

# “Who Can Stay? Racial Disparities in Layoffs During COVID-19”

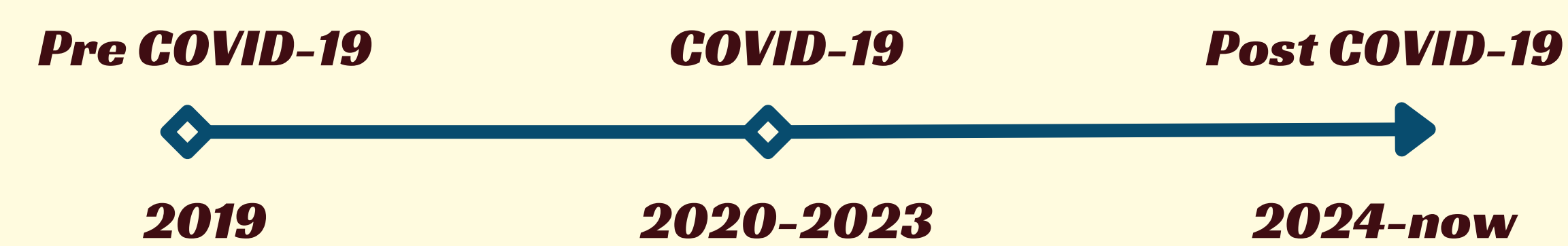
University of Toronto Scarborough, Department of Sociology, SOCC31: Practicum in Quantitative Research

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## Background

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed deep-rooted social inequities, disproportionately devastating marginalized and racialized communities. While numerous studies examined racial inequality in health and economic outcomes, **few have explored the role of racism and workplace diversity in job loss.**



## Literature Review

### PREVIOUS RESEARCH FOUND...

- Overall:** White individuals faced **lower** unemployment rates (4-12%) than **Black, Asian, and Hispanic individuals** (Wang and Kang 2024; Gemelas et. al 2022)
- Patterns **persisted** across **frontline & non-frontline work**, highlighting sector-specific variations, but occupational racial segregation cannot fully explain disparities (Carter 2023; Gemelas et. al 2022)
- Structural** inequality & **systemic** racism (e.g., unequal access to education & healthcare) contributed to **overrepresentation in unstable jobs** for Black and Hispanic individuals (Tan et. al 2021; Hardy et. al 2021)
- However, previous research lacks explanations for job loss beyond structural inequality & systemic racism

What else constitute differences in job loss?  
What about **micro-level, individual interactions?**

**Such as racist coworkers and bosses?**

Do they exacerbate the problem?

## Research Questions

- Did racism increase** since COVID-19?
- What is the relationship between **experiencing racism and layoffs** during this period?
- Can **workplace diversity** explain racism in the workplace and job loss?

Read the full research paper here!

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## Data and Methods

- Source:** General Social Survey (GSS) Cumulative Datafile (2012-2022)
- Sample:** 31,585 respondents (consisting of White Americans, Black/African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans)

