = Strongly Agree), with two subscales (ATGL; Herek, 1988): one subscale targeting attitudes toward gay men, and the other targeting attitudes toward lesbians (e.g., "I think male homosexuals [lesbians] are disgusting";  $\alpha_s = .92$  for attitudes toward gay men and  $.91$  for attitudes toward lesbians). The mean for

all items in each subscale was calculated to create two composite scores for each subscale of the measure.

Participants also completed the same demographics questions as in Study 2.

### Results and discussion

Table 5 displays means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations for all Study 3 measures. Greater endorsement of polyculturalism was significantly associated with less negative attitudes toward both gay men and lesbians.

We used regression analyses to test our hypothesis that openness to criticizing one's culture mediates the relationship between polyculturalism and sexual prejudice (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Because polyculturalism significantly predicted less negative attitudes toward both gay men and lesbians, we tested mediation with both of these outcome measures. For the second step of testing mediation, we tested whether polyculturalism (predictor) significantly predicted openness to criticizing one's own culture (mediator), which it did ( $b = .42, p < .01$ ). For the third and fourth steps of testing mediation, we ran two regression analyses, with polyculturalism and openness to criticizing one's culture as simultaneous predictors for both outcome measures being tested. In these analyses, openness to criticizing one's culture was significantly associated with less negative attitudes toward both gay men and lesbians ( $b = -.17, p = .03$  for gay men;  $b = -.23, p < .01$  for lesbians), satisfying the third step for testing mediation. Polyculturalism remained significantly associated with less negative attitudes toward lesbians, but became only marginally significantly associated with less negative attitudes toward gay men. Using the  $z$ -prime method for the Sobel tests again, the mediated effects were statistically significant for both outcome variables ( $z' = -2.13$  for negative attitudes toward gay men;  $z' = -2.84$  for negative attitudes toward lesbians).

In short, Study 3 replicates the findings of Studies 1 and 2 in a community sample of adults, supporting the generalizability of the results.

**Table 5.** Bivariate correlations, means, and standard deviations of study variables for Study 3 ( $n=198$ )

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Polyculturalism				
2. Openness to criticizing one's culture	.42**			
3. Negative attitudes toward gay men	-.20**	-.22**		
4. Negative attitudes toward lesbians	-.25**	-.30**	.91**	
Means	5.87	5.22	3.48	3.28
SD	0.93	1.23	1.99	1.85

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

**Auxiliary analyses with gender** Using  $t$ -tests, we found that as expected, men reported greater negative attitudes toward both gay men [ $t(196) = -3.87, p < .01$ ] and lesbians [ $t(196) = -2.51, p = .01$ ] than did women, and there were no significant gender differences for polyculturalism or openness to criticizing one's culture.

Because of the significant gender differences found in sexual prejudice, we tested whether controlling for gender changes the results of the regression analyses, which it did not. Last, we tested whether gender moderated the relationships that polyculturalism had with attitudes toward gay men or lesbians, and these interactions were nonsignificant.

#### Auxiliary analyses with race/ethnicity

Although there was less diversity in this sample compared with the other two studies, a MANOVA revealed significant racial/ethnic differences for openness to criticizing one's culture and attitudes toward lesbians, but not for polyculturalism or attitudes toward gay men. Asian Americans reported the greatest openness to criticizing one's own culture ( $M = 5.58, SD = 1.05$ ), followed by White ( $M = 5.25, SD = 1.22$ ), Latino ( $M = 4.86, SD = 1.21$ ), and Black ( $M = 4.43, SD = 1.40$ ) Americans. White Americans reported the most positive attitudes toward lesbians ( $M = 3.00, SD = 0.16$ ), followed by Latino ( $M = 3.66, SD = 0.43$ ), Asian ( $M = 3.72, SD = 0.32$ ), and Black ( $M = 4.00, SD = 0.43$ ) Americans.

Because of the significant racial/ethnic differences found, we tested whether controlling for race/ethnicity changed the results of the

regression analyses, which it did not. Then, we tested whether race/ethnicity (being White American) moderated the relationship between polyculturalism and attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, and these interactions were nonsignificant.

Although we again found significant mean gender and racial/ethnic differences in sexual prejudice, controlling for these differences did not change the results for polyculturalism, and these variables did not significantly moderate the relationship between polyculturalism and lower sexual prejudice.

