

## RESEARCH

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### TEACHER TRAINING ON GENDER ISSUES

#### *FORMACIÓN DEL PROFESORADO EN CUESTIONES DE GÉNERO*

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#### ABSTRACT

There have been many advances. However, women are still far from achieving real equality with men and, in some cases, they still undergo physical, psychological, verbal, sexual assaults... aggressions that, sometimes, have their origin in the ideas historically and culturally transmitted from generation to generation. Some people believe that domestic violence does not affect the new generations, but the latest research shows us a very different situation: schools are the first stage of gender abuse. Therefore, teachers' work is essential in detecting and treating violence, in improving school life and in training and raising awareness on gender issues. The piece of research contained herein intends to reveal whether teachers are ready for that and whether teacher training takes these issues into account. In this article, we show some of the most relevant results of research on "teacher training for the educational treatment of conflicts on cultural diversity and gender". The results state, in consistence with others previous pieces of research, the fact that there are significant gaps in the training of teachers in gender, gender coexistence, conflict management and violence issues.

**KEY WORDS:** Gender – coexistence – conflict – violence – diversity – teacher education – teachers' professional development.

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## RESUMEN

Se han conseguido muchos avances. Sin embargo, la mujer todavía está lejos de lograr una igualdad real con el hombre y, en algunos casos, sigue siendo objeto de agresiones físicas, psicológicas, verbales, sexuales... que, en ocasiones, tienen su origen en las ideas que histórica y culturalmente han sido transmitidas de generación en generación. En algunos sectores sociales es habitual la creencia de que la violencia de género no afecta a la infancia y la juventud, pero las últimas investigaciones muestran una situación diferente: los centros escolares son el escenario de los primeros abusos de género. La labor del profesorado es esencial en la detección y tratamiento de la violencia, la mejora de la convivencia escolar y la formación y sensibilización en cuestiones de género. La investigación que se presenta en este artículo pretende desvelar si el profesorado está preparado para ello y si la formación del profesorado tiene en cuenta esos aspectos. Aquí se muestran algunos resultados relevantes de una investigación sobre la "formación del profesorado para el tratamiento educativo de los conflictos sobre diversidad cultural y de género", en la que se utilizó una metodología mixta de investigación. Los resultados ponen de manifiesto que existen carencias importantes en la formación del profesorado en relación a cuestiones de género, convivencia entre sexos, gestión de conflictos y violencia.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Género – convivencia – conflicto – violencia – diversidad– educación del profesorado – desarrollo profesional de docentes.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

We have lived in a patriarchal system in which women were assigned family and household care functions within the domestic space and men were assigned the work outside home to support the family. Literature offers statements that give an idea of what to be a woman has been considered for years:

The relatives of my stepfather said, therefore, that I was not good at all because I did not know how to iron, or cook, or knit; because I did not wash the windows, nor make the bed, nor sweep my room. According to them, I needed twenty servants and behave like a princess. They also ridiculed my fondness for study and called me the Doctor ... (Gómez de Avellaneda, quoted by Catena, 1989, p.169).

This distribution of functions made women receive a differentiated education in spaces, contents and even in terms of the educational levels they could access. There has been a great social change regarding the role of men and women. Today,

women can access all levels of education and there is no gender-differentiated curriculum. Fortunately, ideas like the following have been left behind for a large part of the population: *"Women never discover anything, they lack the creative talent reserved by God for manly intelligences"* (Pilar Primo de Rivera, 1942, quoted by Otero, 2001, p. 176).

However, women still have less access to the most prestigious studies and find more obstacles in finding a job. Many girls and boys still play games or play with toys that were traditionally assigned to their sex. In the words of Subirats (1994): Formal equality is not accompanied by real equality, for although women can access the same studies and jobs, they still do not do it.

Women's universal access to education, coupled with the great changes that have taken place in recent years regarding their social stand and gender stereotypes, might suggest that gender-based violence has been eradicated, but nothing is farthest from reality. News of insulted, raped, physically and psychologically assaulted women is continually coming to light.

Many pieces of research show that gender-based violence is not unique to the elderly, who may have been raised with other ideals and values, but it affects children and young people. Greater equality between people of different sex does not imply total respect between them nor coexistence without problems.

