



Demonstrating Affection, Empathy and Playful Engagement as Factors Influencing Parental Discipline Strategies

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Abstract

Parenting is both a skill to learn and master since it will give the offspring perspectives in life. To attain this unique ability, one must master the art of affection, engagement and discipline towards the child. This study analyses affection, empathy, and play engagement as predictors of discipline strategies for parents of a primary school in the Philippines. The study used a descriptive-correlation research design with the survey as the primary gathering tool. One hundred forty-four parents voluntarily participated in the survey, which commenced in March and ended in April 2023. To analyze the data, the proponent used descriptive and inferential statistics. The study found that parents always show their affection and empathy, try to engage in play and establish discipline strategies. In addition, the computation also found a moderate relationship between showing affection and empathy and engaging in play with the establishment of discipline strategies among parents. Regression analysis also confirmed that showing affection and empathy and engaging in play are predictors of establishing discipline strategies among parents.

Keywords: *Show of Affection; Empathy; Play Engagement; Discipline Strategy; Parenthood*

INTRODUCTION

Showing affection and empathy among parents refers to the degree to which parents demonstrate warmth, love, and concern for their children. It encompasses many behaviours and actions that help children feel loved, valued, and safe. Some examples of affection and empathy include giving hugs, providing emotional support, listening actively, and showing interest in the child's life. Studies have shown varying levels of relationship interaction in the family (Boele et al., 2019); parenting self-efficacy (Wozniak-Prus et al., 2023); agreeableness and parental support (Van Heel et al., 2020); family communication pattern (Abdullah & Salim, 2020); even with the children's financial well-being (Pak & Fan, 2022).

Engaging in play is another vital aspect of parenting that refers to the extent to which parents participate in play activities with their children. It involves actively playing with the child, showing interest in their play, and providing opportunities for play and exploration. Engaging in play can take many forms, such as playing games, doing arts and crafts, going on outings, or reading books together. For instance, a study by Amodia-Bidakowska et al. (2020) discussed the frequency and characteristics of father-child play and its potential impact on children's development. Accordingly, fathers spend a significant proportion of their time with their children. Cabrera et al. (2018) also argued that conceptual and theoretical advances regarding father-child relationships have demonstrated an effect on children's outcomes both directly and indirectly.

Establishing discipline strategies refers to parents' methods to promote positive behaviours, prevent negative behaviours, and teach children right from wrong. Discipline strategies can take many forms, such as setting rules and expectations, using positive reinforcement, providing consequences for misbehaviour, and modelling appropriate behaviours. In one particular study in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, 230.7 million children experienced aggressive physical and psychological discipline (Cuartas et al., 2019).

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Effective discipline strategies balance structure and warmth, where parents provide clear rules and expectations while showing love and support. When children misbehave, parents can use positive reinforcement to encourage positive behaviours or provide consequences for negative behaviours. Parents can also model appropriate behaviours and provide guidance and support when children need help. This idea aligns with the research paper of [McCoy et al. \(2020\)](#), wherein parenting interventions reduce some forms of violence against children and promote positive parent-child interactions.

Based on the following premises presented, the proponent of this study decided to create this study in order to assess the affection and empathy of parents towards their children, the engagement of parents in play and the discipline strategies that they employ with their children in the local setting of a public primary school in the country. Thus, the main objective of this study is to analyze the show of affection and empathy of parents, engagement in play and the discipline strategies employed by them. At the same time, the study also intends to determine whether the show of affection, empathy and engagement in play significantly predicts the parent's discipline strategies. This study specifically sought to answer the following questions:

1. How can the show of affection and empathy among the respondents be described?
2. How is the engagement in play among respondents be described?
3. How is the establishment of discipline strategy described among the respondents?
4. Is there a significant relationship between the show of affection and empathy and engagement in play among respondents with the establishment of discipline strategies?
5. Do shows of affection, empathy, and engagement in play significantly influence the establishment of discipline strategies among the respondents?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Show of Love and Empathy

Affection and empathy are critical components of healthy parent-child relationships. In a recent paper by [Wolf and colleagues \(2023\)](#), they stressed that affection captures emotional approach tendencies, concerns, and positive behaviour. Another recent paper also mentioned that empathy and psychological security correlated significantly ([Al-Harthy et al., 2023](#)). On the other hand, [Ruiz-Zaldibar et al. \(2021\)](#) mentioned that a positive trend was found in parental self-efficacy and styles. Research has shown that children who receive affection and empathy from their parents have better physical and mental health outcomes, higher self-esteem, and better social and emotional skills. A study by [Goering and Mrug \(2021\)](#) supported this idea. Affectionate and empathetic parenting provides a secure base for children to explore the world, promotes attachment, and helps children develop positive relationships with others.