**Independent Variables:** Racial background, perceived racial discrimination

**Dependent Variables:** Racial attitudes, job loss (laid off)

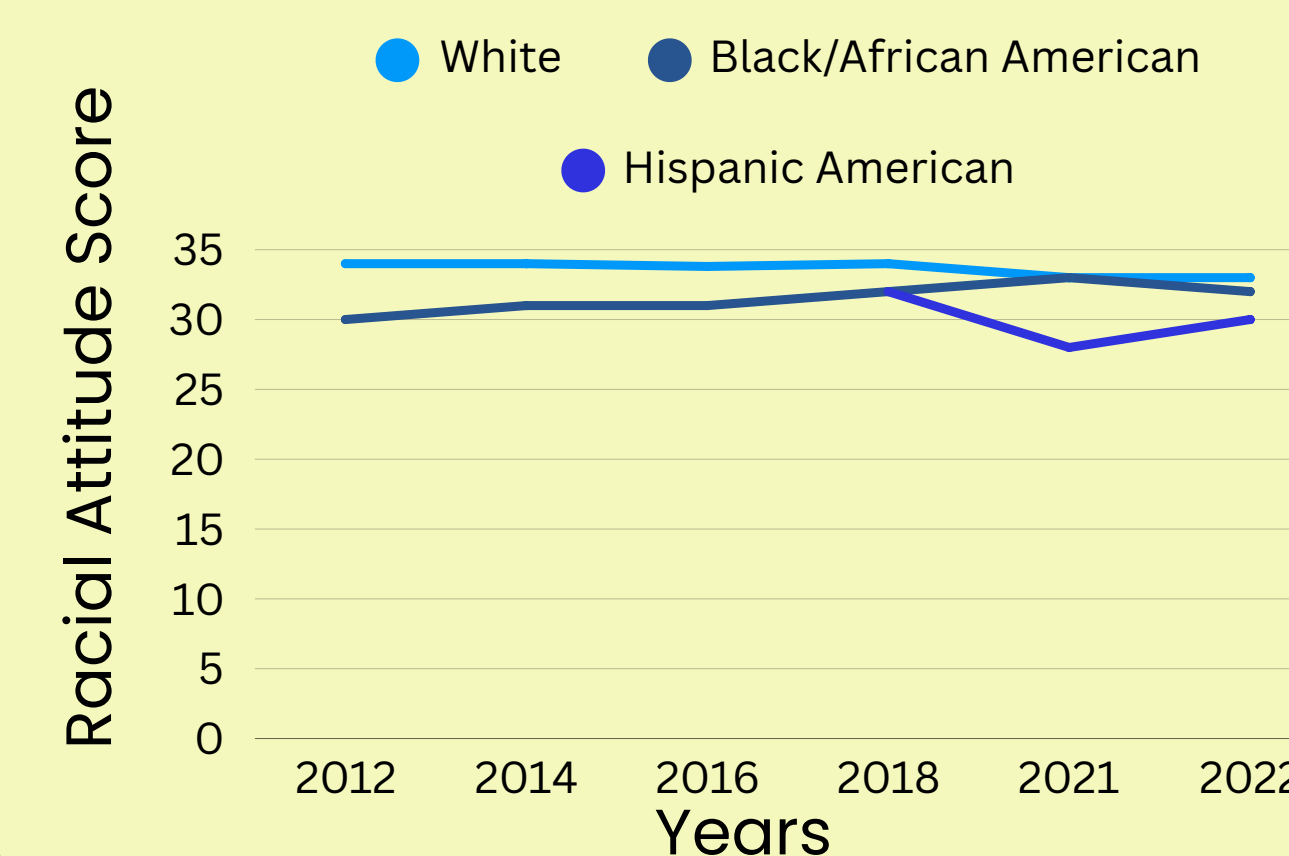
**Intervening Variable:** Workplace diversity

