



The Status of Utah Pacific Islander Women

In 2021, the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute reported that “Utah ranks as the 34th most racially and ethnically diverse state in the nation, with 22% of the state identifying as other than non-Hispanic White.”¹ As the state continues to become more diverse, it is critical that the Utah Women & Leadership Project (UWLP) conducts and reports research focused on women of color. As the UWLP focuses on strengthening the impact of *all* Utah girls and women, research that increases our understanding of the status and experiences of girls and women within all social and identity groups—including race and ethnicity—is crucial. This research snapshot is the first in a series of five that detail the available data on Utah women of each Census race/ethnic category: Pacific Islander, Asian, Black, Hispanic/Latino, and Native American women. The data presented here include information from, among other sources, the 5-year US Census Microdata, the Utah System of Higher Education, the Utah Department of Corrections, and a number of Utah Department of Health offices including Health Disparities, Vital Records and Statistics, and Public Health Assessment.

Setting the Stage

Often, research entities publish data on gender and race separately, leaving a gap of information and understanding on the intersection of gender and race/ethnicity. Yet, separate data do not allow the community, decision makers, and policy makers the depth of information needed to design programs and policies that meet the diverse spectrum of needs of all Utah women. This snapshot highlights the gender and race intersection for Utah Pacific Islander women. It highlights both the available data as well as the gaps in the information that could, if filled, help local and state decision makers and leaders to understand and address the needs of all Utah girls and women.

This research uses the US Census description for “Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander,” which is “a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.”² Importantly, while widely-used Census categories allow for data to be comparable across entities, the categories represent many different countries, cultures, and experiences.

We sought data across broad categories that impact Utah women, such as civic engagement, childcare access,

domestic violence, utility connectivity, caregiver status, unpaid care work, housing, transportation, access to healthy food, and food insecurity. Unfortunately, vital information is unavailable for a variety of reasons: the data have not been collected, the data have not been collected at the needed level, the sample sizes were too small to generalize, the origin of the data was underresourced, the data had sharing limitations, or the data collection methods were unsubstantiated. Yet, UWLP researchers collected data in these five categories: general demographics, health, basic needs, education, and income and employment.

Demographics

Available demographic data on Pacific Islander Utah women include population size, household size, family household type, marital status, and religious affiliation.

Population Size: The Utah Pacific Islander population has been relatively stable over time, comprising around 1.0% of the Utah population. In 2010, 24,307 Utahns were Pacific Islanders, while by 2020 the number had increased to 32,739. Population demographers project slight growth through 2065, at which point Pacific Islanders are expected to make up 1.2% of Utah’s population.³ Currently, 13,921 Pacific Islander women reside in Utah, which represents 0.45% of the general Utah population and is larger than the 0.09% share of the general US population.⁴

Household Size: The average household size of Pacific Islander women in Utah is 4.1 people, which is larger than the average of 3.4 for Pacific Islander women across the US: 3.0 for Utah women and 2.5 for women in the US.⁵

Family Household Type: Almost three quarters (73.1%) of Utah Pacific Islander households consist of married couple families (compared to 81.7% of all Utah families and 65.6% of US Pacific Islanders). Of Pacific Islander households, 18.7% are led by women with no spouse present (12.3% for Utah women and 22.7% for US Pacific Islander women) compared to 8.2% of Utah Pacific Islander men with no spouse present (5.9% for Utah men and 11.7% for US Pacific Islander men).

Marital Status: Just over 49.0% of Pacific Islander women in Utah are married, which is similar to all US women (48.7%), but lower than all Utah women (56.9%). Almost 37.0% have never been married compared to 27.3% for all

Utah women and 30.4% for all US women. Utah Pacific Islander women have similar separation rates to all Utah women (1.9% vs. 1.6%) as well as rates of widowhood (6.1% vs. 5.6%); however, divorce rates for Pacific Islander women in Utah are much lower than for all Utah women (6.1% v. 10.2%). That trend holds nationally as well, where 8.8% of US Pacific Islander women are divorced compared to 12.1% of all US women.⁶ See Table 1 for a summary of household and marital status findings.