Parents can demonstrate affection and empathy differently, depending on their cultural background, personality, and parenting style. A recent study by [Sahin and Cetin \(2023\)](#) mentioned that the emotional and cognitive dimensions of empathy predicted the perception of parenting. Some parents may express affection through physical touch, while others may show it through words of affirmation or acts of service. [Cunha et al. \(2023\)](#) showed that parental intervention and empathy drastically increase and reduce incidents such as bullying. A related article mentioned that parents must improve empathetic communication with their children to create an atmosphere suitable at home and outside ([Zubaili, 2023](#)). Empathy involves understanding and sharing the child's emotional experiences, which is vital for building trust and emotional connection. A related study by [Syahril et al. \(2020\)](#) stated that children who get attention, discipline, and sincere affection from parents and family have good social behaviour.

It is important to note that affection and empathy are not the same as permissiveness or lack of discipline. Effective parenting involves finding a balance between warmth and structure, where

parents provide clear rules and expectations while also showing love and support. In a recent research by [Kadosh-Laor and company \(2023\)](#), they stated that caring for a child may be associated with increased stress and parental burnout. In addition, they mentioned that maternal emotional empathy acts as a buffer against parental burnout. Parents with high levels of affection and empathy can still set limits and enforce consequences when necessary. In the study of [Ng et al. \(2020\)](#), they explained that adolescents who believe their parents treat them differently from their siblings have poor psychosocial well-being.

Engaging in Play

Play is a critical component of children's development, as it helps them develop cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills. When parents engage in play with their children, they provide a secure and supportive environment for them to explore, learn, and grow. Engaging in play also promotes bonding and attachment, as it provides a positive shared experience between the parent and child. In a recent research by [Istenič et al. \(2023\)](#), they pointed out that a child's digital screen technology use and parents' attitudes and perceptions of digital play correlated significantly. From a systematic literature review done by [Yang et al. \(2023\)](#), they revealed interesting facts where parental involvement and student engagement studies seemed to embrace the idea of measuring parental involvement via school and home subtypes and student engagement via affective, behavioural, and cognitive domains. At the same time, [Oliver and company \(2023\)](#) introduced that limited adventurous play negatively influences a child's physical and mental health. Additionally, children are allowed to play, according to parents, within hearing distance, and they have completed their homework and avoid risks and danger ([Kurt & Ozgun, 2023](#)). In a related article, [McFarland and Laird \(2018\)](#) mentioned that many parents felt that play was essential and provided appropriate activities; however, they identified the young age of children and safety concerns as barriers.

Playing can be particularly challenging in today's fast-paced, technology-driven world. Many parents need help to carve out play time, especially when busy with work or other responsibilities. For instance, in a recent paper by [Lyttelton et al. \(2022\)](#), they concluded that parents, especially mothers, responded to childcare demands through multitasking. [Erdogan et al. \(2018\)](#) found that digital play was the most minor preferred play across four countries globally. However, research has shown that even short periods of play can have significant benefits for both the parent and child.

Engaging in play is not only beneficial for the child's development but also for the parent-child relationship. It allows parents to connect with their children, understand their interests and needs, and strengthen their emotional bond. Play also allows parents to model positive behaviours and attitudes, such as cooperation, creativity, and problem-solving. A relevant reference by [Marsh et al. \(2018\)](#) showed a unique perspective on the given account regarding the relationship between play and creativity among young children. However, a local study by [Jabar et al. \(2023\)](#) believed that parents were more involved in parenting for education.

