INTRODUCTION.

BEYOND PLURALISM IN RESEARCH METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

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In the last five years, the contexts in which we do the work of rhetoric and writing studies have changed drastically, including how and where we teach, write, and conduct research. We've seen a volatile political climate where facts are constantly called into question, lived and worked while a pandemic raged across the globe illustrating ever-deepening inequalities, and witnessed relentless state violence against Black bodies and attacks on other people of color. To do research, today, means to grapple with the complexities of everything going on around us-news headlines and sound bytes about what can and can't be taught in educational contexts, legislation meant to exclude and harm the most vulnerable populations, and safety in public spaces. To do ethical and humane research today also means prioritizing issues of equity, justice, and accountability, and reflecting on how research affects us as scholars and, perhaps more importantly, as human beings. Numerous calls from leadership in the field have illustrated the necessity to disrupt the status quo and take action against outdated, long-held beliefs and exclusionary standards that are institutionalized, in multiple ways, in the very pillars that constitute our discipline, pillars that shape our practices and, thus, how we come to knowledge (Inoue, "Framework" and "Why"; Baker-Bell et al.). This collection takes up this call by revising, resisting, rethinking, and reconstructing the method/ologies that both ground and guide research in a field as capacious as ours. If the last few years have taught us anything, it's that our lives and the challenges we face aren't bound within neat and tidy categories; and neither is our research.

The research process—from formulating research questions, operating within a methodological framework, designing a study, deliberating on appropriate methods, conducting the research, analyzing the results, and writing up the

findings—is complex, relational, distributed, circuitous, and very often messy (Dadas; Rickly and Cargile-Cook; Banks, Cox, and Dadas). And yet, our first encounters with research in rhetoric and writing studies, often through graduate courses on research methods or undergraduate research experiences, are assigned readings of polished, published works in well-regarded journals and collections which often make it *seem* that *writing about* the research process is fairly straightforward and linear. As Rickly and Cargile-Cook ask: "When we look at virtually any published research, something is missing: Where's the mess?" (119). If the research process is messy and makes use of overlapping method/ologies, how do researchers create a sense of coherence when writing and publishing about research methods and methodologies? And, when coherence isn't possible or desirable, how can researchers show the value of messy method/ological frameworks, advocate for disruption to tradition, and convince stakeholders in our discipline that alternate ways of knowing and doing research in rhetoric and writing studies are valid and, in fact, often necessary?

We argue that there is, indeed, a lot to be learned from the messiness of research contexts and we believe that it's valuable to revisit and reflect on research method/ologies, to shed light on the processes commonly elided between research design and publication, and to make explicit that the method/ologies we use in our research require praxis. In this introduction, we situate the chapters featured in the collection as informed by a reexamining, critical questioning, and expanding of method/ologies in rhetoric and writing studies; this expansion has largely been spearheaded by conversations in cultural rhetorics, feminist rhetorics, queer rhetorics, and linguistic justice. We also highlight the ways contributors to this collection are already committed to and doing this work, demonstrating multiple pathways toward more equitable research practices. Among these chapters, we read about how researchers revisit their methods and findings over time and how they resist traditional approaches to method/ologies that curtail innovation and inclusion: in short, we get to read the often untold stories behind published research and track trajectories of method/ological change and progress in the field of rhetoric and writing studies.

THE CONCEPT FOR THIS COLLECTION

We come to this project bringing our experiences as advisors of graduate and undergraduate student research, as teachers of research methods, and as manuscript reviewers and editors considering the efficacy and merits of various method/ological approaches. Advising and teaching graduate students about research methods since 2012 and 2013, we have both witnessed students struggling to design method/ologically sound research projects. Moreover, even when there is

a firm grasp of research design and coding, many novice researchers have a difficult time knowing how to write about their research method/ologies for their theses and dissertations, as well as for peer-reviewed publications. In a discussion about how positively graduate students responded to "model methods" readings Ashley assigned in a graduate seminar, we began forming the ideas for this edited collection. While exploring scholarly models and exemplars is a common strategy in graduate programs, method/ology sections in dissertations are vastly different from those in published articles and essays, primarily because their inclusion in a dissertation functions "as a sort of proof and a performance" as well as a "reflection" of a graduate student's first major research project (Pantelides 198-99). Extended sections on method/ology are rare in journal articles and edited collection chapters—often reduced to a brief paragraph, a few footnotes, or edited out entirely, further contributing to the seeming "tidiness" of an often-messy process of research.

