

EXPECTATIONS OF ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS: A COMPARISON BETWEEN HOMOSEXUAL AND HETEROSEXUAL MEN WITH REGARD TO BAXTER'S CRITERIA

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According to Baxter (1986) every relationship has rules which must be followed. If at least one of these rules is broken, it gives the individual the right to breakup the relationship. Baxter identified 8 such rules or criteria. The aim in the present study was to investigate whether or not the expectations of romantic relationships held by homosexual men can be linked to Baxter's criteria. Data were obtained through a questionnaire addressed to 31 homosexual men and 50 heterosexual men. Results indicated that Baxter's criteria can be linked to expectations of romantic relationships held by men regardless of sexual orientation, and that age and experience are more reliable predictors than is sexual orientation.

Keywords: romantic relationship expectations, homosexual, heterosexual, males, Baxter's criteria.

Baxter's theory (1986) is grounded in rules theory (Schimanoff, 1980) which states that relationships have certain rules which, in order to work, need to be followed. Rules are prescriptions of obligated/preferred/prohibited behavior in specific situations. Baxter (1986) surmises the presence of a rule if: (a) a behavior is recurrent in a situation, (b) the behavior is controllable, and (c) the obligated/preferred/prohibited behavior can be evaluated. Every relationship has different rules which need to be followed (Jeffmar, 1987). If at least one of these rules is broken, it gives the individual the right to break up the relationship without being socially blamed for destroying a social network (Baxter, 1986).

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Baxter's (1986) study sample comprised American students who, in an anonymous essay, wrote why they had initiated the break-up of a recent heterosexual romantic relationship. The results showed eight rules or criteria, which may seem obvious and, since we take them for granted, are not noticed until broken. The following criteria were the most frequent (in ranked order):

(a) *Autonomy/personal freedom* Individuality and relationships outside the romantic relationship (e.g., friends and family).

(b) *Similarities* Shared attitudes, opinions, values, and interests (e.g., use of alcohol, ambitions).

(c) *Mutual support* Enhancement of each other's self-esteem, and encouragement and acknowledgement of each other (e.g., listening, showing appreciation).

(d) *Honesty/openness* Being open, honest, and real (e.g., being able to talk about feelings).

(e) *Loyalty and good faith* Being able to trust each other at all times (e.g., not betraying a confidence or breaking a promise).

(f) *Time together* Being willing and able to share time together, both private and public (e.g., going out for a dinner, or watching TV).

(g) *Sharing resources and efforts* Equality and balance in give and take, both economically and emotionally (e.g., both parties taking responsibility for the well-being of the relationship).

(h) *A sense of something special between them* A kind of "magic" is experienced in the other's presence. A feeling of being in love and being loved (e.g., feeling happy when together).

Some of the criteria and their definitions (Baxter, 1986) are not uniquely separate. This is regarding statements linked to "loyalty and good faith", "honesty and openness", and "mutual support"; "shared resources and efforts" and "autonomy/personal freedom". Peplau and Cochran (1981) describe a balance of dyadic attachment and personal autonomy which are not necessarily opposites, but are independent dimensions. Their indistinguishability can also strengthen the necessity for rules in romantic relationships, where the lack of one criterion will subsequently lead to the mutilation of another.

Baxter's criteria (1986) possess similarities with other studies comparing homosexuals and heterosexuals, and their demands/wishes of romantic relationships (e.g., Duffy & Rusbult, 1986; Peplau & Cochran, 1981). Homosexual and heterosexual romantic relationships are alike, according to Tripp (1981), since both are aimed at the same set of rewards, and founded on an agreement between parties. An agreement with components such as understanding (similarities in reactions and attitudes) supporting the parties' intimacy and love together with a sufficient resistance (distance and differences) giving the parties complementarily and sexual attraction. Tripp describes an optimal distance between parties where the existence of neither too many differences nor too much intimacy promotes a continuing sexual attraction. Male and female biological and psychological differences establish a distance for attraction, where boys and girls are made complementary from birth. "Each sex

becomes systematically incompetent regarding tasks and abilities ascribed to the opposite sex" (Tripp, 1981, p. 68). A complement in homosexual romantic relationships, which McWhirter and Mattison (1984) describe as planned incompetence, emerges in the first stage of blending, where one of the parties shows his appreciation by becoming incompetent regarding e.g., cooking, since his partner enjoys this.