Table 1. Household and Marital Status Characteristics, 2015–2019⁷

| Demographic | Utah Women | | US Women | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|-------|------------------|-------|
| | Pacific Islander | All | Pacific Islander | All |
| Average people per household | 4.1 | 3.0 | 3.4 | 2.5 |
| Marital Status | | | | |
| Never married | 36.7% | 27.3% | 37.3% | 30.4% |
| Married | 49.2% | 56.9% | 44.2% | 48.7% |
| Separated | 1.9% | 1.6% | 2.5% | 2.2% |
| Widowed | 6.1% | 5.6% | 7.3% | 8.8% |
| Divorced | 6.1% | 10.2% | 8.8% | 12.1% |
| Family Household | | | | |
| Married couple family household | 73.1% | 81.7% | 65.6% | 73.6% |
| Male householder, no spouse present | 8.2% | 5.9% | 11.7% | 7.5% |
| Female householder, no spouse present | 18.7% | 12.3% | 22.7% | 19.0% |

Health

Because Utah ranks fifth among the ten states with the largest Pacific Islander population, recent studies by the Utah Department of Health’s Office of Health Disparities⁸ give particular attention toward the female Pacific Islander population (see these reports for further analysis and comparisons). Findings from a recent survey of Utah’s Pacific Islander population indicate that the disparate health rates of this population may be underestimated (see Table 2 for age-adjusted data for access to healthcare, physical health, reproductive health and wellbeing, and mental health).

Access to Healthcare: Pacific Islander women in Utah are more likely to lack health insurance (17.5%) than Utah women in general (11.2%).⁹ Further, they face greater barriers to medical care, with 25.7% of Pacific Islander women reporting that they forgo medical care due to cost (vs. 13.8% of Utah women generally) and having no personal doctor (27.7% for Utah Pacific Islander women vs. 20.2% for Utah women).¹⁰

Physical Health: Utah Pacific Islander women are less likely to receive most preventative care and more likely to experience poor health outcomes compared to all Utah women. For example, Utah Pacific Islander women are far less likely to

receive pap smears (46.8% vs. 60.3% of all Utah women)¹¹ and more likely to receive a diagnosis of cervical cancer (10.9% vs. 5.2% of all Utah women).¹² Yet, Utah Pacific Islander women receive more mammograms (79.8%) than all Utah women (63.2%)¹³ and are far more likely to be diagnosed with breast cancer (174.2 per 100,000 vs. 114.6 for all Utah women)¹⁴ and to die from breast cancer (29.7% vs. 19.3% of Utah women).¹⁵ Lower rates of physical activity are reported by Pacific Islander women in Utah (16% vs. 19.4% of all Utah women),¹⁶ as well as greater rates of obesity (48.2% vs. 28.4% of all Utah women).¹⁷ An exception to the trend of poor health outcomes is a decreased rate of heart disease among Pacific Islander women in Utah (4.0% vs. 5.0% of all Utah women).¹⁸

Table 2. Health Indicator Summary

| Health Indicator | Utah Women | |
|---|------------------|-------|
| | Pacific Islander | All |
| Access to Healthcare | | |
| Uninsured | 17.5% | 11.2% |
| Unable to get care due to cost | 25.7% | 13.8% |
| No personal doctor | 27.7% | 20.2% |
| Physical Health | | |
| Pap smear | 46.8% | 60.3% |
| Cervical cancer | 10.9% | 5.2% |
| Breast cancer rates per 100,000 females | 174.2 | 114.6 |
| Breast cancer death | 29.7% | 19.3% |
| Obesity | 48.2% | 28.4% |
| Heart disease | 4%* | 5% |
| Reproductive Health | | |
| Birth rate | 18.2 | 10.6 |
| Gestational diabetes | 11% | 6.8% |
| Postpartum depression | 35.5%* | 14.8% |
| Mental Health | | |
| Bad mental health** | 20.5% | 23.6% |
| Depression | 14.5% | 29.7% |

*Use caution in interpreting; the estimate has a coefficient of variation > 30% and is therefore deemed unreliable by Utah Department of Health standards.
**7 or more days out of the past 30 where respondent noted their mental health was “not good.” See citations in this section for the data sources.