Thus, Pérez and Montalvo (2011, pp. 90-92) warn of the following:

In 2009, out of the 55 victims of gender violence, five were from 18 to 20 years old and 11 were from 21 to 30 years old. Age spans in which deaths due to sexist violence are more and more frequent and in which, above all, the different studies specify that the common thing is to find constant episodes of psychological violence in some groups of adolescents and young people. (...) In general, the young population considers that abuse is only related to serious physical aggression, ignoring other forms of gender violence. Most boys and girls think that the problem is in married and elderly women and not in young women, also associating the belief that men have difficulties to control aggression because it is a hormonal issue (...) The belief among the youth that gender violence only occurs in the elderly should worry us. Young people do not imagine that the slap on the face or the insults that occur at the present moment correspond to the same phenomenon of the lady who has died due to a beating and that appears in the television news.

In the same lines, Diaz Aguado and Carvajal (2011) reveal data that, at least, are disturbing. The following are examples:

1. 24.7% of the adolescents participating in this piece of research show some agreement that *"the man who seems aggressive is more attractive"* and 7.1% and 2% quiet and strongly agree.
2. 30.7%, 6.5% and 2.8% of the adolescents participating in this piece of research are somewhat in agreement, quite in agreement and strongly agree respectively that *"it is right to hit someone who has offended you."*

3. 29.7% of the adolescents participating in this piece of research are in agreement, quite in agreement and strongly agree that *"in order to have a good relationship, it is desirable that the woman avoids disagreeing with the man"*.
4. When asking the teenagers if their partners *"have tried to isolate them from their friends"*, 15.1%, 3.3% and 2.8% respectively answer that "sometimes", "often" and "many times".
5. 2.7% of the adolescents participating in this piece of research stated that their partners had "sometimes" beaten them, followed by 0.4% who answered that "often" and another 0.4% who answered "many times".

The latest piece of research by the Reina Sofía Center on Adolescence and Youth (2015) shows that 33% of Spanish teenage boys and girls (12-24 years old) very much, fairly and somewhat agree with: *"It's okay for boys to date many girls, but not the other way around."*

They are examples of the fact that people are very close to justify violence or to value the androcentric vision, based on the macho mentality. It may be thought that these percentages are low, but a minimum percentage of answers in this sense should already worry, because it means that there are a number of adolescents at risk and, therefore, mistreatment in the couple is not restricted to adult life. The generational change detected in adolescents is not enough to eradicate gender violence.

Research shows that gender violence is not an isolated problem, but it rather affects all countries, all areas of society and all age groups. All people must be informed and sensitized to work on its eradication. And that is where the school plays a key role. During childhood and adolescence, the foundations of the relationships of a couple are established, making it essential to intervene as early as possible in gender issues.

It is essential to include in the curriculum specific contents and actions to work with stereotypes, self-control, self-esteem, social skills and the construction of a proper and positive identity ... Gender violence can only be eradicated with prevention and awareness. As indicated by the Galego Educación Paz Seminar (2006, p. 125):

Education collaborates by shaping mentalities, personal and social identities, shaping more sensitive people capable of standing in a different way when facing problems, making them a basic element for the equality, improvement and optimization of human beings.

It requires a kind of education that, assuming the differences between boys and girls, and recognizing the diversity, allows them both to develop with the same rights and obligations. This is to question the model of masculinity that has been transmitted from generation to generation and that consisted on associating aggressiveness, strength and violence to male identity. According to de Celis (2011, p. 73), male socialization went *"by demonstrating strength and aggressiveness, and by acquiring the right to dominate and control through it."* It is necessary to flee from this model, condemning all forms of violence, and showing boys and girls that being male does not have to be associated with strength or the exercise of violence,

but it can instead be associated with empathy, dialogue, equality, affection, sensitivity ...

In order to prevent sexism and gender violence in schools, the first step is for teachers to be aware of their own experiences, thoughts and actions and be aware of the need to attend to diversity and to work to achieve effective gender equality. Are teachers aware? Are teachers being trained to encourage peaceful coexistence between boys and girls? And to intervene in cases in which peaceful coexistence is threatened?

