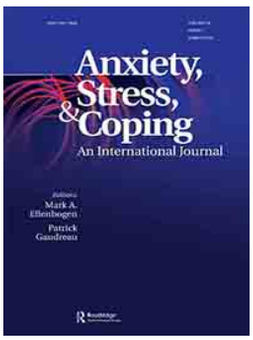

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When Times Get Tough: Savoring and Relationship Satisfaction in Couples Coping with a Stressful Life Event

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ABSTRACT

Background and Objectives: When couples face a stressful life event, this can adversely impact relationship satisfaction. Because savoring positive experiences is thought to enhance intimate relationships and there is evidence that savoring buffers the negative effects of stress at the intrapersonal level, this study examined savoring as an interpersonal resource for couples who experienced a stressful life event.

Methods: One hundred and twenty-eight opposite-sex couples completed measures of impact of event, savoring, positive affect, and relationship satisfaction.

Results: Results from actor-partner interdependence models found that: (1) For couple members who reported a relatively low impact of event, their own savoring was positively predicted by their partner's impact of event; (2) For women, their own savoring the moment predicted their own *and* their partner's greater relationship satisfaction; (3) The relationship between one's own impact of event and relationship satisfaction was buffered by one's partner's savoring the moment; and (4) The relationship between one's own savoring and relationship satisfaction was mediated by one's own positive affect.

Conclusions: The findings support the study of savoring as an interpersonal resource in times of stress and have implications for couples-based interventions.

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savoring; stressful life event; couples; relationship satisfaction; positive affect; actor-partner interdependence model

The notion of savoring positive experiences—that is, attending to, appreciating, and intensifying positive experiences (Bryant & Veroff, 2007)—is somewhat poetic, perhaps even romantic, and although it has been proposed that savoring can enhance romantic relationships (Bryant & Veroff, 2007) and be cultivated to boost positive emotions within couples therapy (Kauffman & Silberman, 2009), there is a dearth of empirical research to support this. Preliminary research on married individuals (i.e., not couples) found that savoring a positively perceived event in the couple relationship predicted relationship outcomes (Costa-Ramalho, Marques-Pinto, Ribeiro, & Pereira, 2015); but without research that examines data on savoring and relationship satisfaction from both people in a relationship, the dyadic and interpersonal nature of savoring remains unknown. Further, without studying savoring in couples facing a stressful life event, the full potential of savoring to not only enhance but also protect couples' relationship satisfaction will be missed.

Empirical support for the protective effects of savoring on psychological adjustment has increased in recent years (e.g., Ford, Klibert, Tarantino, & Lamis, 2017; Smith & Bryant, 2016), and because savoring is theorized to upregulate positive emotions and build resilience to stressful life events (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2007), savoring is likely to be critical for couple members' relationship satisfaction in the 'bad times'. Research has found that couple members' regulation of negative emotional experience

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following a stressful life event impacts their own *and* their partner's relationship satisfaction (Samios & Baran, 2018), and so it is likely that savoring (which regulates positive emotional experience) will do the same. Thus, this study examines savoring as an interpersonal resource for couples who have experienced a stressful life event, and as proposed by others (e.g., Costa-Ramalho et al., 2015; Donato & Parise, 2015), considers savoring a pro-relationship process.

Stressful Life Events and the Couple Relationship

Most people experience a life event they appraise as stressful in any given year and they do not experience that event in isolation; rather, they turn to people close to them, usually their spouse (Revenson, 1994). Intimate partners typically face a stressful life event with a sense of 'we-ness' and awareness of the relationship (Acitelli & Badr, 2005). As such, intimate partners interact as they share their emotions (social sharing of emotions theory: Rimé, 2009), appraise the stressor in terms of what it means for them and their family (family resilience and family stress theory: Patterson, 2002), and narrate and attempt to make sense of the event (communicated narrative sense-making theory: Koenig Kellas & Kranstuber Horstman, 2015). There are many examples of stressful life events that impact both members of a couple either directly or indirectly, including economic stress (Kinnunen & Feldt, 2004) and illness (Samios, Pakenham, & O'Brien, 2015). Such stressful life events can have negative implications for the couple members' relationship satisfaction (Randall & Bodenmann, 2009), and because relationship satisfaction is important for individuals' wellbeing (Proulx, Helms, & Buehler, 2007), it is important to study factors, such as savoring, that mitigate the negative effects of a stressful life event on relationship satisfaction.