Most romantic relationships seem to share some common factors and one will probably find "a greater difference between individuals and individual couples, than type of couple" (Tripp, 1981, p. 176) and that biological sex probably has greater impact on romantic relationships than sexual orientation (Peplau, 1981). From this point of view one can assume that Baxter's criteria (1986) are general to all romantic relationships irrespective of sexual orientation.

The aim in the following study was to investigate (a) if the expectations of romantic relationships held by homosexual men can be linked to Baxter's criteria (1986), (b) the differences between the expectations held by homosexual and heterosexual men, and finally (c) other factors, besides sexual orientation, which possibly may affect the expectations.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

The participants consisted of 81 men ($N = 81$), 31 homosexual and 50 heterosexual. The average age was 41.26 years ($SD = 12.52$; $range = 21-58$). Presently involved in a romantic relationship were 17 (55 %) in the homosexual group and 44 (88 %) in the heterosexual group, a difference which was shown (independent samples t test) to be significant ($t = -3.59$, $p = 0.001$). The average length of the relationships was 146.84 months ($SD = 125.69$). A one-way ANOVA indicated a group difference [$F(1, 47) = 5.53$, $p = 0.023$] where the homosexual men were involved for fewer months ($M = 86.07$, $SD = 103.57$) as compared to the heterosexual group ($M = 173.65$, $SD = 126.53$).

A two-way ANOVA with the group (i.e., "homosexual" and "heterosexual") and involvement (i.e., "involved" and "not involved") as independent variables and age as dependent variable showed no significant difference between groups ($p = 0.23$), but there was a significant difference regarding involvement [$F(1, 77) = 4.36$; $p = 0.04$], and there was also a significant difference regarding interaction [$F(1, 77) = 5.18$, $p = 0.03$]. Further analyses indicated that the men involved in a romantic relationship were older ($M = 43.49$; $SD = 12.67$) as compared to men not involved in such relationships ($M = 34.45$; $SD = 9.39$). The interaction effect indicated that heterosexual men of age 36-55 years were more likely to be involved in a romantic relationship ($N = 29$) than were heterosexual men of age 20-35 years ($N = 7$), heterosexual men of age 56-69 years ($N = 8$) and homosexual men of age 20-55 years ($N = 17$). The most common form of relationship for heterosexual men is "married" ($N = 29$) and for homosexual men "living apart" ($N = 10$). There were no differences (Mann-Whitney Test) between groups with regard to present and earlier

living conditions ($p > 0.2$), but there was a significant group difference with regard to education ($z = -5.14$, $p < 0.001$) where the heterosexual group had higher education as compared to the homosexual group.

DESIGN AND SAMPLING

A one-shot survey design was used with the aim of obtaining descriptive data through a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 40 statements linked to Baxter's criteria (1986), each criterion had five different statements linked to it followed by a 0-10 scale where participants were asked to take a stand by ticking the correct grade (0 = *disagree*, 10 = *agree*).

Due to the hidden population of homosexual men, and to some ethical aspects, two methods of sampling were used for the two samples. To be included in both samples, participants had to: a) be men, b) be over 18 years of age, and c) see themselves as either homosexual or heterosexual.

Independent variables were *group* (i.e., the homosexual group and the heterosexual group) and *involvement* (i.e., those involved in romantic relationships and those not involved in romantic relationships).

The homosexual sample. An opportunity method was used to obtain the homosexual sample, including the majority of the members of The National Society for Sexual Equality in Värmland (RFSL-V) ($N = 73$). Since RFSL-V's list of members is confidential, the board of directors agreed to distribute the questionnaires – and the anonymity of the subjects was thus maintained.

The heterosexual sample. A systematic random method was used to obtain the heterosexual sample ($N = 100$) from male employees at the University of Karlstad.

RESPONSE RATE

The total response rate was 46.2 % (49 % for the heterosexual and 42.5 % for the homosexual sample). Due to the lack of personal data concerning the homosexual sample, no adequate analysis can be made. An (independent samples t test) analysis of the heterosexual sample showed no significant differences between the men who answered and those who did not, regarding age ($p > 0.76$) or regarding department ($p > 0.40$).

RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

A split-half test was made on 20 randomly-selected questionnaires (10 heterosexual and 10 homosexual). An analysis (Pearson's r) showed a significant correlation between the two halves ($r = 0.78$; $p < 0.001$). Two people perused the questionnaire before it was distributed, and assessed it to have face validity. When the results had been analyzed it was presented before the secretary of RFSL-V and assessed by him to indicate common views held by his friends and other members of RFSL-V.

BAXTER'S CRITERIA

A Pillais' MANOVA (2 x 2 factorial design) was used with group (homosexual/heterosexual) and involvement (involved/not involved in romantic relationships) as independent variables, and Baxter's eight criteria: "autonomy/personal freedom", "loyalty and good faith", "honesty and openness", "similarities", "mutual support", "time together", "shared resources and efforts", and "the feeling of something special together" were used as dependent variables.

The overall analysis showed no significant difference in respect to interaction ($p = 0.64$), a result confirmed by the univariate F tests ($ps > 0.1$) and no significant difference in respect to group ($p = 0.06$), a result which not was confirmed by all of the univariate F tests. There was, however, a significant difference in respect to involvement ($p = 0.02$). Described below are, for each dependent variable, the results from the univariate F tests with regard to group and involvement (as the MANOVA showed no interaction effect between independent variables). For means and standard deviations see Table 1.

(a) **Autonomy/personal freedom** Univariate F tests showed no significant differences regarding group or involvement ($ps > 0.4$).

(b) **Loyalty and good faith** Univariate F tests showed no significant differences regarding involvement ($ps > 0.1$).

(c) **Honesty and openness** Univariate F tests showed no significant differences regarding group or involvement ($ps > 0.2$).

(d) **Similarities** A univariate F test showed no significant difference regarding group ($p = 0.56$) but another univariate F test showed a significant difference regarding involvement [$F(1, 77) = 7.81, p < 0.001$] where men involved expected greater "similarities" with their partners ($M = 6.44, SD = 0.93$) than men who were not involved ($M = 5.67, SD = 1.35$).

(e) **Mutual support** A univariate F test showed a significant difference regarding group [$F(1, 77) = 7.71, p < 0.01$] where homosexual men held higher expectations on "Mutual support" ($M = 8.23, SD = 0.75$) than heterosexual men ($M = 7.74, SD = 0.90$). There was no difference in respect to involvement ($p = 0.2$).

(f) **Time together** Univariate F tests showed no significant differences regarding group or involvement ($ps > 0.15$).

(g) **Shared resources and efforts** Univariate F tests showed no significant differences regarding group or involvement ($ps > 0.15$).

(h) **Feeling of something special together** A univariate F test showed a significant difference regarding group [$F(1, 77) = 5.68, p = 0.02$] where homosexual men had higher expectations of "Feeling of something special together" ($M = 7.63, SD = 1.16$) than heterosexual men ($M = 6.83, SD = 1.29$). There was no difference in respect to involvement ($p = 0.95$).

A Pillais MANCOVA, where differences in education were taken into consideration showed a significant difference with respect to group [$F(1, 76) = 7.87, p < 0.01$] where homosexual men held higher expectations on "Time together" ($M =$

7.74, $SD = 0.68$) as compared to heterosexual men ($M = 7.42$, $SD = 0.79$). No other significant changes occurred. A Pillais MANCOVA, where differences in age were taken into consideration, yielded no other significant indications.

Pearson's r showed a significant, negative correlation ($r = 0.3$, $p = 0.01$) between age and expectations held on "Feeling of something special together", where the expectations decreased as age increased.