To answer these and other questions, a piece of research was developed on the training of teachers for the educational treatment of conflicts on cultural diversity and gender. We then analyze the most relevant results referring to gender.

## **2. OBJECTIVES**

After analyzing different news reports in the social media, engaging in conversations with colleagues in the profession, students of different educational qualifications and wide bibliographical consultation, it seemed that there were important shortcomings in the training for the degrees of Psychopedagogy, Pedagogy, Social Education, Early Childhood Education and Elementary Education regarding gender, coexistence, conflicts, violence ...

It was intended to know the perception of teachers (both in-training and active in Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, Departments of Orientation and Teams of Educational and Psychopedagogical Orientation) on whether there were deficiencies in their initial and permanent training, and on their influence on their professional development.

The objective on the gender perspective is: "To know the attitudes and the degree of training of the professionals of education to address the diversity of gender, to promote healthy coexistence and to intervene in situations of conflict and to make proposals of improvement".

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

It is intended to study in depth what happens in classrooms for teacher training and in educational centers. It is a matter of knowing if the participants in this piece of research had received or were receiving training to achieve peaceful coexistence, if they considered themselves prepared to intervene in violent situations, their opinion about their training, what strengths and weaknesses they found in it, why they received or not training in certain subjects ...

We used a mixed methodology, looking for the complementarity and compatibility of the quantitative and the qualitative, because, according to Reichardt and Cook (1986), there are at least three reasons that justify the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods:

1. Research has multiple purposes that have to be addressed with a variety of methods.

2. When used together and with the same purpose, we can achieve what neither of them would separately achieve.
3. No method is free from prejudice. It is necessary to triangulate to reduce the biases of each one and to test them.

### **3.1. Instruments**

At first, a questionnaire was used as an approach to reality. In order for participants to express themselves freely about the aspects we were concerned about beforehand and other emergent ones, we chose a questionnaire with poly-nomic or categorized and open questions.

Subsequently, discussion groups and interviews were held, with the aim of reducing biases, deepening and enriching the understanding of the field of study. The interviews were semi-structured and conducted in the discussion groups, despite having a script, an attempt was made to encourage a free debate.

The current curricula were also reviewed to determine the subjects in which the research topics were addressed.

The instruments were validated by experts in teacher training, gender, interculturality, violence and research methodology. All the suggestions offered by the experts were taken into account for the improvement of the instruments. In addition, in order to verify that the questions included in the instruments were correctly understood, they were previously applied to a small pilot group of characteristics analogous to what would later be the definitive sample of the study. All the suggestions made by experts in the field, as well as by those who voluntarily collaborated in the revision of the instruments, were taken into account in order to make the questionnaire and the definitive sets of interviews and discussion groups that were used in this piece of research.

### **3.2. Sample**

The questionnaire involved 204 people from the Community of Madrid (Spain), 40 men (19.6%) and 164 women (80.4%). Out of the participants, 66 (32.4%) were active teachers and 138 (67.6%) students of last year of different educational qualifications. The students are distributed as follows: 47.5% of 4th year of Degree, 51.2% of 5th year of Bachelor's Degree (Pedagogy and Psychopedagogy) and 1.2% of Master's Degree.

The teaching staff came mainly from public centers (46.9%) and concerted centers (45.3%). 7.8% from private centers also answered.

Fifteen students and 15 professors participated in the interviews: 10 students of Social Education, Pedagogy and Teaching degrees and 5 of Diploma in Teaching, Bachelor's Degree in Pedagogy and Psychopedagogy. 10 were women and 5 men. As for the teaching staff, 9 were women and 6 men, 3 worked in Early Childhood Education, 6 in Elementary Education, 4 in High School Education and 2 in Special Education.

In the discussion groups, 8 students (4 of degree and 4 of extinguishing plans, 6 women and 2 men) and 9 active professionals (5 women and 4 men) participated.

## **4. DISCUSSION**

### **4.1. Attitudes regarding diversity.**

The information obtained in the questionnaire, the interviews and the discussion groups allows us to affirm that the majority of the participating people are very in favor of the school that welcomes all the people, irrespective of their sex, origin, social status ... They consider diversity as something positive that allows personal and social growth. In some cases, they even come to think that "there is no other option, if what we want is to educate citizens. The school has to be totally standardized and accommodate all the people who form society" (5th grade student of Pedagogy) and that "that is what school should be, we should not talk about inclusive, but about school" (4<sup>th</sup> grade student of Social Education).