Both novice and experienced researchers have likely experienced the challenges with research method/ologies, perhaps feeling lost, overwhelmed, or boxed-in; yet, in rhetoric and writing studies, there are too few examples of what to do with the method/ological mess to help researchers navigate resisting, rethinking, and revising our methods. We also acknowledge that the naming and labeling of "sound" method/ologies is very much indicative of values and existing power structures that legitimate what "counts" as research or as knowledge more broadly within any given discipline. Thus, in compiling this collection, we sought to explicitly include chapters that not only acknowledge the ways in which research method/ologies are messy, but also pieces that explore the ways in which method/ologies can change over time, push against traditional method/ ological approaches and definition, reflect on method/ological dispositions, and chart avenues for building new method/ological tenets. In so doing, then, this collection is informed by our own method/ological commitments to making our discipline more inclusive by highlighting the diversity of research method/ology scholars use; examining research sites that are often overlooked or undervalued; and challenging the traditional frames that guide the subjects and sites of inquiry that more established and traditional method/ologies have served.

Our early discussions about this edited collection focused on supporting graduate student and early-career researchers—a commitment we continue to hold at the center of this work. To get a sense of the current state of affairs, we went to the source of where we and others first learned about research methods: graduate programs. We began by informally surveying via email the main points of contact for each of the 75+ programs listed as members of The Consortium of Doctoral Programs in Rhetoric and Composition (https://cccdoctoralconsortium.org/). We asked for recommendations of journal articles or book chapters, and we received

overwhelming responses and suggestions from the very teacher-scholars who often teach graduate courses in research method/ology, including the kinds of pieces that they liked to assign as well as what they would like to see more of. As we pored over their suggestions, we realized that while our field has several excellent handbooks that walk novices through the research process along with copious published research that deploys a particular methodological approach, there were fewer resources that explicitly addressed the messiness and the hard intellectual labor of grappling with the complexity of method/ologies. In other words, what novice researchers were likely to encounter in a graduate course was a straightforward "how to" primer on beginning a research project, and tidy, polished pieces that may (or may not) have a brief paragraph about method/ology before moving on to the results and analysis of any given study. To echo Rickley and Cargile-Cook once more: "Where's the mess?" (19). Each of the chapters makes the mess visible through questioning, disruption, and/or innovation in method/ologies.

Central to this collection is the relationship between the featured chapter and paired readings. Each author's chapter responds to or builds from at least one of their recently published articles, chapters, and/or books. The chapters in *Learning from the Mess* extend the research stories that began in these earlier publications, and reading them alongside one another highlights the powerful research interventions by these contributing authors. Their work embraces the unwieldy and the capacious, moving beyond mere pluralism in research method/ologies.

BEYOND PLURALISM IN RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES AND METHODS

The terms "methodology" and "method" have traditionally been defined as the frame through which research is guided (methodology) and the tools used to collect data (method) (Harding 2-3). The actual practices these two terms connote are not fixed and, as collections on method/ology in rhetoric and writing studies emphasize, are constantly being adapted to be applicable to a wide range of contexts and new ways of dissemination. In their 1992 collection *Methods and Methodology in Composition Research*, Gesa Kirsch and Patricia A. Sullivan embrace "methodological pluralism" and take a "self-questioning" stance (2). The structure of Sullivan and Kirsch's collection from thirty years ago already suggests a tension between traditional and innovative approaches—between what we see as a kind of tidiness and messiness—as they organize Part I to highlight method/ologies "gaining prominence" at the time and Part II to identify "research problems and issues" (Kirsch and Sullivan 5). In our approach to this collection, we found guidance and support from the arguments made by contributors to Kirsch and Sullivan's *Methodology*. For example,

Kirsch's chapter-length contribution argues that critical self-awareness is central to methodological pluralism because it reveals that "all methodologies are culturally situated and inscribed, never disinterested or impartial" (248). New approaches to research in any field of study will understandably result in disruption and dissonance as they call into question how we know what we know and whether our method/ologies are valid, just, and ethical. As Kirsch reminds us, these new approaches may not "produce a coherent or unified body of knowledge but, instead, may reveal contradictions, fissures, and gaps in our current knowledge of composition" (248). The challenge we take up in this collection is to embrace these fissures by exploring research studies that push the boundaries of knowledge production through methodological pluralism and innovative methods in ways that acknowledge this work as "a continuously changing enterprise" (Kirsch 248).