## General discussion

Across three studies with racially and ethnically diverse male and female undergraduates and a community sample of adults, we tested whether greater endorsement of polyculturalism was related to lower sexual prejudice assessed in numerous ways. As hypothesized, greater endorsement of polyculturalism was consistently related to lower sexual prejudice. Greater endorsement of multiculturalism (a focus on important differences among groups), and greater endorsement of colorblindness (a focus on the uniqueness of individuals and cross-group similarities) were not consistently related to lower sexual prejudice. Greater endorsement of polyculturalism accounted for a unique amount of variance in sexual prejudice, even when controlling for the contributions of race/ethnicity, gender, SDO, conservatism, and ethnic identification, as well as the contributions of multiculturalism and colorblindness.

Findings also suggest that greater openness to criticizing one's own culture at least partially mediates the relationship between greater endorsement of polyculturalism and lower sexual prejudice.

These studies are consistent with but extend past work on polyculturalism, which has demonstrated its association with more positive interethnic attitudes (Rosenthal & Levy, under review), by demonstrating that polyculturalism is also associated with more positive attitudes toward gay men and lesbians. The effect sizes of polyculturalism's relationship with sexual prejudice were not large, but considering the many factors that contribute to sexual prejudice and that the relationship between polyculturalism and lower sexual prejudice remained significant even when controlling for many important predictors of sexual prejudice, these findings suggest that polyculturalism may indeed be an important belief system to study because it contributes uniquely to attitudes toward gay men and lesbians.

As well, mediation analyses support the predicted mechanism through which polyculturalism is associated with lower sexual prejudice: greater openness to criticizing one's own culture. Thus, as expected, it seems that polyculturalism—belief in and focus on the ways that different racial and ethnic groups have interacted, exchanged ideas, and influenced each other, creating changes in cultures over time—leads people to be less defensive about traditions in their cultures that may marginalize homosexuals, and therefore is associated with lower sexual prejudice. This suggests that ideologies about racial and ethnic groups, and even racial/ethnic prejudice, may have a dynamic and important relationship with sexual prejudice, although past work has not yet explored the relationship between these types of ideologies and sexual prejudice. At the same time, greater openness did not completely mediate the relationship between polyculturalism and sexual prejudice, so this is likely not the only mechanism through which polyculturalism is associated with lower sexual prejudice. Future work may want to explore what other factors or mechanisms may mediate this relationship to further understand

the dynamics of why polyculturalism is associated with lower sexual prejudice.

We also found across studies that gender did not moderate the relationship between polyculturalism and sexual prejudice, suggesting that this relationship is consistent for both men and women. Race/ethnicity also was not a significant moderator of the relationship between polyculturalism and sexual prejudice in Studies 1 and 3, but in Study 2, we found that it moderated the relationship between polyculturalism and both traditional heterosexism and denial of discrimination against homosexuals, with the relationship being stronger for non-White Americans. Because of the inconsistency in these findings across studies, future work should test this potential interaction and aim to collect data with racially/ethnically diverse individuals to fully address this issue. Also, in Study 2, we found that ethnic identification significantly moderated the relationship between polyculturalism and thermometer ratings of lesbians, with the relationship being stronger for people high in ethnic identification. This finding makes sense theoretically, as polyculturalism may be a more relevant ideology in relation to sexual prejudice for people who have stronger ethnic identification and potentially are more influenced by traditions or beliefs they identify with their racial/ethnic group that may discriminate against homosexuals. However, this interaction was not significant for other outcomes, so it is preliminary, and future work should further explore this issue.

We found that colorblindness was significantly associated with higher thermometer ratings of gay men in Study 1, but colorblindness and multiculturalism did not demonstrate significant relationships with any of the measures of sexual prejudice in Study 2. As described earlier, it is possible that because of the combined positive and negative implications of both multiculturalism and colorblindness for sexual prejudice that these relationships did not emerge as significant. It is also possible that multiculturalism and colorblindness may be less relevant ideologies for sexual prejudice compared with polyculturalism. It seems possible that polyculturalism, for example,

could include ideas about gay men and lesbians comprising cultural groups that have influenced heterosexual cultural groups and vice versa. Still, others have suggested that multiculturalism and colorblindness could be conceptually relevant to many different types of social groups as well (e.g., Banks, 2004; Zirkel, 2008), so further work on these ideologies' relationships with sexual prejudice is needed.

