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Understanding Childcare through the Lens of Attachment Theories: An Exposition

Olisaeke, Lovelyn Chika
Department of Early Childhood Care in Education, Federal University of Education, Pankshin, Plateau State
Corresponding Author: chikafes@gmail.com
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Abstract
Mothering and care-giving breed attachment between mothers or caregivers and the children receiving care at infancy. This study dissects the major postulations of some theories of attachment. The selected theories and several other secondary data are relied on. Expository design, qualitative approach, textual and content analyses, interpretive devices and analytic description are employed. The analysis shows that the different theories of attachment share common views amidst their variances in explaining how attachment is formed between a child and a mother or a primary caregiver during the child's early years. The study concludes that childcare in schools, homes, and other settings can be understood and cared for much better through an understanding of attachment theories. The concerned professionals and stakeholders are charged to leverage attachment theories for effective childcare service delivery and early childhood education.

Keywords: Attachment Theories, Childcare, Understanding, Exposition, Developmental Psychology

Introduction
Among others, understanding theories of education, research, educational events, awareness campaigns like workshops, and effective parent-teacher communication are means of understanding childhood education (Wilson & Lee, 2020). Parents and teachers are partners in progress in childhood education, because the partnership yields more results in the learning process of the child on one hand and child development on the other. Strong ties between teachers and parents build conducive, supportive and

collaborative learning environment for children. Wilson and Lee (2020) emphasize the importance of parental involvement in childhood education, as positive results are obtained from the involvement. Theories, such as Piaget's constructivist theory and Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, are proven to be playing crucial role in childhood education through cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development of the child, as they offer valuable insights to play-based activities in teaching and learning and the attendant development of curricula that accommodate play and other learner-centered activities (Johnson & Brow, 2021).

By implication, theories of attachment are likewise. That is which this study avers that theories of attachment aid a better understanding of childcare in varied settings. Oluwamayomikun and Oparaku (2023) emphasize the importance of creating result-oriented curriculum that is capable of developing children's cognitive and social skills in the course of childhood education. To that end, understanding the theories of attachment through a research work of this kind can aid an understanding of childcare in school, home and other settings. Attachment refers to the emotional bond between infants and their elementary caregiver (Schaffer & Emerson, 1964). The implication of their definition of attachment is that the bond is of great relevance to infants, as it impacts positively on their emotional and social development. Their definition is of practical realization and implications in that infants are bound to be attached to their early regular caregivers.

These caregivers may be their mothers, older siblings, aunties, any other relatives or nannies who they are fond of, because they are being carried about, pampered, played with, cared for, shown love and so on by these their caregivers. Following the bond, infants trust and depend more on their caregivers, whom they are attached to, than on anyone else. They feel secured being with their primary caregivers. The bond serves as a springboard from which they explore and learn about the world where they live in. It also serves as the base of their social and emotional development throughout life (Crouch, 2015). This essay seeks to demonstrate that some of the theories of attachment proffer valuable insights into understanding childcare in different settings.

John Bowlby's Theory of Attachment

John Bowlby was a British psychologist and psychoanalyst, who introduced the Attachment Theory (AT) in the 1950s. The centrality of Bowlby's (1951) theory is the idea that human beings are biologically programmed to seek closeness with others. This notion reflects the idea of humans being social animals by nature. Bowlby believes that the tendency for attachment or close bond is innate in humans. He notes that the quality of attachment between the child and the primary caregiver(s) significantly impact on the social and emotional development of the child (Bowlby, 1951 & 1974). The theory emphasizes the importance of responsive care-giving. This is the kind of care-giving that is receptive, attentive, supportive, committed, humane, consistent, lovely, accommodating, playful, and problem-solving. With these attributes, among others, the child feels safe or secure.

Consequent upon feelings of safety, the child acts and interacts freely with their caregiver, and show trust and confidence in others for interpersonal relationships. The securely attached child explores the world around them. The reverse is the case with the child exhibiting insecure

attachment. That is, the insecurely attached child struggles with intimacy, because they are not exposed to intimacy. This is simply because attachment only obtains where and when intimacy obtains and vice versa. This is why the insecurely attached child grows up struggling with intimacy, since they neither had the foundational development of attachment nor are they used to intimacy. The results of attachment development manifest at adolescence, youth and adulthood. The results manifest according to the background influences.