The value of methodological pluralism in the field of rhetoric and writing studies has made space for alternative research approaches and an expansion of the sites for research over time. Writing twenty years later in her preface to Writing Studies Research in Practice, Kirsch celebrated the broader contexts in which we study rhetorical activities and literate practice, naming "... after-school settings; . . . service learning and community organizations; . . . social networking sites; historical contexts; ... among groups often considered to reside at the margins of society; . . . [and in] international and transnational contexts" (xi). These new contexts, she asserts, "challenge researchers to adapt and refine research methods and to develop new ones (Kirsch xi). Making similar claims about the evolution of research design and methodological pluralism, Janice Lauer, in a 2014 interview, revisits her work "A Dappled Discipline" after 30 years to argue that the discipline has retained traditional modes of inquiry (e.g., theory, history, and empirical research) but that "these modes have expanded their types of investigation, theoretical assumptions, scholars, epistemic courts, and hence their bodies of knowledge" (Vealey and Rivers 170).

While methodological pluralism has laid an important foundation for researchers in the field to be more expansive in their approach to method/ology, we believe it's important at this time that the field move beyond only pluralism. Pluralism, like common tropes around diversity, can easily slide into an equalizing or neutralizing force that is co-opted by institutions to maintain the status quo under a new, more politically correct name. We invite readers of this collection to critically question why our field has traditionally valued some method/ologies while casting others aside; we challenge researchers not only to acknowledge difference in method and methodological frameworks but also to actively listen to and reflect on method/ological commitments while also seeking approaches that are more equitable, ethical, and just.

RETHINKING METHODOLOGIES AND METHODS

Moving beyond methodological pluralism requires that we rethink our relationship to knowledge work and research practice; after all, method/ologies are never neutral, a point especially illuminated by recent conversations in cultural rhetorics. Seeking to challenge and decolonize the dominant paradigm of Western approaches to knowledge-making—including how knowledge comes to be via research—cultural rhetorics scholars explicitly question why certain methodologies and methods are used in the first place, insisting that we must move "beyond simply applying frames from one culture/tradition to another culture's rhetorical practices" (Bratta and Powell). Key to a cultural rhetorics "orientation to a set of constellating theoretical and methodological frameworks" (Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab 2) is relationality and the ways in which cultural communities, beliefs, and practices—including knowledge-making practices—are enmeshed in a specific community's own intellectual traditions and histories, rather than relegating them as a response to and resulting from Western thought as the origin of intellectual production. As Riley Mukavetz explains, "To do cultural rhetorics work is to value the efforts and practices used to make and sustain something and use that understanding to build a theoretical and methodological framework that reflects the cultural community a researcher works with" (110). In addition to an emphasis on reciprocity and responsibility in research, cultural rhetorics method/ologies also find value in weaving together seemingly disparate and messy lines of inquiry, explicitly recognizing that meaning-making comes from a "compendium of theories, ideas, experiences, tangible tools, and intangible epistemologies" (Medina-Lopez). "Data" then, can come from storytelling, from embodied and emplaced interactions with research sites and participants, and from multiple literate acts beyond the textual (Powell et al.). Perhaps more important when thinking about our field's method/ologies, however, is that a cultural rhetorics orientation to research is explicitly interventionary and makes visible the "web of relations" within which our locations, institutions, and research practices are complicit in colonialism (Powell et al.). Among the hard questions cultural rhetorics scholars ask us to consider are: Why is a particular method/ology being used? What other possibilities exist for method/ologies to be more relational and reciprocal? And who does the research serve?