Reproductive Health and Wellbeing: The birth rate per 1,000 Pacific Islander women in Utah is 18.2, which is higher than the rate of 10.6 for Utah women generally.¹⁹ Utah Pacific Islander women are less likely to receive prenatal care in their first trimester (77.5%)²⁰ and have a far greater rate of gestational diabetes during pregnancy (11.0%) than all Utah women (8.7% and 6.8%, respectively).²¹ After giving birth, Utah Pacific Islander women have a greater rate of postpartum depression (35.5%) than Utah women in general (14.8%).²²

Mental Health: According to the data, Utah Pacific Islander women fare better in mental health outcomes than Utah women generally. They are less likely to report bad mental health (20.5% vs. 23.6% of all Utah women)²³ or have a diagnosis of major depressive disorder (14.5% vs. 29.7% of all Utah women).²⁴

Basic Needs

The term “basic needs” is used to describe data found that indicate the bare minimum of needs: access to water, internet, safety, and freedom. First, fewer women in Utah report no access to water (11.6% for Utah Pacific Islander; 10.6% for all Utah women) than women nationally (18.6% for Pacific Islander and 14.4% for all US women). Second, internet access has become increasingly critical to accessing information, services, and education. Similar rates of Utah Pacific Islander women report having no internet access at home (4.7%) as Utah women in general (5.1%), rates that are much lower than those seen nationally for women (12.9% of US Pacific Islander; 10.4% of all US).²⁵ Third, the Utah Office for Victims of Crime report that of individuals who have applied for crime victim reparations between 2019 and 2021, 81.6% were women. Of those, 0.9% have been Pacific Islander (it is important to note that the race/ethnicity of 28% of these women was classified as “unknown”).²⁶ And finally, Utah Pacific Islander women made up an average 2.3% of the female prison population between 2010 and 2021,²⁷ compared to their 0.9% share of the total female population in Utah.²⁸

Education

In most states and in the US in generally, women earn the majority of college degrees. In fact, women earn 57.0% of bachelor-level diplomas, 60.0% of master’s degrees, and 51.7% of doctorates.²⁹ While we were not able to determine the same detail for Utah women of color, this section highlights educational attainment rates in general as well as share of enrollment at Utah’s public universities.

According to the 5-Year American Community Survey Integrated Public Use Microdata of the US Census Bureau, Pacific Islander women in Utah end their education with a high school diploma (32.6%) more than Utah women generally (23.8%), and they have lower rates of attaining bachelor’s degrees (18.1% vs. 29.0% of all Utah women) (see Table 3).³⁰ Of the population aged 18-35 in 2018, Utah Pacific Islander women had the lowest enrollment rate of all subgroups (8.5%) compared to the Utah female average of 12.5%.³¹ The 5-year average completion rates of college-enrolled Pacific Islander women in Utah aged 18-35 is 22.3% compared to all Utah women at 27.9%.

Table 3. Educational Attainment, 2015–2019³²

| Educational Attainment | Utah Women | | US Women | |
|------------------------|------------------|-------|------------------|-------|
| | Pacific Islander | All | Pacific Islander | All |
| Less than HS | 8.2% | 7.1% | 12.3% | 10.9% |
| HS diploma | 32.6% | 23.8% | 33.4% | 26.2% |
| Some college | 41.1% | 40.2% | 37.2% | 32.0% |
| Bachelor’s | 18.1% | 29.0% | 17.0% | 30.9% |