TABLE 1
MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS IN REGARD TO BAXTER'S CRITERIA IN RESPECT TO SEXUAL ORIENTATION (HETEROSEXUAL MAN, HOMOSEXUAL MEN) AND INVOLVEMENT (YES, NO)

Involvement Baxter's index	Homosexual men				Heterosexual men			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Personal freedom	6.22	1.05	6.70	1.12	6.67	1.10	6.94	1.17
Loyalty and good faith	8.14	0.78	7.90	0.76	8.34	0.54	7.79	1.49
Honesty and openness	7.12	1.15	7.63	0.83	7.12	1.34	7.36	0.77
Similarities	6.46	1.01	5.37	0.75	6.38	0.71	5.80	1.55
Mutual support	7.78	0.90	7.40	0.88	8.06	0.71	8.44	0.78
Time together	7.45	0.83	7.23	0.39	7.65	0.70	7.84	0.66
Shared resources and efforts	6.43	0.92	6.40	0.95	6.84	1.03	6.69	0.76
Feeling of something special together	6.85	1.32	6.73	1.08	7.60	1.16	7.67	1.20

DISCUSSION

The low response rate (46.2%) led to queries and doubts about the investigation's external validity. According to Babbie (1992), a response rate at 50% is sufficient for making generalizations, which is actually quite a high demand (Shaughnessey & Zechmeister, 1994) as the response rate for mail surveys is frequently about 30%.

The heterosexual sample consisted of a majority of very highly-educated men, a group which in previous research (e.g., Bell and Weinberg, 1978) were the most unwilling to disclose their homosexuality. It seems as if they believe that they have more to lose than have men of lower education. The homosexual sample were anonymous, but due to the lack of insurance of this, e.g., a letter from RFSL-V reporting the procedure of dealing with the questionnaires, the investigation caused distress among the members anxious to keep their sexual orientation confidential. This could be yet another cause of the low response rate. How representative is the sample? Peplau states that; "there is no such thing as a representative sample of members of a hidden population such as homosexuals. Volunteers are never typical of the group they come from" (Peplau, 1981, p. 30). One can, therefore, assume that this sample is at least as "representative" as samples from other investigations.

The overall result shows that Baxter's criteria (1986) can be linked to expectations of romantic relationships held by men, regardless of sexual orientation. Similar research (e.g., Duffy & Rusbult, 1986; Peplau, 1981; Peplau & Cochran, 1980) has shown that every kind of romantic relationship must contain certain factors in order

to work, factors which in many ways, are similar to Baxter's criteria (1986). This is seen as strongly supportive evidence for the universal application of Baxter's criteria (1986), regardless of whether they are defined as criteria, rewards/investments, or demands/wishes.

The present results indicate also that there is a more determining factor than sexual orientation affecting the expectations held of romantic relationships – namely the presence or absence of involvement in a romantic relationship. This has been shown also in previous research (Duffy & Rusbult, 1986; Peplau & Cochran, 1981; Tripp, 1981), where background variables, such as gender or the gender of the partner, have had a greater effect on the result than has sexual orientation. This difference between genders is, according to Duffy and Rusbult (1986), due to an early influence of defining ourselves as men or women, a definition which happens much earlier than our awareness of sexual orientation. Bell and Weinberg (1978) stress the importance of perceiving homosexual men and women as individuals with great variation – and not just as homosexuals.

As mentioned above, the results showed that the variable involvement in a romantic relationship had the greatest effect on the expectations held. Although the questionnaire was designed so that neither previous, nor present, experiences of romantic relationships would be necessary, possible experiences unavoidably affect the results. Unfortunately, previous experiences are not available in the present investigation, which concerns only the presence/absence of current involvement. Earlier researchers (Bell & Weinberg, 1978) have shown that most homosexual men have their first romantic relationship in their twenties, with a duration of one to three years, though their results stem from an investigation conducted in an area known for its high tolerance of homosexuals and lesbians – “Bay Area”, which includes San Francisco, CA. In spite of the fact that the respondents in the present investigation correspond to other respondents in several previous investigations (Bell & Weinberg, 1978; Håkansson, 1987), with reference to the share of homosexual men involved in a romantic relationship, no assumptions regarding correspondence in experiences are made since most of the homosexual respondents in the current investigation are living in rural or suburban areas, where difficulties in finding a homosexual partner should be greater than in urban areas – due not only to a smaller selection of partners, but perhaps also to a greater fear of loss of the “social-value” (Håkansson, 1987, p. 158). It presupposes furthermore, greater difficulty in “hiding” a romantic relationship in suburban and rural areas, than would be the case in urban areas.