The need to intervene and disrupt traditional research practices in rhetoric and writing studies has also been echoed by others in the field, evidenced by the publication of edited collections focused squarely on research methods and methodologies. William P. Banks, Matthew B. Cox, and Caroline Dadas' 2019 collection *Re/Orienting Writing Studies: Queer Methods, Queer Projects* calls on us to examine the heteronormative orientations that undergird our research. Moreover,

the essays in the collection purposefully make messy the seemingly clean lines between method/ologies, calling on us to recognize the value of "queer rhetorics and queer method/ologies . . . in rethink[ing] the work of traditional data-collection methods and frames of inquiry" (6). Noting that anything labeled *queer* begins its work in a complicated, in fact quite 'messy' place (6), the contributors explore the value of complicating overly tidy methodological frameworks and methods—that in fact, research practices *shouldn't* be forced into tidy categories because doing so more often than not hampers inclusivity, and may actually perpetuate oppression, thus limiting what's possible for knowledge-making.

Other recent publications on method and methodology not only call for more inclusive and diverse frames to guide our research, but also ask us to examine the ethical imperatives that undergird why we do research, as the 2021 edited collection Race, Rhetoric, and Research Methods argues. Calling attention to the ways in which racism is embedded in our discipline's research practices, Alexandria L. Lockett, Iris Ruiz, James Chase Sanchez, and Christopher Carter emphasize that texts commonly encountered during graduate study present a dominant narrative (read: white) without "sufficient attention to structural racism. Consequently, students and faculty lack models for designing research about this very problem" (19). By foregrounding how race and racism impact the work of teaching and learning in our field, the authors deploy antiracism as methodology and illustrate how methods such as critical historiography, autoethnography, visual rhetorical analysis, and critical technocultural analysis can innovate and actively disrupt existing research practices in service of justice (22). As this brief review of recent conversations in our discipline demonstrates, reexamining the methodologies that drive our research as well as the methods we use can be a starting point to reimagining new and more just research practices.

To that end, this collection features ten chapters that challenge readers to rethink and reflect upon their own method/ological choices in the past and to envision new possibilities for their future research designs. We have clustered these chapters around the following themes: (1) Revising Method/ologies over Time, (2) Resisting Method/ological Definitions and Norms, (3) Rethinking Method/ological Dispositions, and (4) (Re)Constructing Method/ological Tenets. As noted previously, we have asked each contributor to connect their reflections about method/ologies to a specific or series of paired reading(s) previously published by the chapter author. We invite readers to consult the referenced paired readings, placing them in conversation with the chapters in this collection; we see this as a valuable opportunity to document a researcher's journey over time and how contributors to this collection arrived at the necessity to revise, resist, rethink, and/or (re)construct their method/ologies. While we have grouped chapters around key themes in research method/ologies, we encourage readers to

jump around and explore various chapters of interest in any order, dipping into topics here and there to follow their curiosities. Knowing also that readers of this collection will be at different stages as researchers and in varying professional positions and trajectories, we want to acknowledge the risks and challenges, as well as the opportunities and rewards, of employing non-traditional method/ologies. We hope that the chapters herein provide space for reflective praxis, as they have for us as researchers, and inspiration for seeking more just and equitable approaches to research and writing method/ologies.

REVISING METHOD/OLOGIES OVER TIME

The collection begins with a series of chapters that highlight researchers reflecting on how they changed, revised, or reconsidered their method/ologies over time. In the opening chapter "Toward a Queer Validity: Delighting in the Messy Methods of Writing Research," Stephanie West-Pucket and William P. Banks narrate their journey toward building a method/ology "to help us orient the messiness of story and create research trajectories that bumble and blunder around through the chaos." West-Pucket and Banks articulate the necessity of representing the complexity of research participants' experiences and stories and how, to do that well, researchers may need to critically question and break out of traditional method/ological models. Their chapter also compellingly speaks to the hurdles graduate student researchers may face when implementing non-traditional methods, as well as the difficulties graduate faculty face in growing beyond the possibly limiting traditional methodologies learned in graduate school. Their chapter forwards queer phenomenology as a valuable approach to research methods that welcomes movement, change, and repositioning over time—a queering of "preplanned research trajectories" that prompts researchers to "speed up, to slow down, and to change course in ways that allow alternative stories, patterns, practices, and experiences to emerge."