**Control Variables:** Age, Education



## Findings

### Negative Shift in Racial Attitudes

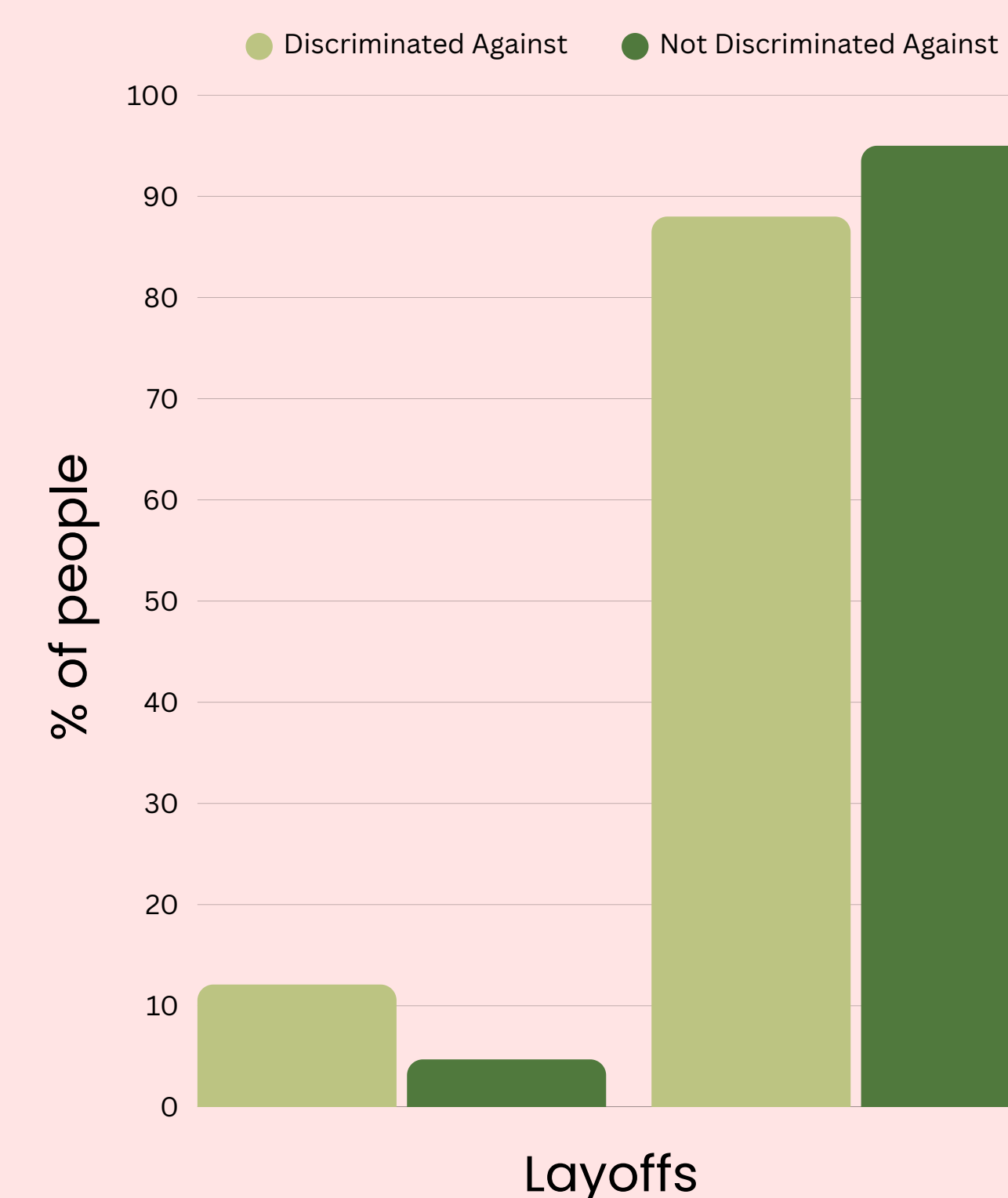


- 2021-2022: Racial attitudes towards **White and Black/African Americans** became **more negative**
- 2018-2021: Racial attitudes towards **Hispanic Americans** became **more negative**, but rebounded in 2022
- The general population are most likely to have **somewhat negative to negative attitudes towards Black/African Americans**, in comparison to other racial groups

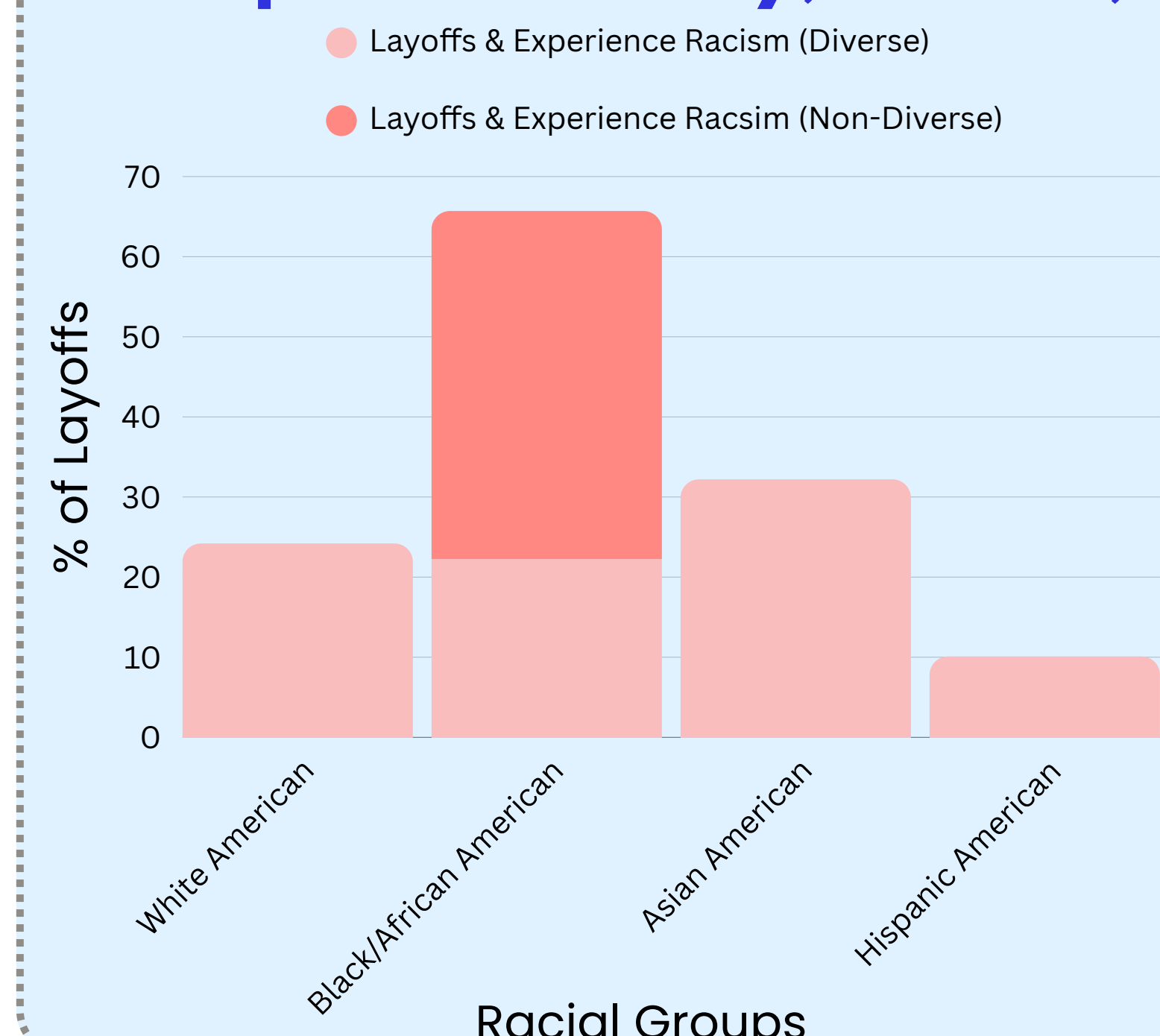
### Experiencing Racism at Work and Layoffs