Establishing Discipline Strategies

Effective discipline strategies are essential for promoting children's social, emotional, and cognitive development. In a recent study by [Farahzadi et al. \(2023\)](#), they shared that there was an increase in shaking, shouting and yelling among parents, especially during the time of pandemic. Harsh discipline can affect peer attachment in the late childhood and early adolescence period of a child's life ([Wang et al., 2021](#)). Another study from [Chu and Xie \(2023\)](#) also emphasized the mediating role of deviant peer affiliation and moral identity with the relationship between harsh parental discipline and cyberbullying perpetration. When parents establish clear and consistent rules and expectations, children are more likely to feel secure and confident in their environment.

Discipline strategies also help children learn self-control, responsibility, and respect for others.

Parents' discipline strategies can vary depending on their cultural background, parenting style, and the child's age and temperament. A study by [de Oliveira et al. \(2022\)](#) showed that children got more anger at time-out or spanking than at induction. For example, some parents may use a more authoritative parenting style, which involves setting clear rules and expectations while showing warmth and support. In a related paper, maternal psychological aggression significantly predicts a boy's anxiety ([Liu et al., 2021](#)). Other parents may use a more permissive or authoritarian parenting style, which may be less effective in promoting positive behaviours.

It is important to note that discipline strategies should be age-appropriate and tailored to the child's individual needs. Parents should also avoid harsh or physical punishment, which can adversely affect the child's development and well-being. This idea reflects the findings of the team [Johnson \(2023\)](#), wherein they tried to evaluate the association between parenting stress and harsh discipline attitudes and behaviours. The study by [Cai et al. \(2019\)](#) also presented the same aspect of parental harsh discipline and its association with affinity and conflict.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

The current paper used a descriptive-correlational research design. Descriptive research pertains to the idea of trying to appreciate the norm or characteristics of a particular sample or population. On the other hand, a correlational design aims to discover the underlying association between two variables in the study. Since this paper would like to assess the parents' show of affection and empathy, engagement in play, and discipline strategies, the said research design fits. Furthermore, it also tries to unravel the relationship between the three variables and determines which one significantly affects the use of discipline strategies among the parents.

Respondents

The respondents of this study comprised selected parents of a primary school in the Province of Rizal, Philippines. One hundred forty-four (144) parents voluntarily participated in the online survey. The data gathering commenced during March and April 2023. The study used a purposive sampling technique to gather the most substantial data source for the study. The inclusion criteria for the study were a parent, guardian, or family relative who has a child or children studying in the primary school, has direct contact or responsibility over the child or children who are studying in the primary school, and has an available device to answer the online survey. The exclusion criteria include a brother, sister or cousin who is not old enough to care for and send off a primary school child or children and those without gadgets or devices to answer the online survey.

Instrument

The researcher adapted and modified a research instrument developed by [Harty \(2009\)](#) to determine the study's intention. The instrument has three (3) major parts, namely, a) the degree of show of affection and empathy of parents, b) the level of engagement in play, and c) the level of establishment of discipline strategies among parent-respondents. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient analysis yielded between 0.80 – 0.91, and such a score is highly reliable. The responses of the parents come from a Six (6) point Likert Scale with the following descriptive interpretations: 6- Never, 5 -Seldom, 4-Sometimes, 3-Often, 2-Almost Always, and 1-Always.

Statistical Analysis

In order to provide answers for the research objectives, the gathered data underwent statistical treatment such as mean, Pearson-r Moment of Correlation, and Regression Analysis. The

data analyst used the software Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23 to calculate the necessary statistical computations for the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The succeeding tables below show the results of the study. The first three tables describe the show of affection and empathy of the parent-respondents, engagement of play, and establishment of discipline strategies. The remaining two table presents the correlation matrix and the linear regression results of the study.