Sarah Riddick similarly finds value in revisiting method/ologies in her chapter "Deliberative Drifting Over Time: A Critical Reflection on Designing Social Media Methods for Longevity." This chapter is a direct response to and extension of Riddick's 2019 *Computers and Composition* article that theorized deliberative drifting as a method. Riddick describes how deliberative drifting developed, but she uses this chapter as an opportunity to more fully explore themes of "engagement, positionality, and feasibility" that she has been reflecting on and wrestling with since she conducted her initial research. Riddick models and demonstrates the critical questioning all researchers should be doing of their own scholarship and others', concluding by helpfully providing a list of questions for future users of deliberative drifting and related social-media methods to consider.

Another approach to revising method/ologies over time may involve revisiting previously collected data and examining it from a new theoretical perspective or methodological lens. Crystal VanKooten does precisely this in her chapter contribution "Voicing Transfer: Examining Race, Identity, and Student Learning through Video." VanKooten's chapter recounts how her decision to "ignore race in writing research" and within her own prior research resulted in a "'color blind' stance" that has consequences. VanKooten revisits data she collected for a prior study and publications to more explicitly foreground issues of race in the analysis; her work in this chapter focuses on the students of color in the study, reflecting on the loss of their representation and voices in the original analysis. VanKooten questions the series of choices that originally led her to dismiss questions of race and identity, and she ultimately argues for the significance of revisiting prior research, as she does here, in order to "disrupt comfortable whiteness."

RESISTING METHOD/OLOGICAL DEFINITIONS AND NORMS

Diverse sites of research and diverse perspectives often require that we adopt new or revise existing method/ological approaches, including *how* that research is composed and delivered. This section opens with Sonia Arellano's "Revising Textile Publications: Challenges and Considerations in Tactile Methods," where she explores "the relationship between the research method we employ and our revision processes" (2), particularly in relation to a new, tactile mode of research: Quilting as Method (QAM). Synthesizing two previous publications wherein Arellano lays out the potentials of QAM prior to composing a tactile research argument via a quilt, Arellano describes the challenges of doing research that not only uses a new method but also takes shape in a new mode. She asks us to resist the commonplaces that typically undergird written revision processes, including the typical norms for what academic publications look like and do, as well as the institutional standards by which such intellectual work is judged.

Innovative methods and approaches, however exciting they may be, also run the risk of establishing new norms and new inequalities, as Jerry Lee's "Messy Language, Messy Methods: Beyond a Translingual 'Norm," reminds us. Responding to calls concerning the translingual turn in composition studies, Lee cautiously resists the invocation of "a linguistic 'norm,' ... even if the norms were established through well-intended action, the very question of who gets to decide on the norm is a power-laden process which in turn exacerbates all kinds of social and educational inequalities" (6). Instead, Lee argues for a method/ological disposition that embraces the messiness of language research. After all,

language use is always fluid, thus language use researchers should remain open to the dynamic and unexpected uses of language without immediately codifying a set of standards or norms.

The chapters in this section open up provocative questions about the norms and definitions that underlie our research, ultimately arguing that all researchers ought to think deeply about why certain standards have been set, by whom, and for whom, as well as where there are spaces of resistance so that we can work toward more accountability and justice in our research designs and practices.

RETHINKING METHOD/OLOGICAL DISPOSITIONS

Drawing from one of our contributors Meagan Malone, we clustered the set of chapters in this section around the concept of rethinking "method/ological dispositions"—the styles of thinking about and doing research that we develop based on our past experiences, our field of study, and adjacent disciplines. Malone's chapter "Embracing the Potentials and Navigating the Pitfalls of Interdisciplinary Method/ologies" reflects on some of the method/ological choices she made in her published analysis of Natalie Wynn's YouTube channel Contrapoints. Malone narrates challenges she faced as a graduate student working with some method/ologies in rhetorical studies that were ultimately limiting her research and analysis. Like other contributors to this edited collection (e.g., Martinez; Abraham), Malone draws inspiration from her prior experiences in a different field of study. Malone argues for the necessity of continuously examining our method/ological assumptions throughout our research processes.

Continuing to identify differences in doctoral and post-graduate research experiences, April O'Brien's "Shifting Method/ologies: My Journey with Countermapping" narrates her experiences with moving toward countermapping as a method. O'Brien tells the story of how her research method/ologies evolved over time, describing specific "aha," or what she calls "punctum," moments. O'Brien's chapter reflects on how she had to face "hard truths about the injustices in [her] own anti-racist work," and her choice to move toward countermapping. O'Brien argues for the valuable lesson she learned from her experience: the necessity of embracing (even when difficult) a shift in method/ologies.