Those who have felt that they experienced racism at work are almost **3x more** likely to be laid off than those who did not.

- White Americans** who reported experiencing racism at work are **2x more** likely to get laid off, with **overall layoffs at 4.6%**
- Black/African Americans\*** who reported experiencing racism at work are also **2x more** likely to get laid off, at a rate **2.6% more** than White Americans with **overall layoffs at 6.8%**
- Asian Americans** who reported experiencing racism at work are about **6.5x more** likely to get laid off than those who did not, but with **overall layoffs at 3.4%**
- Hispanic Americans\*** who reported experiencing racism at work are **just as likely** to get laid off than those who did not, with **overall layoffs at 6.5%**



### Workplace Diversity, Racism, and Layoffs



#### In non-diverse workplaces...

- White Americans** are **extremely unlikely** to experience racism, only 2.5% who do were laid off
- Black/African Americans** who reported workplace racism are **2x more** likely to get laid off
- Asian Americans** report **no** layoffs

#### In a diverse workplace...

- Black/African Americans\*** who report workplace racism are **2.5x more** likely to get laid off
- 100%** of **Asian Americans** who reported such are laid off
- Hispanic Americans** have slightly higher layoff rates in a diverse workplace than non-diverse

\* = not statistically significant

## Controlling for Education

- Black/African Americans** and **Hispanic Americans** are about **more likely** to get laid off in **all levels of education**, in comparison to **White Americans**
- Asian Americans** are the **least likely** to get laid off in all levels of education **except for post-grad**

## Controlling for Age

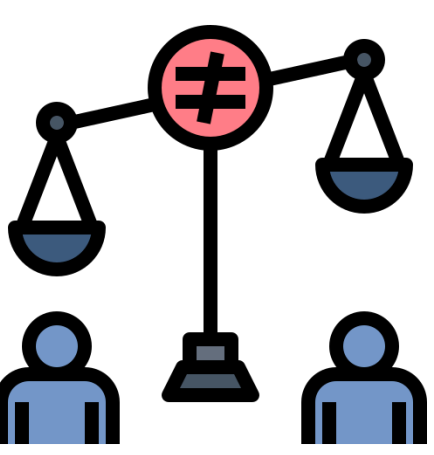
- Similar to education, **Black/African Americans** and **Hispanic Americans** are **2-8x more** likely to get laid off **across all age groups**, in comparison to **White Americans** and **Asian Americans**

## Conclusion

- Black/African Americans** and **Asian Americans** are the most likely to have **faced racial discrimination at work**
  - Black/African Americans** are the **most likely to report racial discrimination and experience layoffs** more than any other group, reflecting anti-Black bias
- Despite heightened rates of **Asian Americans** reporting experiencing racial discrimination at work, they **faced less overall layoffs**
  - Racism can manifest and be perceived differently
- Even within the same level of education, **disparities persist** particularly among **Black/African Americans** and **Hispanic Americans**
- Workplace diversity does not mitigate** racism and layoff disparities for racial minorities

## Limitations

- Data for Asian and Hispanic Americans are underrepresented → low ecological validity
- Some data are not statistically significant
- Gender differences were not accounted for



## Future Research Direction

- Focus on reports from perspective of managers and their layoff decisions
- Investigate the role of gender and immigrant status for an intersectional approach
- Measures effective in reducing such disparities

## References

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