### **4.2. Initial teacher training.**

All evidence shows that training for coexistence between the sexes has been absent in the training of the majority of participants (only 27.1% say they have received some training in this regard). Most of the comments made in the questionnaires suggest that the treatment of this topic depends very much on the initiative or personal interest of each teacher:

1. "Throughout the course, I have only been taught by a teacher who has been committed to the cause of gender equality and has dyed his classes on these issues in a cross-cutting way" (5th grade student of Pedagogy).
2. "We have noticed that the work on these subjects has been carried out mainly by the interest of the teachers" (4<sup>th</sup> grade student of the Degree of Social Education).
3. "The truth is that, on this subject, nothing is shown unless there is some teacher who is interested in addressing it. Training on this is very poor "(5th grade student of the Pedagogy Degree).

The previous result coincides with that obtained by the Institute for Women and Red2 Consultants (2004), quoted by Anguita and Torrego (2009, p.20):

Teachers in practice have not received specific training in coeducation, and this leads them to think that it is not necessary to act in educational centers because they consider equal opportunities between men and women to be an outdated fact.

Romero and Abril (2008, p. 5) also obtained similar results in relation to the studies of Infant Education (formative cycles and university studies):

Some universities are beginning to develop equality plans and create equality observatories; but it is still not widespread. In secondary schools and faculties where early childhood education is taught, gender is not usually a priority for the teaching staff. When dealing with gender issues in schools, it is often due to the individual initiative, interest or sensitivity of a particular teacher.

On the other hand, in the analysis that was made on the curricula of the specialty of teacher in Childhood Education of the Spanish universities, it was verified that the majority did not have specific subjects on gender and coeducation. Thus, in the majority of cases, in the initial training, when there are contents on gender, they are included within non-specific subjects.

In addition, this piece of research has shown that the problem also seems to be that, when receiving training for coexistence between the sexes, it is not done in a broad way:

1. "Our teacher talked to us about that issue, but we did not go into depth neither did we receive a solid background on that." (4th grade student of Elementary Education)
2. "A kind of training that, in spite of being useful, was a little scarce as it was just an exhibition of a group work within the subject" (5th grade student of the Psychology Degree).
3. "It has been non-existent, limited to prototypical comments in the development of some subjects". (4th grade student of the Degree of Childhood Education).
4. "It is only at specific moments in which some debate or concrete situation arises, or it is briefly commented by the teacher, but it does not serve to produce a true change of attitude or to eliminate prejudices in the practice nor is it usually tried other than in a theoretical way "(4th grade student of the Degree of Elementary Education).

Undoubtedly, one of the causes of not deepening that issue is that it is not expressly included in the curriculum or in the teaching guide.

When asked about the quality and usefulness of the training received, although the vast majority (66.1%) considered the training received to be "quite useful", a rather high percentage (50.3%) rated it as "bad".

However, the attitudes of the participants to this type of training are very positive (especially for women). Here are some comments:

1. "This should be something dealt with since preschool and very deeply. Thus, afterwards, there would not be so many problems in society related to the inequality between men and women "(4th grade student of Social Education)
2. "It would be very useful to be trained to learn to solve problems related to gender, today machismo is the order of the day, women continue to charge less than men and the solution is in school" (5th grade student of the Degree of Pedagogy).



In light of the results obtained, it seems that conflict management, violence treatment and self-knowledge do not have much presence in teacher training, despite their importance in order to prevent our own prejudices from influencing the way in which we relate to other people and to redirect situations that, without a good intervention, could degenerate into negative situations.

Although there are important gaps in all degrees of education in relation to issues such as gender, conflict, coexistence or violence, it seems that the degree in which more training in these subjects is received is in the Social Education Degree. Although more training is received, the criticisms are the same as in other cases: training is considered useful, but insufficient and too theoretical, not offering an answer to the real needs that occur in schools.

### **4.3. Professional development of teachers.**

The different research instruments show that the majority of participants in this piece of research have not received permanent training related to the improvement of coexistence between the sexes. Only 11.5% have received permanent training in this area.