Bowlby's (1969) monotropic theory of attachment is an evolutionary theory of attachment, which focuses on the concept of the child's attachment. This theory considers attachment to be a unique and close attachment of one person to another– the mother [or any other primary caregiver of the baby]. The theory argues that the child's attachment to their primary caregiver(s) is a biological making that had been pre-programmed by nature in the individual, which aids the natural process of survival. Bowlby (1974) asserts we form attachment in order to protect babies from danger and keep them alive. This paper holds otherwise that attachment is more natural than nurtured. It develops on its own as a result of consistent closeness. Mothers or other primary caregivers of children do not form attachment on purpose. They just keep on taking care of children and finally become fond of the children. Attachment forms from the consistent care of and closeness to the child. This is why even adults miss the persons who they are fond of, while away from them.

His monotropic theory has two cardinal principles. These are the law of continuity and the law of accumulated separation, whereby the effects of every separation from mother add up. Bowlby (1988) is of the view that the nature of monotropy means that not developing child-mother attachment would bring to place serious dangers to the child. The dangers include affectionless personality, personality disorders, and mental health challenges. According to Bowlby (1988), the concept of monotropy means conceptualizing attachment as an essential and close affinity (bond) with just one attachment figure. Bowlby's idea of 'internal working model' is a mental representation of the self and others, which is formed at early age in life. The formation occurs concurrently with the formation or development of attachment.

However, the fact that John Bowlby found children separated from their parents by the World War II does not mean he had a knowledge of the same children's early years as well as upbringing. If his judgment was based on his thinking that the children lacked attachment at early ages, when their mothers deprived them of such, then his introspection was not deeply enough and his analysis was peripheral. One question, among many others, to ask Bowlby would be: "If their mothers had deprived them of attachment, why were they missing their mothers or parents, or showing feelings of emotional insecurity or detachment?". What is generic in the cases of the children is the negative impact of World War II experiences on them. Their experiences cannot be rightly attributed to lack of attachment in their early days. Since he never knew the children before the War, how was he able to know their early days and thereby attribute their distress to lack of maternal attachment? Does it mean every child is compulsorily attached to their mother? Of course, some children are more attached to their fathers, or a particular sibling or relative. Thus, considering cases of emotional and social detachment from a mother, a father or a caregiver as being the result of deprivation is

misleading or questionable. This is because a child who was never deprived of responsive care, cordial relationship and/or emotional and social development essentials could later get detached from the attachment formed in their early days.

His theory revolutionized the understanding of the bond between infants and their caregivers– mothers, influence their relationships and behavior throughout their lives. What makes his theory monopolistic is that it solely considers mother alone as the first or primary caregiver of the child. It emphasizes that the disruption of child-mother bond causes mental health challenges for the child. The challenges include personality disorders, depression, and anxiety, to mention but a few. These make his theory influential in neuroscience and psychology. The foregoing view is monopolistic because it claims that the mother alone can offer the child the avenue for social and emotional development.

His theory considers the bond or attachment between the child and the caregiver as an internal working model that influences or grounds the working force behind the social and emotional development and functionality of the child. Attachments form as a result of the innate tendency for intimacy, and the consistent comfort and support the child gets from the caregiver. This statement implies that the human person has the natural tendency for intimacy. Thus, when infants get the intimacy expected naturally by every human being from their mothers or primary caregivers, they form attachment consciously and unconsciously. The absence of attachment between children and their mothers constitutes maternal deprivation.

John Bowlby on Maternal Deprivation

John Bowlby defines maternal deprivation as the negative effects of a lack of emotional and physical care from a mother or a primary caregiver during a child's early years. Reflecting on Bowlby's definition, this essay defines deprivation as a term that describes the lack of strong emotional bond between the infant and the mother or any other primary caregiver. Given his views about child-mother bond for social and emotional development, Bowlby thinks that the lack of cordial relationship between the child and the mother exerts negative effect on the child, particularly on the social, psychological and emotional development of the child. The idea of "maternal deprivation" suggests that Bowlby considers attachment to be basically what concerns mother and child. When the child lacks it from a mother, maternal deprivation occurs. Since attachment is needed for healthy psychological, physiological, emotional, social and behavioral development of the child, its absence undoubtedly exerts negative impact. The impact is likewise– psychological, physiological, emotional, social and behavioral impacts. Their emotional and social development phases are the most affected by the negative impact. According to Bowlby, maternal deprivation has both short- and long-term consequences on the child, who lacks attachment. Following the lack, such a child struggles to get attachment from elsewhere. In the process, the individual experiences difficulties in forming healthy relationships with others, as a result of not being familiar with the essentials of attachment or cordial relationship. Bowlby avers that children lacking attachment suffer and exhibit emotional distress. The difficulties are some of the consequences of the lack of attachment,

