

Stigma, Discrimination, and Social Marginality: Uncovering Perceptions towards Neurodevelopmental Disability

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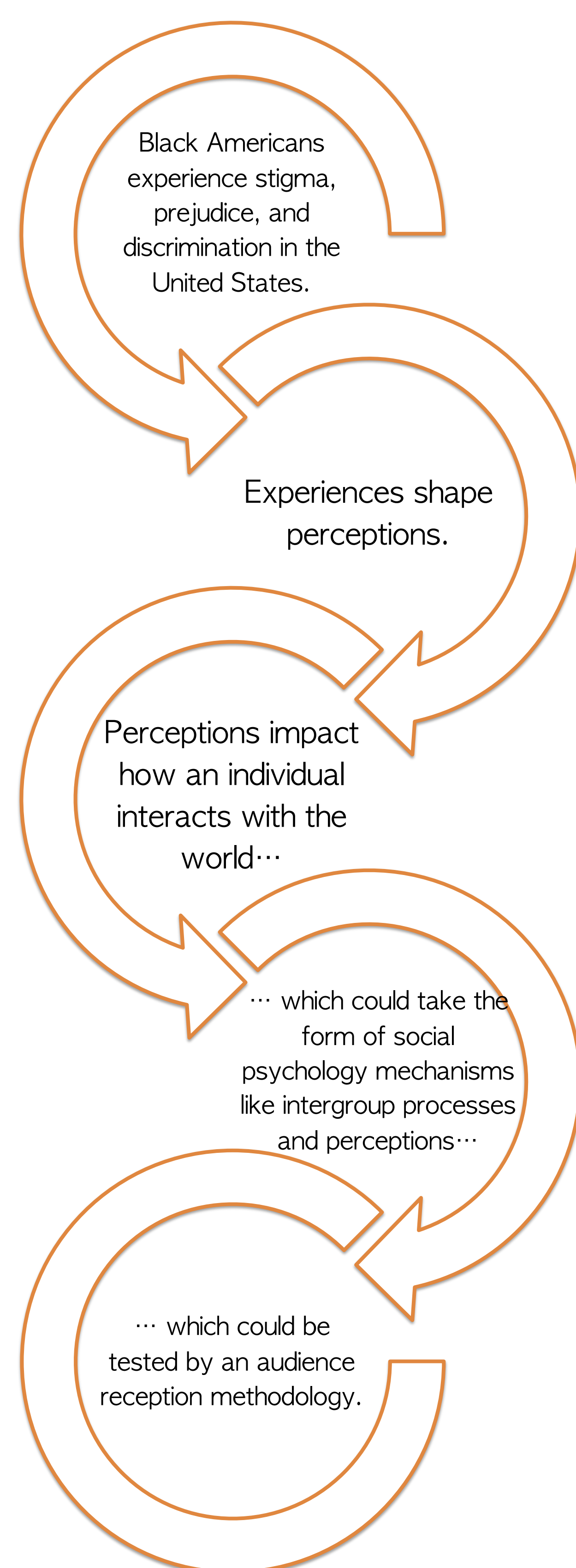
BACKGROUND

Neurodevelopmental disabilities are often characteristic of chronic disorders involving deficient growth of the brain and central nervous system.

These disorders manifest as **impairments of cognition, communication, language, and activities of daily living**. Despite the forward evolution of societal and cultural perceptions of disability in the United States, **"stigmatizing qualities... (still often) attract the attention of nondisabled persons, often triggering prejudicial thoughts and attitudes and discriminatory behaviors."** For persons with a neurodevelopmental disability, these experiences can serve as a threat to their personhood, justice, and overall day-to-day existence.