The main reasons for not receiving training are "not having received any offer" (65.1%), "not having time" (18.5%) or the "economic cost of training activities" (4,7 %), Although we also find people who refer to other reasons such as problems of accessibility to the place of delivery of the course or not considering this training necessary.

Those who have participated in activities consider them to have been quite useful, although they indicate as main faults: short duration, lack of practical application (very theoretical training based on unreal cases) and little specificity or little adaptation to each case. In some cases, it is also argued that these are activities that are not up to date or that have declined in quality and supply in recent years:

There is not much offer of permanent training for teachers. Every time there is less offer and it is always jack, horse and king, they are always didactic resources for the classroom, computing in the classroom and, now with bilingualism, English courses (Special Education Teacher).

The kind of training that participants consider most effective to improve coexistence or to educationally deal with gender conflicts is that which includes dynamics, practical cases, teamwork and shared reflection.

### **4.4. Training to improve coexistence and manage diversity.**

Although training has not always been provided to improve coexistence or to manage conflicts and prevent violence, the majority of participants (56.7%) feel able to improve coexistence and manage diversity. However, if we differentiate the answers offered by the teaching staff from those by the students, we see quite a few

differences: 80.4% of teachers acknowledge that they feel very well or fairly prepared, whereas only 46.4% of the students state that they are.

In many cases, it is acknowledged that the intervention occurs (and would occur) due to personal sensitivity or common sense rather than due to scientific knowledge or for having received training:

1. "Since I did not receive any training, how can I know how to intervene? I can only rely on my common sense "(4th grade student in Early Childhood Education).
2. "I was not trained for this, but I think it would be simpler than in the case of cultures, because in all spaces there are boys and girls, and practically all of us assume that need" (4th Grade Student of Childhood Education).
3. "Many times you work out of common sense, how I would do it, how I'm going to do it, I think it can work and I'm going to be wrong and maybe it doesn't work and I'll try it another way, And, many times, out of that testing and I'm wrong, you're out "(Professor of PCPI).

It is striking that students and professionals coincide in stating that the training of teachers to improve coexistence and manage diversity depends greatly on each person, their age, their personal experiences and the training they have received. They tend to rely more on Primary or Childhood Education professionals than on Secondary Education professionals.

#### **4.5. Training needed to address diversity.**

It was intended to know not only whether training had been received and whether it had been useful, but also what training was considered more necessary and appropriate to adequately address diversity. The answers provided by students and faculty are very similar. The most repeated proposal is that training, although needing sufficient theoretical base, should be much more focused on practice (we should not forget that they have mostly received theoretical training with little or no practical application). It is considered that the conception of many subjects should be changed to answer to the needs of an educational professional, as well as the need to invest in "more human" subjects such as social skills, self-knowledge, self-esteem, teamwork, accompaniment throughout life, conflict management techniques such as mediation ... in addition to the issues of this piece of research: gender, conflict, violence, coexistence ...

We emphasize the words of an advisor of secondary education and professor of the degrees of education at the university:

I am also a university professor, but I have to say that we are still light years away from teaching real conflict resolution skills and procedures that are endorsed, supported as useful both clinically and by science and, if so, I believe that yes ... there is always lack of training ... In addition, there is a very important work, which is the personal one, self-knowledge, managing your own

emotions, your own self-regulation, your own social skills ... that work is not done (Secondary Education Advisor).

#### **4.6. Situation of the classrooms and action in them.**

Teachers warn that conflicts on the basis of sex are frequent in schools. There is a great deal of macho behavior, both in male and female students and in families, as well as in teachers:

Yes there are situations of chauvinist conflict, completely overturned, but not only in boys. The other thing that I find is that certain situations return, certain attitudes that were supposed to be already filed and closed, and again we are having problems, ideologies and ways of acting that are tremendous (Secondary Education Advisor).

A professor of PCPI points out: "Our students tend to relate in a very conventional way and very marked by stereotypes, both males and females, and that can lead to problems."

It is thought that there is lack of training to deal with certain situations. When this happens and the person is not able to solve a problem on his own, that person tends to seek support in the Orientation Department, other professionals and in the Management of the Center.