which Bowlby espouses. The consequences he identifies include aggression, emotional instability and high level of anxiety.

The short-term effects of maternal deprivation include increased distress, anxiety, aggression, defiance, indecorum and other behavioral problems among infants; delayed emotional and social development; and difficulties in forming secure attachment with caregivers. The long-term effects include mental health conditions like depression and anxiety; impaired cognitive development and poor academic performance; difficulties in forming and maintaining healthy relationships; increased risks of substance abuse, maladaptive copying strategies, and chronic health issues from stress and other sources. Smith and Doe (2024) is of the view that theories of cognitive development, digital literacy, and media ecology are viable means of understanding the role of technology in early childhood education. It notes that amidst the challenges posed by technology, its huge benefits can be understood and harnessed for the appropriate all-round development of young people through the understanding attained from some associated theories in the field.

For Oluwamayomikun and Oparaku (2022) and Nwode (2022), technologies have both negative and positive effects on children. As Nwode (2022), Pasupuleti (2022), Shawana (2022), Thuraka (2022), and Anjugu (2013) unanimously indicate, technologies include the internet, telephones, computers, e-mail, instant messaging, blogs, picture sharing, music sharing, crowd sourcing, voice record, social media, artificial intelligence (AI), and other smart technologies. Again, although Bowlby's claims might be true and/or realizable, Bowlby seems to think that relationship problems only arise from the deficiency in parenting or the lack of attachment in early childhood development. This study does not subscribe to that view. Rather, it emphasizes that apart from lack of attachment at infanthood or childhood, different factors account for the situations considered by Bowlby as the consequences of maternal deprivation (i.e., lack of attachment). For example, maternal deprivation is not the only cause of ill mental health. Its emphasis does not imply a rejection to the espoused effects of maternal deprivation. There is no doubt that maternal deprivation has effects on children. The effects obtain at childhood through adulthood.

However, not all individuals who suffer the Bowlby's identified effects of maternal deprivation never had attachment. Bowlby's thoughts were influenced by his experiences with children separated from their parents during the World War II. If his judgment of the impact of the separation was based on that which occurred during or as a result of the War, then his idea of attachment at early age raises some questions or concerns. The reason for this observation is that war experiences differ from non-war experiences. The trauma of any war can make an individual lose any formed attachment. The strengths include emphasis on the imperative of developing early attachment relationships; triggering more studies; and the realities of his notion of "internal working model".

The weaknesses of his theory include narrow and a context-specific perspective on mother-child relations; the exclusion of father and other actors from child development and parenting; disregarding resilience, cultural and contextual factors; and blaming detachment from formed attachment on the mother alone, leaving out other factors. The core ethical issues involved are

child wellbeing, parental responsibility, social support, and cultural considerations. These are considered and upheld by the present study. Understanding the strengths and the weaknesses of the theories of attachment allows for best practices in the practical settings of childcare in schools, homes and other settings. White and Wilson (2023) demonstrate that theoretical perspectives can offer valuable insights to cultural diversity in childhood education.

Schaffer and Emerson's on Attachment

Their research, entitled "attachment behavior", involved the practical observation of 60 infants of working families in Glasgow, Scotland at regular intervals from birth to 18 months. Their focus was on the reactions of the infants to being separated from and reunited with their primary caregivers. John Bowlby's Theory of Attachment is the base of Schaffer and Emerson's research. There is no doubt that Schaffer and Emerson's study was in furtherance of John Bowlby's Theory of Attachment. Schaffer and Emerson (1964) reveal that infants seek closeness to their primary caregivers. This offers insight to why most children are closer to their mothers than their fathers. This is in view of the fact that majority of mothers are their children's first or primary caregivers, even in this era in which house-help or housemaid practice obtains. It follows that children bred by housemaids are bound to be more attached to them, as their primary caregivers, than their mothers who have little or no time for them.