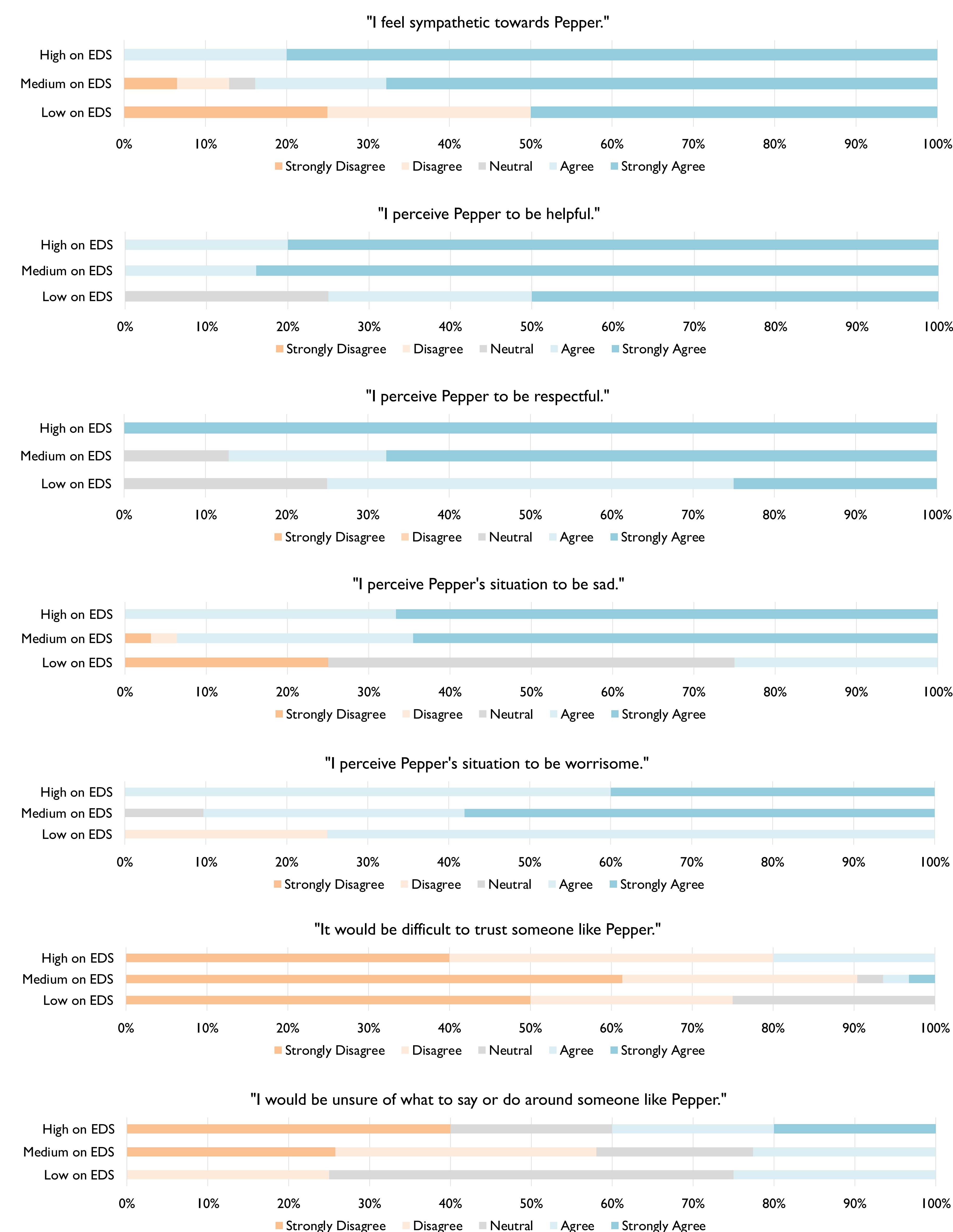
THE DILEMMA

While current research acknowledges that this phenomenon of stigmatizing exists, it fails to characterize whether the agents who perpetuate stigma have experiences that predispose them to doing so. In other words, are individuals who experience discrimination and stigma in their day-to-day lives more or less likely to then stigmatize and discriminate against another (or, in this study, a disabled) individual?



RESULTS

Respondents who scored higher on the Williams et al. (2016) scale of "everyday discrimination" ("EDS") were more likely to feel sympathetic towards Pepper ($p=0.007$). They were also more likely to perceive her character as "respectful" and "helpful" ($p=0.032$, $p=0.049$), and her overall situation as "worrisome" and "sad" ($p=0.027$, $p=0.012$). Furthermore, individuals who scored higher on the discrimination scale were less likely to believe that it would be difficult to trust someone like Pepper ($p=.001$). These respondents were also less likely to feel unsure about what to say or do if around someone like Pepper ($p=.002$).