The result shows that men involved in a romantic relationship expect greater “similarities” with their partner than do men not involved in a romantic relationship. The men involved are, on the average, older than the men not involved in a romantic relationship. Thus, the difference could be caused by the younger men's more romantic view of love, perhaps stemming from inexperience, where love conquers everything. Though, if this assumption is true, should not the homosexual men – who hold higher expectations on the “Feeling of something special

together” as compared to heterosexual men – also have significantly lower expectations on “similarities”? Sounds reasonable, but on the other hand, high expectations on the “Feeling of something special together” need not express a feeling of “undying” love and “pink” romance, but could be merely a wish for togetherness.

Evident from the result is a strong negative connection between age and expectations on the “Feeling of something special together”. A closer analysis showed that the younger men regarded “being in love” as a more invaluable and necessary ingredient of a romantic relationship (statement 25), than did older men. The younger men also regarded the importance of the perception that the romantic relationship should feel special, and that the partner made them feel unique, more highly than did the older men. This difference between ages leads to the assumption that younger and/or less experienced men, view romantic relationships in a more romantic way, affecting their expectations on “similarities” – expressing a belief that love can bridge everything.

Does this mean that older and/or more experienced men hold more cynical and/or more pragmatic views on romantic relationships? Previous experiences of romantic relationships may have made older men realize the limits of love. They may still be as romantic as they were when younger, but their own and others’ experiences have shown that a high degree of similarities in attitudes and certain fundamental values are necessary for the duration of a romantic relationship. Individuals with very different backgrounds may have different expectations of a romantic relationship (McWhirter & Mattison, 1984), leading to conflict on an everyday basis and possibly, eventually, the break-up of that romantic relationship.

Older and/or more experienced men may have come to realize that similarities between partners foster their intimacy and love for each other, expressed in a greater mutual understanding (Tripp, 1981). As mentioned earlier, Baxter’s criteria (1986) and their definitions are not uniquely separated, implying that the absence of one criterion inevitably brings a deterioration of a further one or more criteria, which view is strengthened by Tripp’s (1981) and McWhirter and Mattison’s (1984) reasoning. Baxter’s criteria (1986) seem to make out a circle of good or evil, where an improvement/deterioration in one criterion affects one or more other criteria, which consequently affects a further one, or more criteria, by improvement or deterioration. Seemingly, younger and/or less experienced men underestimate the importance of similarities between their partner and themselves, something they perhaps may come to realize in time.

Overall, the homosexual and heterosexual men did not differ in the expectations held of romantic relationships – although the homosexual men held higher expectations with regard to “mutual support”, “feeling of something special together”, and “time together”, than did heterosexual men. The higher expectation held on “mutual support”, can be a result of the high egalitarian element found in homosexual romantic relationships – to a degree rarely found in heterosexual romantic relationships (McWhirter & Mattison, 1984). Peplau (1981) compares homosexual

romantic relationships to “best friendships, with the added component of romantic and erotic attraction” (p. 29). As in “best friendships”, partners support and encourage each other, and raise each other’s self-value and self-esteem, by listening and showing appreciation, among other things. Bell and Weinberg (1978) showed that many homosexual men who had broken up a close and significant romantic relationship became very depressed and sometimes even tried to commit suicide, though that could apply for heterosexual men as well. This is, according to Bell and Weinberg (1978), due to the fact that homosexual romantic relationships contain a very strong mutual dependence, which cannot be found in heterosexual romantic relationships. This mutual dependence could be a result of the “best friendship”, where the absence of traditional gender-roles and behaviors allows homosexual partners to create a romantic relationship built on similarities; egalitarianism; and shared powers and responsibilities, frequently lacking in heterosexual romantic relationships (Peplau, 1981). This is strengthened further by the result showing a strong connection between “similarities” and “mutual support”.

Bell and Weinberg (1978) showed that friendships are important to all homosexual individuals in several regards. According to them, friends function as role-models, they increase possibilities of meeting a partner; and, above all, they provide support. Where individuals – through their friends – are confirmed in their self-value, and in the knowledge of not being alone in a world which may seem hostile and indifferent (Bell & Weinberg, 1978), they are given the courage to face the world around them. This is confirmed by Håkansson (1987), who shows that stable friendships with other homosexual individuals are important for self-image and self-esteem. According to Bell and Weinberg (1978), homosexual friends are to many an extended family. Research by Dorfman, Walters, Burke, and Hardin (1991) confirms this, by showing that social support of homosexual individuals was received from outside the biological family, mainly from friends, whereas heterosexuals’ social support came from the biological family.