Income and Employment

The US Department of Labor recently released a report³³ showing that women of color were more disproportionately impacted by the economic crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. Report authors argued that the longstanding disparities in the labor force between men and women, and especially women of color—exacerbated by pandemic-related issues—intensified the persistently lower wages, fewer workplace benefits, and underinvestment in policies around childcare and paid leave. Although data limitations in this report made it difficult to discern the diverse experiences of Asian and Pacific Islander women specifically, UWLP researchers conducted a survey of over 3,000 Utah women regarding their experiences with work during the pandemic and that found women of color were more likely to agree that they were exhausted and struggling to balance work and home life.³⁴ In fact, Pacific Islander women with household incomes between \$25,000 and \$30,000 were among the highest to report financial worry.³⁵

This section provides information regarding income, occupation, and business ownership among Pacific Islander women in Utah.

Income: The median personal income for Utah Pacific Islander women (\$20,670) is on par with the median income for Utah women generally (\$19,245), which contrasts national trends with US women having a higher median income (\$23,106) than US Pacific Islander women (\$20,447) (see Table 4). Similarly, the median personal wage of Pacific Islander women in Utah is slightly higher than for all Utah women (\$30,762 vs. \$28,374), as well as for household income (\$78,313 vs. \$70,838). However, Pacific Islander women in Utah face greater rates of poverty (11.8% vs. 10.8% of all Utah women), which is commensurate with national trends.³⁶ Utah Pacific Islander women earn \$0.55 on the dollar compared to white Utah men (compared to \$0.70 for all Utah women³⁷), a wider gap than is seen nationally for Pacific Islander women (\$0.63 cents on the dollar).

Table 4. Income, 2015–2019³⁸

| Characteristic | Utah Women | | US Women | |
|--------------------------------|------------------|----------|------------------|----------|
| | Pacific Islander | All | Pacific Islander | All |
| Labor force participation rate | 66.0% | 61.7% | 63.5% | 59.4% |
| Median household income | \$78,313 | \$70,838 | \$64,819 | \$59,250 |
| Median income | \$20,670 | \$19,245 | \$20,447 | \$23,106 |
| Median wage | \$30,762 | \$28,374 | \$31,797 | \$34,543 |
| Poverty rate | 11.8% | 10.8% | 18.9% | 14.7% |
| Wage gap | 55.0% | 70.0% | 63.0% | 82.0% |
| Unemployment | 5.0% | 3.3% | 7.0% | 5.0% |

Occupation: Utah Pacific Islander women are represented at different rates across occupational settings as compared to Utah women generally (see Table 5).

Table 5. Occupational Type, 2015–2019³⁹

| Occupation | Utah Women | | US Women | |
|------------------------------|------------------|-------|------------------|-------|
| | Pacific Islander | All | Pacific Islander | All |
| Officials and Administrators | 7.5% | 11.6% | 9.4% | 12.2% |
| Professionals | 15.8% | 22.1% | 13.0% | 23.3% |
| Technicians | 4.1% | 3.0% | 3.2% | 3.4% |
| Protective Services | 0.4% | 0.8% | 1.5% | 1.0% |
| Paraprofessionals | 0.2% | 0.8% | 1.0% | 0.8% |
| Administrative Support | 39.2% | 35.0% | 35.4% | 31.0% |
| Skilled crafts | 1.9% | 1.8% | 1.8% | 1.5% |
| Service & Maintenance | 30.0% | 24.3% | 32.5% | 25.8% |

Industry: Utah Pacific Islander women are also employed in industry at different rates than Utah women generally (see Table 6).