Their study also highlights the early relationship between infants and their primary caregivers, whom they get attached to because of the kind of care they get from them. Their research highlights the importance of responsive care-giving, which makes infants to become attracted and attached to their primary caregivers. This is the kind of care-giving in which the caregiver provides the child with prompt responses to their questions; provide their needs; play with and understand them; make them comfortable and relaxed; and establish a cordial relationship with them. The implication of the foregoing is that there could be primary caregivers of children, whose care is deficient or not responsive and so the infants they nurse and nurture do not develop attachment to them. That is because the absence of their expectations disrupts, shatters, or thwarts the child's development of attachment.

The identification of four major stages of attachment development is another highlight of their research. By explaining the stages of child emotional and social development, they contribute immensely to explaining child psychology and childhood education. The research has continually sparked further studies. Finally, their research was an experimentation of the postulation of attachment theory that infants develop close ties with their primary caregivers. The ties, which constitute a bond between infants and their caregivers, exert some influence on emotional and social development of the infants. Therefore, Schaffer and Emerson's research aligns with Bowlby and Ainsworth's theory of attachment.

Schaffer and Emerson's on Stages of Attachment

There are four stages of attachment development put forward by Schaffer and Emerson (1964). The first stage is the pre-attachment. The second is attachment in the making. The third stage is clear-cut attachment. The fourth is called reciprocal relationships. Accordingly, Schaffer

and Emerson (1964) explain that at the first stage, infants are not yet attached to anyone. Rather, they only show preference for faces that they are familiar with. Caregivers' responsiveness and care make infants to start developing attachment to them. This is the stage called attachment in the making, being the second stage of attachment development.

In the third stage, the infants show distress or dislike when separated from or kept away from their primary caregivers. The fourth stage is that in which infants seek and engage in interactions with their caregivers (Bretherton, 1992). The first stage occurs when the infants are just around 6 weeks old. Between 6 and 7 weeks, the second stage occurs. This stage is also regarded as the indiscriminate attachment phase. The discriminate phase, being the third stage, occurs around 7-9 months. The final (fourth) stage is also called the multiple attachment phase. It occurs around 9 months and above. At this stage, infants become independent, form multiple attachments, and feel insignificant or no distress being away or separated from their primary caregivers (Bretherton, 1992).

Insights from the foregoing described stages of attachment undoubtedly arm mothers and other caregivers with the basic knowledge of attachment, with which they understand infants well and treat them accordingly. Thus, the knowledge helps avert some of the parenting or care-giving issues that could possibly arise from poor knowledge or ignorance of these stages and what to do regarding creating care bond with infants. The knowledge also helps mothers and other caregivers to be able to meet the needs of infants based on their ages, stages of psychological development and childhood, and needs.

The foregoing points are upheld by Garcia and Smith (2022), who explore the role of play in childhood education through the lens of theories of social stratification and educational inequality, highlighting the disparities among learners as a result of stratification and inequality. The disparities, the study shows, cause as well as worsen the barriers to education. The study considers policy measures and the addressing of socio-economic challenges as the pragmatic measures for tackling the situations. It holds that understanding socio-economic factors in childhood education through theoretical constructs can help educators and policymakers to create conducive and supportive learning environment for children. It is to that end that the present work avers that understanding theories of attachment can help arm the individuals saddled with responsibility with the techniques for making learning more meaningful for children.

Mary Ainsworth on Attachment among Infants

Mary Ainsworth's Strange Situation is a technique used in developmental psychology to measure the style of attachment between infants and the primary caregivers, which informs their reactions to series of separations and reunions in a controlled laboratory context. Developed in the 1970's, the Strange Situation refers to the unusual situation in which infants and young children in that context feel and react to the situation as a strange one, since it was unknown to them before that given time. Ainsworth's test involved 8 episodes. In the first episode, the child and the caregiver enter a room, and a stranger enters shortly afterwards and interacts with the child, while the caregiver leaves the room. As the stranger leaves, the

caregiver reenters the room. The child is then left alone in the room before the caregiver returns again.