Few professionals develop concrete projects to improve coexistence, mainly due to lack of time and motivation. In order to avoid situations of rejection and exclusion, as well as fostering coexistence in classrooms, teachers tend to incorporate equality in their classroom (using inclusive language, using appropriate materials, dealing with certain topics ...) and to encourage heterogeneous groupings in the tasks of class.

#### **4.7. Other highlights.**

Some of the students and teachers have pointed out that inappropriate messages are sometimes transmitted by teachers or how the treatment of gender or conflict in the classrooms is not the most appropriate. In this regard, we find statements such as the following:

1. "Sometimes I did not like the treatment of gender by teachers" (3rd grade student of Physical Education Teaching).
5. "Even the training received, both in form and in depth, could be categorized as sexist and discriminatory" (Teacher of Foreign Language and Pedagogy).

That is worrisome because teachers have a large multiplying effect, in addition to reaching many students and families throughout their active life, many people do not question what they say.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Despite the progress made in recent years in relation to the situation of women and their participation in all social spheres, we are still seeing in the twenty-first century situations in which women of all ages are the target of different forms of violence. Although it may appear that these facts are only present in adults or older people, the latest surveys and research show a very different reality: schools are witnesses (sometimes dumb) of discrimination, insults, vexations ... to girls of all kinds of social, economic and cultural conditions. Faced with this situation, deep work is needed to prevent violent situations in schools or intervene educationally when prevention has not worked. Not in vain, education is "an essential factor in the consolidation of a culture of peace in society" (Aguilar and Castañón, 2014, p.92).

We agree with Díaz-Aguado (2002) in the fact that, in order to build equality and prevent violence against women, it is necessary to include the fight against sexism and against violence against women in the school curriculum, since it is not enough for the school to be limited to not being sexist. This inclusion in the school curriculum should allow:

1. Favoring cognitive, affective and behavioral changes that help overcome the different components of sexism and violence.
2. Increasing efforts to overcome the invisibility of women.
3. Developing skills to identify and reject sexist stereotypes contributing to violence.

By addressing the gender perspective in schools, we will be taking a very important step towards overcoming sexist stereotypes that lead children, adolescents, youth and adults to justify, use or silence violence against women.

In addition, as indicated by Gairín, Armengol and Silva (2013), there are close relationships among the school curriculum, the teaching methods, the evaluation systems and the living standards, which influence the likelihood of antisocial behaviors occurring in educational settings. For example, the time the teacher spends in the classroom to group processes, to interpersonal relationships and to questions of standards, order and discipline can be related to the reduction of disruptive behaviors and mistreatment among peers. But for the school curriculum to take these aspects into account, it is necessary to train teachers first.

However, teacher training does not always pay the necessary attention to aspects such as interpersonal relationships or classroom and center rules. This piece of research has shown that, despite the fact that future teachers and teachers are aware of these and other related issues, they have not been trained to do so. This may limit their ability to act and prevent them from not considering prevention or intervention in this regard necessary.

Efforts need to be made to reinforce initial training, as there is lack of training on gender issues to address diversity, to take action in the face of violence, to take advantage of conflict positively, to develop violence prevention programs or to work cooperatively. There are few subjects that address these aspects and, the ones that exist, are optional. Efforts must therefore be made to ensure that relationships between peers, equal opportunities between boys and girls, teamwork and educational management of conflicts take the place they deserve in training all teachers without exception, since it is no use training only some future teachers.

There are professors who advocate dealing with these issues in a cross-cutting way. You cannot and should not leave such important issues to optativity or transversality. This does not guarantee that all people who should receive training receive it. It is essential to introduce specific subjects in the initial training of all education professionals.

It is also necessary that the permanent training of the teaching staff echoes this need and increases the activities in which the gender perspective and, therefore, also conflicts, coexistence, teamwork ... are addressed.

In any case, it is not enough to include these topics in the initial and ongoing training of teachers, care should also be taken in the way they are included:

1. Focusing on the real needs of schools.
2. Not limiting training to conceptual contents and betting on a more practical, less memorable training
3. Paying special attention to the affective dimension.
4. Strengthening teamwork, debate, negotiation and shared reflection.

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