In the final chapter in this section, Stephanie Abraham describes her journey of "becoming, and sometimes unbecoming a qualitative researcher." In "Doing, and Undoing, Qualitative Research: A Story of Theory, Method, and Failure," Abraham reflects on her experiences as an elementary educator, on her work with multilingual and Latinx students, and her prior research and publications related to translanguaging and literacy practices. Drawing on her own experiences as a researcher, Abraham calls for more research that "undos and unbecomes"

and that ends with "more questions than answers" as a way of documenting and attending to the messiness of research method/ologies.

RECONSTRUCTING METHOD/OLOGICAL TENETS

Just as revisiting our method/ological dispositions can help us see why we use the method/ological approaches that we do, they can also help us reconstruct new method/ological tenets that reflect our personal, intellectual, and embodied commitments as researchers. The latter is particularly important when there's a seeming dearth of resources to turn to. For example, while prioritizing research participant safety is a common tenet of research with human subjects, what method/ologies are in place to ensure researcher safety? Bridget Gelms grapples with this very question in the opening chapter of this section, "Risky Projects & Researcher Well-Being: Locating New Methodological Traditions in Rhetoric & Writing Studies." As a digital rhetoric scholar who studies online harassment, Gelms narrates and reflects on "the hidden costs [researchers] face when pursu[ing] the sort of high stakes, risky, and emotionally challenging topics that can inspire upset or damage to the researcher." Writing in conversation with a previously published piece, Gelms points to the ways in which researchers can become entangled with explicit threats to their well-being and safety along with second-hand trauma-issues that are complicated by "methodological traditions that privilege rigidity and present objectivity as a gold standard." Thus, she argues for the value of methodologically locating the researcher within a project, foregrounding researcher well-being-physically, intellectually, and emotionally-as a means of leveraging the complications that can arise from risky research projects.

The final chapter in the collection, "What We Thought We Knew: Snapshots Along the Development of a Cultural Rhetorics Methodological Philosophy," also demonstrates how method/ological tenets that guide our research are constructed over time and in different contexts. Here, Aja Martinez weaves together seemingly disparate method/ological dispositions cultivated over timespans of learning across disciplines and different settings—personal, familial, educational—to illustrate *how* method/ological philosophies are interdependent, connected, and can be built to guide research questions that explicitly foreground the stories of multiply minoritized and marginalized peoples. Martinez locates how her values as a researcher came to be, laying down the groundwork for the method/ological philosophy informed by cultural rhetorics from which all her work is built upon. Pedagogically, Martinez also calls on rhetoric and writing studies teachers to reconsider how we read and teach rhetorical texts—that we should do so not simply as rhetorical artifacts but as rhetorical methods—even when

the method/ologies are not explicit. Doing so can open up new ways of looking and understanding what method/ologies do and the values they espouse.

EMBRACING THE MESS: CRITICALLY REVISITING METHODS AND METHODOLOGIES

This critical moment, we believe, is especially ripe for embracing the interventionary work that messy, and sometimes disruptive, method/ologies can do for rhetoric and writing studies. The chapters in *Learning from the Mess* collectively represent what we believe to be an incredible research intervention. While each author takes a different approach to these method/ological disruptions, the chapters demonstrate and enact what it takes for a field to critically question how it produces knowledge and to begin making changes. In contrast to scholars who want to discipline the field and mark off its boundaries and approaches, *Learning from the Mess* offers an alternate, revolutionary trajectory that embraces the field's capaciousness.

We see this collection as a starting point to embracing our field's shifting values in order to have a ready-set of method/ological readings from which graduate students and novice researchers, going forward, can draw upon in thinking expansively about just research designs. While some of our contributors call for new method/ological approaches, we see as equally important the calls for revising and rethinking our prior research, questioning our choices, and providing space—as we hope this collection does—for reflective praxis on our method/ologies, perhaps most especially when reflective distance and evolution over time demands that we pursue more just, nuanced, or critical positions as researchers. We hope that the stories researchers have bravely shared here will encourage other researchers and publication venues to make space for the mess, to embrace the untidy findings and processes, and to see those as valuable (indeed, publishable) lessons for other researchers and for the field of rhetoric and writing studies.

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