Table 1. Affection and Empathy among the Respondents

Statements	Mean	Interpretation
1. I can make time to tell my child I love him/her no matter how I am feeling.	1.67	Always
2. I can show my child love and be affectionate, as well as any other parent can.	1.51	Always
3. I can understand my child’s personality and moods.	1.69	Always
4. I can let my child know I still love him/her, after I have reprimanded him/her for misbehaving.	1.65	Always
5. I can create a home environment that promotes security and trust.	1.59	Always
6. I can demonstrate warmth and acceptance to my child as well as any other parent can.	1.56	Always
7. I can use the opportunities that come up in daily activities to show my child how much I care for him/her.	1.58	Always
Overall Mean	1.61	Always

Legend: 1.00-1.82=Always; 1.83-2.66=Almost Always; 2.67-3.50=Often; 3.51-4.32=Sometimes; 4.33-5.16=Seldom; 5.17-6.00=Never

Table 2 presents the respondents' means and interpretation of responses to the statements on the show of affection and empathy towards their children. The table shows that the respondents strongly agree with all the statements, with a mean score ranging from 1.51 to 1.69.

The interpretation of the mean scores for all statements is "Always," indicating that the respondents believe they can consistently show affection and empathy towards their children. The overall mean score of 1.61 indicates a firm agreement with the statements.

In summary, the table suggests that the respondents have a positive attitude towards showing love and empathy towards their children consistently, regardless of their moods or situations.

Table 2. Engaging in Play among the Respondents

Statements	Mean	Interpretation
1. I can get my child to participate in play activities even when s/he does not want to.	2.40	Almost Always
2. I can spend time playing with my child.	2.24	Almost Always
3. I can think of activities with my child to encourage him/her to learn.	2.03	Almost Always
4. I can figure out which activities my child enjoys doing.	1.94	Almost Always

5. I can enjoy playing with my child as much as any other parent can.	2.16	Almost Always
6. I can adapt activities that other parents and children enjoy so that my child and I can enjoy them too.	2.06	Almost Always
7. I can think of fun activities for my child to do which s/he will not find boring.	2.17	Almost Always
Overall Mean	2.14	Almost Always

Legend: 1.00-1.82=Always; 1.83-2.66=Almost Always; 2.67-3.50=Often; 3.51-4.32=Sometimes; 4.33-5.16=Seldom; 5.17-6.00=Never

Table 3 presents the respondents' means and interpretation of responses to the statements on engaging in play with their children. The table shows that the respondents agree with all the statements, with a mean score ranging from 1.94 to 2.40.

The interpretation of the mean scores for all statements is "Almost Always," indicating that the respondents believe they can engage in play activities with their children most of the time. The overall mean score of 2.14 indicates a firm agreement with the statements.

Specifically, the table suggests that the respondents believe they can get their child to participate in play activities even when the child does not want to, spend time playing with their child, and think of activities that will encourage their child to learn. The respondents also believe they can figure out which activities their child enjoys, enjoy playing with their child, adapt activities to make them enjoyable, and think of fun activities their child will find interesting.

The table shows that the respondents believe they can engage in play activities with their children effectively and enjoyably. It suggests that the respondents have a positive attitude towards engaging in play with their children and believe that they can facilitate their child's learning and enjoyment through play.

Table 3. Establishing Discipline Strategies by the Respondents

Statements	Mean	Interpretation
1. I can discipline my child, no matter how I am feeling.	1.49	Always
2. I can discipline my child as well as any other parent can.	1.65	Always
3. I can set realistic limits and boundaries for my child.	1.63	Always
4. I can discipline my child if s/he misbehaves when we are visiting close friends.	1.60	Always
5. I can discipline my child if s/he misbehaves when we are in a public place, i.e., a shopping centre.	1.67	Always
6. I can discipline my child in consistent ways.	1.65	Always
7. I can listen to other people's advice about how to discipline my child.	2.12	Almost Always
8. I can learn from watching how other parents discipline their children.	2.26	Almost Always
Overall Mean	1.76	Always

Legend: 1.00-1.82=Always; 1.83-2.66=Almost Always; 2.67-3.50=Often; 3.51-4.32=Sometimes; 4.33-5.16=Seldom; 5.17-6.00=Never

Table 3 presents the respondents' means and interpretation of responses to the statements on establishing discipline strategies for their children. The table shows that the respondents strongly agree with all the statements, with a mean score ranging from 1.49 to 1.67.

The interpretation of the mean scores for all statements is "Always," indicating that the respondents believe they can consistently establish discipline strategies for their children. The overall mean score of 1.76 indicates a firm agreement with the statements.