### *Limitations and future directions*

The results from these three studies are correlational, leaving the direction of effects unclear. We did statistically control for the influence of several possible confounding variables (gender, race/ethnicity, SDO, ethnic identification, conservatism, multiculturalism, colorblindness), but other important predictors of sexual prejudice were not included in analyses, such as RWA and essentialism (e.g., Haslam & Levy, 2006; Whitley & Lee, 2000). It is also interesting that ethnic identification was significantly associated with greater sexual prejudice, but polyculturalism was not significantly associated with ethnic identification. This suggests that polyculturalism's association with lower sexual prejudice was not due to a reduction in ethnic identification. Future work should continue to examine and control for relevant confounding variables, such as ethnic identification (e.g., Tremble et al., 1989; Verkuyten, 2009), and attempt to use experimental methods to establish causality.

It is also important to highlight that consistent with past work on polyculturalism (Rosenthal & Levy, under review), mean endorsement of polyculturalism was fairly high. This suggests that polyculturalism is a well-regarded belief that has great potential for challenging sexual prejudice, but it also raises the questions of the extent to which polyculturalism is chronically accessible, and in what situations it may become more or less salient for individuals. Again, future work should test experimental manipulations to address this issue of how and if polyculturalism can be increased or made more salient and accessible to individuals in order to potentially be used to

reduce sexual prejudice, as well as other issues that these studies cannot address because of being correlational.

The measures of colorblindness and multiculturalism that we used in Studies 1 and 2 are also a limitation. Our colorblindness measure assessed a combined belief in focusing on individual uniqueness and commonalities across people, and our multiculturalism measure assessed a belief in focusing on important differences between racial and ethnic groups. Other measures of colorblindness and multiculturalism have included other forms of these ideologies, such as forms of multiculturalism that focus on appreciating the contributions of different racial and ethnic groups, and groups maintaining their own cultures (for a review, see Rosenthal & Levy, 2010). Although our measures of multiculturalism and colorblindness have been found to have positive correlations with several measures of these other ideologies in past work (Rosenthal & Levy, under review), future work may be directed toward seeing if other measures of multiculturalism and colorblindness relate to sexual prejudice. However, the main goal of the present investigation was to examine the relationship between polyculturalism and sexual prejudice. Additionally, the measure of openness to criticizing one's culture, although it only had three items, demonstrated sufficient but not high internal reliability; therefore, this measure may be a weakness of this study and have made it more difficult to test mediation.

Another limitation is that although we sampled diverse groups of undergraduates and community members, our samples still came from within one geographic location. Although past work has demonstrated polyculturalism's relationship with positive intergroup attitudes among adults across different regions of the United States (Rosenthal & Levy, under review), subsequent research may want to examine the generalizability of the relationship between polyculturalism and sexual prejudice in other locations in the United States, as well as in other countries.

Our findings are also limited to measures of sexual prejudice targeting gay men and lesbians, suggesting a fruitful line of inquiry is examining

polyculturalism's relationship with attitudes toward bisexuals (e.g., Mohr & Rochlen, 1999).

## Conclusion

Findings from the present investigation advance our understanding of contributors to sexual prejudice and tolerance, and particularly suggest that intergroup ideologies are relevant to our understanding of sexual prejudice. While there is longstanding research showing that belief systems and ideologies play a role in increasing or decreasing sexual prejudice, this paper reports for the first time that a greater belief in polyculturalism—an intergroup ideology that emphasizes the interactions, mutual influences, and connections among different racial and ethnic groups, and therefore the changing nature of cultures—is associated with lower sexual prejudice. Results from this investigation also highlight that polyculturalism relates to lower sexual prejudice through the mechanism of greater openness to criticizing elements of one's culture that may be discriminatory. Continued study of polyculturalism and other ideologies about race and ethnicity may contribute to a fuller understanding of the processes that maintain versus challenge sexual prejudice, which is vital in a world in which prejudice, marginalization, discrimination, and violence against gay men and lesbians persist.

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