Table 6. Industry, 2015–2019⁴⁰

| Industry | Utah Women | | US Women | |
|-------------------------------|------------------|-------|------------------|-------|
| | Pacific Islander | All | Pacific Islander | All |
| Trade, Transportation, Util. | 23.0% | 17.3% | 21.7% | 15.9% |
| Construction | 1.7%* | 1.4% | 1.4% | 1.4% |
| Manufacturing | 11.2% | 6.6% | 5.3% | 6.2% |
| Information Services | 1.1%* | 1.8% | 1.0% | 1.7% |
| Finance, Insurance, Real Es. | 9.1% | 7.7% | 6.0% | 7.3% |
| Professional & Business Serv. | 6.9% | 11.0% | 8.1% | 10.4% |
| Health & Education | 26.3% | 34.3% | 29.6% | 35.4% |
| Leisure & Hospitality | 6.2% | 9.4% | 13.5% | 10.2% |
| Other Services | 8.8% | 4.9% | 4.9% | 5.5% |
| Public Admin. | 4.7%* | 4.3% | 5.9% | 4.4% |

*Use caution in interpreting; sample sizes may be too small for generalizability.

Business Ownership: The Women’s Business Center of Utah reports that, of their majority of women clients (95%), only 2% are Pacific Islander.⁴¹ Nationally, as of 2019, 50% of all

women-owned businesses in the US were owned by women of color, and firms owned by Pacific Islander women grew 41% between 2014 and 2019.⁴²

Conclusion

As noted in a seminal report—*Diversity in Utah: Race, Ethnicity, and Sex*—published by the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute at the University of Utah, demographic, economic, education, and health data by race, ethnicity, and sex are extremely complex.⁴³ Yet, we agree with these report authors that data can be used as a “source of light” instead of a source of division that impedes progress.

The data in this report provide a snapshot of the existing disparities in several areas specifically related to Utah Pacific Islander women. It also provides a starting point for meaningful, targeted change. Although we were able to find existing data regarding the general demographics, health, wellbeing, education, and income and employment of Utah Pacific Islander women, usable information was not available in many of the categories we hoped to collect, such as housing, transportation, domestic violence, unpaid labor, caregiver status, childcare accessibility, civic engagement, and food insecurity. This demonstrates both a data gap and an opportunity for Utah universities, government, nonprofit, and other entities to do more to collaborate, gather, and report quality data that can help government, education, business, and nonprofit leaders and decision makers understand more deeply the circumstances and needs of Utah’s Pacific Islander women. More generally, gender, race, and ethnicity, along with other important demographic data, can help Utahns create a more inclusive, accessible, and equitable culture for all.

Overall, Utahns can increase equality within the state by utilizing data to recognize the impact of gender and race in our everyday lives. As we provide greater access and opportunity to all residents, the state can use these data to better utilize the talents, ideas, and resources that Pacific Islander women have to offer the state, employers, and Utah families. It continues to be important to remember that when we strengthen the impact of all Utah residents, including Pacific Islander women, we can strengthen Utah’s workplaces, educational institutions, communities, and the state as a whole.

¹ Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute. (2021, May 6). *Data book. Diversity in Utah: Race, ethnicity, and sex. Analysis in brief.* University of Utah. <https://gardner.utah.edu/wp-content/uploads/DiversityDataBook-AIB-May2021.pdf?x71849>

² US Census Bureau. (2022). *About the topic of race.* <https://www.census.gov/topics/population/race/about.html>

³ Hollingshaus, M., Harris, E., & Perlich, P. (2019). *Utah’s increasing diversity: Population projections by race/ethnicity.* Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute, University of Utah. <https://gardner.utah.edu/demographics/population-projections/raceethnicity-projections/>

⁴ Utah Women & Leadership Project analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata.

⁵ Utah Women & Leadership Project analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, 2015–2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

⁷ UWLP analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata.