Moreover, the table suggests that the respondents believe they can discipline their child regardless of their emotions, set realistic limits and boundaries, discipline their child consistently, and discipline them in different settings, such as when visiting friends or in public places. The respondents also believe they can listen to advice from others on how to discipline their children and learn from watching how other parents discipline them.

The table demonstrates that the respondents believe they can establish effective discipline strategies for their children. It suggests that the respondents have a positive attitude towards disciplining their children and believe that they can do so consistently and effectively. The respondents also believe they are willing to seek advice and learn from others' experiences regarding discipline strategies for their children.

Table 4. Correlation Matrix between Show Affection and Empathy, Engaging in Play, and Establishing Discipline Strategies

Variables	1	2	3
Show of Affection and Empathy	1		
Engagement in Play	.581*	1	
Establishing Discipline Strategies	.541*	.497*	1

Note: * $p < .05$

Table 4 depicts a correlation matrix between the variables: establishing discipline strategies, showing affection and empathy, and engaging in play. The correlation coefficient is measured using Pearson's correlation method. The correlation between establishing discipline strategies and show of affection and empathy is positive, with a coefficient of .541, indicating that as the level of discipline strategies increases, so does the level of affection and empathy. The probability value for this correlation coefficient is less than 0.001, indicating that this correlation is statistically significant. Similarly, the correlation between establishing discipline strategies and engaging in play is positive, with a coefficient of 0.497. This result indicates that as the level of establishing discipline strategies increases, so does the level of engagement in play. The p -value for this correlation coefficient is also less than 0.001, indicating that this correlation is statistically significant.

Overall, the table suggests a positive relationship exists between establishing discipline strategies, showing affection and empathy and engaging in play. This finding means that parents with more effective discipline strategies likely have higher levels of affection, empathy, and engagement in play with their children.

Table 5. Linear Regression to Determine the Factor Influencing the Establishing Discipline Strategies among the Respondents

	Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.
	Coefficients		Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.564	.151		3.734	.000
Show of Affection and Empathy	.438	.096	.381	4.544	.000
Engaging in Play	.229	.069	.276	3.295	.001

Note: $F(2, 141) = 36.883, p = .000; R^2 = .343$

Table 5 denotes the results of a linear regression analysis that investigates the relationship between "Establishing Discipline Strategies," "Engaging in Play," and "Show of Affection and Empathy" among the respondents.

The coefficient for the show of affection and empathy is .438, indicating that for every one-unit increase in the show of affection and empathy, there is a .438 increase in establishing discipline strategies. The standardized coefficient (beta) for affection and empathy is .381, indicating that this variable positively affects establishing discipline strategies. The *t*-value for affection and empathy is 4.544, and the *p*-value is less than 0.001, indicating that this variable is statistically significant.

The coefficient for engaging in play is 0.229, indicating that for every one-unit increase in engaging in play, there is a 0.229 increase in establishing discipline strategies. The standardized coefficient (beta) for engaging in play is 0.276, indicating that this variable has a small positive effect on establishing discipline strategies. The *t*-value for engaging in play is 3.295, and the probability value is 0.001, indicating that this variable is also statistically significant.

The overall model's goodness of fit is evaluated using the *F*-test. The *F*-value is 36.883, with a probability value less than 0.001, indicating that the model is statistically significant. The R-squared value of 0.343 indicates that the model explains 34.3% of the variance in establishing discipline strategies.

In conclusion, the linear regression analysis suggests that affection, empathy, and engagement in play have a positive and statistically significant effect on establishing discipline strategies. Parents who exhibit higher levels of affection and empathy and engage in play are likelier to use effective discipline strategies with their children.

Discussion

The main aim of this study is to determine the parents' show of affection and empathy, as well as engagement in play and establishment of discipline strategies. It also tries to discover any underlying relationships and predictors for the parental establishment of discipline strategies for their child. In general, the paper revealed some interesting findings during the study. It provided some strong and definitive results supporting the study's objectives. At the same time, it also provided some evidence to back up the research hypothesis of the study.