The combination of the need for an extended family, the “best friendships”, and high degree of mutual dependence pretty much explain the high expectations of “mutual support” held by homosexual men. Note that the result regarding “mutual support”, does not express a difference in needs, but merely a difference in where the needs are being met.

From research done by Håkansson (1987), it is clear that many homosexual individuals hold high expectations of romantic relationships, grounded in an ideal for the heterosexual romantic relationship – where duration and love form the opposite to casual sex which leaves them emotionally empty. They believe that a stable romantic relationship holds everything they lack in casual contacts. This idealized image of romantic relationships can be expressed in many ways, from a solemnly declared faith in love to a simple wish of having someone with whom to share their life. Corresponding to this are the high expectations held by homosexual men on Baxter’s eighth criterion (1987) “feeling of something special together”. Somewhat contradictory is the research by Peplau (1981), showing that the homo-

sexual man often separates sex and love, enjoying sex for its own sake, and “rejects marriage as a model for love relationships” (p. 30). This is strengthened by Duffy and Rusbult’s (1986) showing that homosexual men value less casual romantic relationships more highly than do heterosexual men. The idealization of romantic relationships, or the preference for more casual romantic relationships, is a sign both of the existence of individual variation, and that all homosexual men are not promiscuous – a view commonly held by society at large. High expectations on the “feeling of something special together” can be explained by both an idealization and/or an expression of a necessity for abandoning a satisfactory bachelor-life, since the feeling of “magic” is strongly connected to several others of Baxter’s criteria.

In addition, homosexual romantic relationships are associated with social risks to homosexual individuals who have not yet disclosed their sexuality (Håkansson, 1987). Even if they have a strong need of togetherness, intimacy and closeness, and/or strongly believe in love, this could be outweighed by the fear of being “caught”. A perceived “feeling of something special together” could be crucial in allowing them to overcome their fears and take the risk of being “caught”. Perhaps it is merely that the feeling of “magic” is a necessity for homosexual romantic relationships, in that they are similar to “best friendships” (Peplau, 1981) – where the “feeling of something special together” is the only way of holding the two different relationships apart.

The result showed a non-significant trend, where the expectations held by homosexual men of “time together” were higher than those of the heterosexual men. This can be related also to similarities with “best friendships” (Peplau, 1981). Previous researchers (Bell & Weinberg, 1978) also show that homosexual men spend most of their spare time with friends. Thus, the fact that their friends are an extended family, and their possible involvement in a romantic relationship wherein their partner has a dual role as both lover and best friend, can explain the high expectations held of “time together”.

This investigation has led to questions as to how expectations are influenced by earlier experiences. Will they, generally, lead to a decrease in some expectations as the reasoning on differences between men involved, and men not involved, in a romantic relationship implies? Should not the expectations of romantic relationships depend upon *how one remembers* previous experiences, not the mere number of them? Do men and women differ in their expectations of a romantic relationship? Peplau (1983) showed that women are more pragmatic and less romantic in their view on romantic relationships than are men. Is this due to how they look at previous experiences? Will this lead to women’s expecting less and/or different things from a romantic relationship from those which men expect? How previous experiences and gender influence our expectations of romantic relationships would be of interest for further research. Our expectations should be greatly influenced by our individual perceptions of the world and its reality, but also by more recent experiences – as our ways of looking at previous experiences are constantly changing,

and not merely the actual facts, but also the individual's perception of these facts play a part (Burton & Dimbleby, 1988).

In conclusion, Baxter's eight criteria seem to have a strong connection to the expectations of romantic relationships held by men – in spite of the differences found between homosexual and heterosexual men in three criteria. The differences seem to stem from experiences and/or age, a difference corresponding to the differences found between the men involved/not involved in a romantic relationship. Age and experience seem to give more reliable predictions of an individual's expectations than does sexual orientation – as the respondents proved themselves to be, above all, men.

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