METHODS

A total of 40 volunteers were asked to watch a segment from Season 4, Episode 10 of American Horror Story. The segment portrays the experiences of a young woman, Pepper, who suffers from microcephaly (a rare neurological condition in which the brain does not develop properly).

Participants were then asked to answer a 20-item questionnaire that included the Williams et al. (2016) scale of "everyday discrimination" as well as a 7-item measure of belief related to intellectual disability stigma. Statistical analysis included the Chi-squared test, the Fisher's exact test, a Kruskal-Wallis analysis, and logistic regression.

CONCLUSIONS

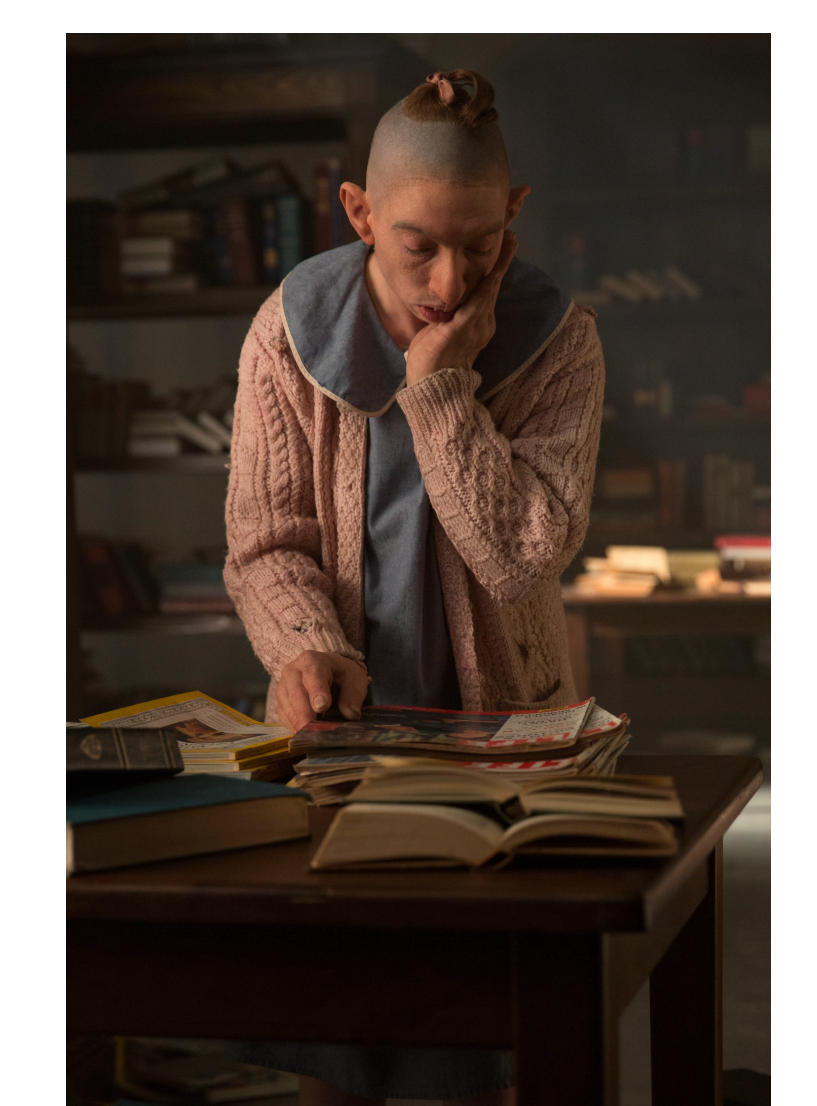
Individuals who experience discrimination and stigma in their day-to-day lives are less likely to apply stigma to a person with a neurodevelopmental disability. They are also more likely to perceive these same persons positively and with sympathy. This suggests that a person's tendency to neither perpetuate stigma nor negative perceptions towards neurodevelopmental disability may be correlated with their prior life experiences and subsequent worldviews.



Pepper
(image courtesy of Wikimedia)



AHS Freak Show
(image courtesy of Blogspot)



Pepper in S4, E10
(image courtesy of Collider)

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