- ⁸ Office of Health Disparities. (2021). *Diabetes and gestational diabetes among racial and ethnic minority women in Utah*. Utah Department of Health. <https://health.utah.gov/disparities/data/profiles/Utah-HealthDisparitiesProfileDiabetesGestationalDiabetes2021.pdf>; Office of Health Disparities. (2021). Utah Department of Health. *Maternal mortality and morbidity among Utah minority women*. <https://health.utah.gov/disparities/data/profiles/UtahHealthDisparities-ProfileMaternalMortalityMorbidity2021.pdf>
- ⁹ Utah Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Office of Public Health Assessment, Utah Department of Health, 2016–2020.
- ¹⁰ Utah Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Office of Public Health Assessment, Utah Department of Health, 2016–2019.
- ¹¹ In past three years. Utah Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Office of Public Health Assessment, Utah Department of Health, 2019 & 2020.
- ¹² Age adjusted. Utah Cancer Registry 2010–2019.
- ¹³ Utah Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Office of Public Health Assessment, Utah Department of Health, 2018–2020
- ¹⁴ Utah Cancer Registry 2012–2016. Age-adjusted incidence per 100,000 females.
- ¹⁵ Age-adjusted rate per 100,000 women. Utah Death Certificate Database, Office of Vital Records and Statistics, Utah Department of Health.
- ¹⁶ Utah Department of Health Office of Health Disparities, 2018–2019.
- ¹⁷ Utah Department of Health Office of Health Disparities, 2018–2019.
- ¹⁸ Utah Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Office of Public Health Assessment, Utah Department of Health, 2016–2020.
- ¹⁹ Birth rate per 1,000 Utah Residents. Utah Department of Health Office of Health Disparities, 2017–2019.
- ²⁰ Utah Birth Certificate Database, Office of Vital Records and Statistics, Utah Department of Health, 2018–2020.
- ²¹ Utah Birth Certificate Database, Office of Vital Records and Statistics, Utah Department of Health, 2020.
- ²² Utah Department of Health Office of Health Disparities, 2017–2019.
- ²³ Seven or more days out of the past 30 where mental health is not good. Utah Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Office of Public Health Assessment, Utah Department of Health, 2016–2020.
- ²⁴ Utah Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Office of Public Health Assessment, Utah Department of Health, 2016–2020.
- ²⁵ Utah Women & Leadership Project analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata.
- ²⁶ Utah Office for Victims of a Crime. (2022). *Office statistics received for claims received between 01/01/2019 and 12/31/21*.
- ²⁷ Utah Department of Corrections inmate population data for 2010–2021.
- ²⁸ Utah Women & Leadership Project analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata.
- ²⁹ Sawyer, K., & Valerio, A. M. (2018). Making the case for male champions for gender inclusiveness at work. *Organizational Dynamics*, 47(1), 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2017.06.002>
- ³⁰ Utah Women & Leadership Project analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata.
- ³¹ Utah System of Higher Education (2019). Issue brief: Utah's growing opportunity gap. https://ushe.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Utahs-Growing-Opportunity-Gap-Final_updated-template.pdf
- ³² UWLP analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata.
- ³³ US Department of Labor. (March 2022). *Bearing the cost: How overrepresentation in undervalued jobs disadvantaged women during the pandemic*. <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WB/media/BearingTheCostReport.pdf>
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- ³⁵ Hansen, J., Hartwell, C., & Madsen, S. R. (2021, April 6). *The impact of COVID-19 on Utah women and work: Changes, burnout, & hope*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/briefs/30-impact-of-covid-19-on-utah-women-work-changes-burnout-hope.pdf>
- ³⁶ Utah Women & Leadership Project analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata.
- ³⁷ Winkel, R., Darowski, E. S., Christensen, M., & Madsen, S. R. (2021, October 5). *Utah gender wage gap: A 2021 update*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/31.pdf>
- ³⁸ UWLP analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata; the gender wage gap data in the table is from Winkel et al. (2021).
- ³⁹ Utah Women & Leadership Project analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata.
- ⁴⁰ UWLP analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 5-Year American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata.
- ⁴¹ Women's Business Center of Utah. (2016–2017). Annual report. <https://wbcutah.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/WBC-Annual-Report-2017-Digital.pdf>
- ⁴² American Express. (2019). *The 2019 state of women-owned businesses report*, p. 4.
- ⁴³ Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute. (2021, May 6).

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