The child's behavioral dispositions or reactions within these episodes informed Ainsworth's three major styles of attachment, which are secure, insecure-avoidant and insecure-resistant attachments. Disorganized style is another style of attachment, being the fourth one, was later added by Main and Solomon to the three identified by Ainsworth (Bretherton, 1992). Accordingly, the secure attachment style is one that describes the situation of showing distress or feeling insecure in the absence of their caregiver, but showing relief and confidence once the caregiver returns to the setting. When their caregiver is present, they make exploit of their environment freely and confidently. In the case of the insecure-avoidant style, the child avoids the caregiver and shows little distress when the caregiver leaves the room. The child may not seek refuge in the caregiver when she or he returns to the room. The child may even actively avoid the caregiver at return.

The insecure-resistant style obtains when a child, who is so attached to their caregiver, shows high level of distress when their caregiver leaves the room. Consequently, such a child is difficult to comfort by the caregiver upon return, and may even show hesitant behavior towards the same caregiver. In the case of the disorganized child, mixed behaviors are realized from them before and when the caregiver returns. Such behavioral dispositions by the disorganized child include freezing, rocking, or appearing dazed and confused. This style of attachment is said to be peculiar to children who experienced trauma or inconsistent care-giving at infanthood. Mary Ainsworth's test has remained popular among researchers, clinicians and psychologists, as they use it to determine the quality of attachment between children and their caregivers. The test reliably predicts emotional and social development and their ability to form healthy relationships in future.

With an understanding of the styles of attachment, professionals and caregivers become conscious of what to do aright, how to relate with different children positively and the kind of support to offer to different children. Parents, teachers and caregivers need to understand and be conscious of the foregoing. That is the essence of the exposition made herein. The test has had appreciable impact on child psychology, developmental psychology, early child education, emotional and social development of children, and care-giving and some clinical services. Nevertheless, the test has been criticized for its reliance on a controlled laboratory and cultural bias. Thus, understanding attachment offers valuable insights to best practices in childcare and child upbringing.

For this essay, the test is flawed with some biases and fallacious generations. In fact, the fallacies are those of hasty generalization. The fact that Main and Solomon added the fourth style is a clear indication that the styles of attachment are not limited to the three identified by Ainsworth. The three identified by Mary Ainsworth reflect the three stages of attachment identified by Schaffer and Emerson (1964). If repeated, the results of the test would vary in different settings. After all, Ainsworth's test was merely controlled laboratory experimentation with given children. Individual differences would also negate the result of her test, because the responses or reactions of Child A, B and C that test would differ from those of Child D, E

and F used by Ainsworth for the test. It is quite logical to think the test of many years ago would not remain the same these days.

The influence of modern-day trends on children present realities that one cannot predict children's behaviors based on the displayed behaviors of several other children. For instance, it takes deep understanding of child psychology, criticality, objective observation, and inquiries, among other factors, for one to know the age of a girl child of 12-13 years old, who looks rather like someone in 20-23 age brackets. Also, this essay avers that attachment cannot remain the same or constant for lifetime. Of course, in the real-world situations, there are cases of changes in the bond between certain individuals and their caregivers. In the first place, the child having secured bond with their primary caregiver would undoubtedly start avoiding the same caregiver who had abused them sexually, emotionally and/or otherwise at early age. They are bound to hate such a caregiver with passion. In that case, the attachment ceases to be.

Distance can also shatter attachment. Environmental, social, economic and familial factors, which vary among individuals and places, also work against the possibility of her test being cross-cultural, and realizable in all real-world situations. The applicability of the findings in some contexts is impossible, thereby making it quite obvious that the test can be considered context-specific. Cultural, religious and parenting differences present variations in attachment. Yet, all cultures, religions and parents uphold the ideals of cordial relationship and the need for secure and responsive care-giving. Clearly, attachment styles are not permanent or fixed. Her research with its findings only made a unique contribution to understanding how cordial relationship with infants (children) and meeting their needs make them get attached to their primary caregivers over sometime.