Specifically, regarding showing affection and empathy to parents towards their child or children, the current study found that parents always try to show it to their children. At the same time, they also never fail to empathize with their children from time to time. In a previous study by [Yao et al. \(2023\)](#), they mentioned that the rejection dimension of parenting style predicted a child's peer relationship and empathy. [Chan et al. \(2023\)](#) also introduced that empathy is a vital socioemotional skill that influences prosocial behaviour and impacts the ability to respond to the emotions of others. Also, a recent study by [Nergaard \(2022\)](#) stated that children's need for empathy was initiated by the wish to play and experience belonging. A previous study also argued that empathy and some types of prosocial behaviour are intrinsically and extrinsically motivated, contributing to young children's prosocial behaviour ([Spinrad & Gal, 2018](#)). Additionally, [Borelli et al. \(2021\)](#) also proved that empathy positively relates to specific child outcomes such as attachment security. Furthermore, the group [Ornaghi \(2021\)](#) disclosed that a child's empathetic responses are associated with positive emotion regulation, language skills, and maternal-emotion-coaching style. Lastly, [Hajal and Paley \(2020\)](#) pointed out that parental emotion regulation is essential due to the degree of involvement in interventions for childhood emotional and behavioural disorders.

In the case of parental engagement to play with their child or children, the paper got the same exciting result. Parents always try to engage in play with their children. They believe that this type of experience will help their child develop physically, emotionally, socially, or holistically. In a

recent study by Kurt and Ozgun (2023), they disclosed that parents set limits on their children's play due to safety concerns, damage to property, and responsibility. Another paper emphasized that parents working at home spent more time in the presence of children and supervising children in combination with work (Lyttelton et al., 2022). The previous paper of Nergaard (2022) emphasizes the importance of play and the belongingness of a child. During the pandemic, children have fewer physical activities, less outside time and increased sedentary behaviours (Moore et al., 2020). Nevertheless, with parental encouragement and support, physical activity is positively associated with healthy movement behaviours. In the case of Stefan et al. (2018), parents see involvement in sports as usual since this connects them emotionally and furthers their child's development. Another previous Rodrigues (2018) team study showed that active parents correlate with sports participation frequency among girls and boys.

Lastly, the result of parents' establishment of discipline strategies for their child, again, is that they always follow their instincts and drives when it comes to disciplining aspect. A particular factor that may play a role here is parent self-regulation, which involves emotional, cognitive, and biological processes that support or constrain parenting behaviour (Lunkenheimer et al., 2023). Their child must value this experience, and hopefully, it will not create trauma for them in the long run. However, a recent paper by the group of Farahzadi (2023) mentioned that there was an increase in shaking, shouting, and yelling among parents when disciplining their children. On the other hand, Lunkenheimer et al. (2023) also explored the parents' behaviour, perceptions, and regulation of parent and child screen-based device use, which they think is a critical factor in parent discipline. One of the results showed that parental limit-setting and involvement were either unrelated to or related to fewer parent and child problems. On the other hand, Satinsky et al. (2023) disclosed that physically harsh discipline is associated with poor developmental outcomes among children.

The inferential statistics of the study also confirm an exciting insight that may contribute to the body of knowledge. There were significant relationships between the three variables involved in the study. Show of empathy and affection and engaging in play are significantly associated with establishing discipline strategies among the parents. A recent study by Chu and Xie (2023) partially supports this result. To better understand the relationship, both the show of empathy and affection and engaging in play predict the establishment of discipline strategies among parents.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the study's results, the proponent concludes that the respondents always show empathy and affection to their children, try to engage in play and establish their discipline strategies among their children. Furthermore, the study also observed a moderate positive relationship between showing empathy and affection and engaging in play with establishing discipline strategies among parents. Lastly, both shows of affection and empathy and engaging in play predicted the establishment of discipline strategies among parents in the study.

LIMITATION & FURTHER RESEARCH

During the research writing process, the researcher met some limitations that would make the manuscript more conceivable. Like any other research study, this particular paper is not spared from its own shortcomings. First, the study sample future studies may also consider a larger scale of respondent selection and not only localized ones. Second, the variables involved in the study and other behavioural measures can be used by future researchers in order to investigate deeper evidence when it comes to parenting attitudes and styles. Third, the research design, future papers can use mixed method design or a simple structural equation modelling for a more explorative study. Lastly, the technical writing should be overseen by a professional proofreader. Constructive

criticism is highly appreciated among scholars and peer reviewers.

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