Ainsworth believes that attachment is dynamic and changes over time, following life experiences, relationship conflict and changes, personal growth and idiosyncrasy, therapy, self-reflection, etc. The focus of her study was on the quality of the attachment between children and their caregivers. The age-long validity of her test rests on the fact that in general context, children having, or who have had, secure attachment do better than others, because of the positive impact of the smooth mutual relationship between them and their caregivers. When they are securely attached, they have positive experiences of exploring the world in collaboration and cordial relationship with others. Be it as it may, Ainsworth's notion of attachment also offers valuable insights to understanding childcare. The insights serve as some essentials for learning, practicing and improving childcare service delivery and childcare education in schools, homes and other social and health care settings.

Freud and Dann on Attachment

While John Bowlby dwells on the impact of maternal deprivation, Sigmund Freud and Rene Dann dwell on privation and its impact on the child. Privation, according to Freud and Dann (1951), refers to the absence of nurturing and stable environment for a child to grow and develop. It occurs when a child is deprived of basic needs, such as love, food, shelter and emotional and social support. Implicitly, privation is same as maternal deprivation. The major

difference is the inclusion or consideration of environmental factors and their influence or impact on the child. The absence of food, shelter and emotional and social support to the child can be blamed on both parents and the society. Societal institutions, particularly governments alongside their agents, are supposed to provide the basic needs of the individuals in society. The failure to provide them can lead to the emergence of a lot of issues, including civil unrest, youth restiveness, heinous crimes, conflicts, militancy, and insurgency. Privation causes physical, emotional, and psychological distress. Vulnerable children are typical examples of children suffering privation. Globally, street children and other sets of abused children constitute nuisance to society. Children suffering from kwashiorkor are among those lacking nutritious food or a balanced diet. Malnutrition has grave implications. These include health, cognitive, physical and mental effects. It leads to weakened immune systems and stunted growth. Privation also obtains in forms of lack of shelter, clothing, healthcare, and education.

Freud and Dann (1951) write on privation with its effects. They look at the effects of privation from psychological perspective, relating it to attachment. They consider privation to be the results of many lacks suffered by a child in their early days of life, which manifest adverse effects on them momentarily and in the future. They emphasize the place of early experiences in life, particularly those concerning attachment and bonding. For them, attachment influences individuals' personality and mental health and either make or mar their emotional and social wellbeing (Freud & Dann, 1951). They observe that lack of childhood nurturing caregiver could lead to feelings of insecurity, emptiness and low self-esteem. They teach that therapy and interventions can help such individuals to get asserted and freed from the effects of privation. Thus, it is imperative to reiterate their teachings in this essay. Doing so reminds teachers, professional caregivers and parents of what to do to either avert or address the effects of privation on children through the various stages of life.

Similarly, Curtiss (1977) observes that children experiencing privation can get healed when given adequate nurturing, support, and care by professionals. He examines early child formation of attachment, with reference to orphanage home children. Of course, children in orphanage homes experience privation and lack attachment. Meanwhile, the absence of attachment impacts negatively on the child throughout their lifetimes. It causes them mental and physical health challenges, including indecorum, aggression, and difficulties in forming relationships. On their part, Hodges and Tizard (1989) reveal that children receiving institutional care are incomparable with those raised by their biological parents. Children in orphanage homes are not raised by their biological parents. Such children have difficulties forming relationships and attachment with others, which are regarded as attachment disorders. They suffer life-time effects of privation, which they lack while in institutional homes. Children under institutional care display antisocial behaviors, lack self-confidence and continually suffer emotional problems.

Conclusion

The different theories as well as studies on attachment and deprivation, just like those on privation, tally extensively in their postulations and findings. They show the intersection

between nature and nurture, and how human behaviors are influenced by genetics and environment. The psychological and emotional wellbeing of the individual is influenced by both nature and nurture as far as privation is concerned. A child who is genetically predisposed to anxiety is bound to be more vulnerable to the negative effects of privation. A girl, Genie, who was isolated from humans for the first 13 years of her life, struggled to develop language and social skills when rescued and placed under nurturing environment. Her struggle is a long-term result of privation.

Essentially, the concept of attachment is a term in developmental psychology that describes the mutual relationship between infants and their mothers or any other persons closest to them, who give(s) them maximal care and attention. There are different theories of attachment. This study has made an exposition of how to understand childcare through the lens of theories of attachment. It enjoins teachers and other actors in social and healthcare settings to leverage theories of attachment for a better understanding of childcare and best practices in the field of childhood education and childcare settings.

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