In order to study such factors that might buffer the negative effects of a stressful life event on the couple relationship, the interpersonal dynamics of the intimate couple relationship must be acknowledged. Dyadic coping (Bodenmann, 2005) proposes that when couples face stress, there is an interaction between a partner's stress signals, how those signals are perceived by their partner, and how their partner reacts to those signals. A dyadic perspective on meaning making (e.g., Samios & Baran, 2018) holds that when couples face a stressful or traumatic life event (as opposed to everyday stress), that event becomes a shared stressor and, where necessary, couple members engage in meaning-making attempts to reduce the discrepancy between their global meanings (i.e., their beliefs, goals, and sense of purpose) and their situational appraisal of the stressor. From a dyadic perspective, meaning-making attempts, which might include or be facilitated by savoring, are thought to be made for the good of the relationship as well to reduce couple members' individual distress.

Such systemic approaches to couple stress and coping acknowledge the impact intimate partners have on each other, and in the case of opposite-sex couples, gender differences in how partners respond to stress are important to consider. For example, women are more relationally-oriented than men (Acitelli, 2002) and are more likely to support their partner adjust to the stressor and promote the wellbeing of the relationship. Using the actor-partner interdependence model (APIM: Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006) to predict relationship satisfaction from not only one's own emotion regulation (i.e., actor effect) but also from one's partner's emotion regulation (i.e., partner effect), research has found that greater downregulation of wives' negative emotional experience predicted greater marital satisfaction for both wives and husbands, where in contrast, the downregulation of husbands' negative emotional experience was unrelated to marital satisfaction for both wives and husbands (Bloch, Haase, & Levenson, 2014). Further, wives' positive dyadic coping predicted her own and her husbands' greater relationship satisfaction, whereas husbands' positive dyadic coping predicted only his own relationship satisfaction (Rusu, Bodenmann, & Kayser, 2019). These findings support the notion that the female partner's emotion regulation really matters for relationship satisfaction (Bloch et al., 2014), which might be because, among other reasons, women feel more responsible for regulating the emotional tone in the intimate relationship (Nolen-Hoeksema & Jackson, 2001).

Savoring and the Stress Process

Savoring is perhaps most frequently conceptualized as a form of positive emotion regulation, but it is also conceptualized as a form of coping (i.e., a way to alleviate the harmful effects of stress). In the opinion of Garnefski et al. (2001), all coping efforts can be defined as emotion regulation, and as such, we view savoring as both emotion regulation and coping. By definition, savoring refers to the ability to generate, intensify, and maintain positive emotions by attending to and appreciating positive experiences from the past (i.e., savoring through reminiscence), in the present (i.e., savoring the moment), and anticipated in the future (i.e., savoring through anticipation) (Bryant & Veroff, 2007). Savoring strategies can be cognitive and/or behavioral, including sharing with others (e.g., recounting a positive experience with a loved one) and memory building (e.g., storing images for future recollection), and it is one's natural or dispositional capacity to savor that is likely to be most beneficial in times of stress because natural savoring has been linked to wellbeing (Gentzler, Palmer, & Ramsey, 2016).

Although one can savor for the sole reason of enhancing a positive emotional experience (Bryant & Veroff, 2007), savoring has been conceptualized as giving positive meaning to 'ordinary' events (such as seeing a rainbow or receiving praise) in times of stress (Folkman, 2008). As such, savoring can be considered a form of meaning-focused coping (Folkman, 2008), which is a form of coping often neglected in dyadic stress research where the delineation of coping categories tends to be emotion- versus problem-focused coping (e.g., Herzberg, 2013). Although it has been proposed that savoring occurs best during reduced stress (Bryant & Veroff, 2007), a meaning-focused approach to savoring suggests that in times of stress, people will engage in, attend to, and remember positive experiences as a way of offsetting negative emotions attached to the stressful life event (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000). In particular, intrusive thoughts and other indicators of the impact of event can signal the need for cognitive processing and drive meaning making (Park, 2010), which could include savoring. The link between the impact of event and adjustment outcomes is often dependent on other variables (e.g., Park, Chmielewski, & Blank, 2010), and thus it appears reasonable to expect that in times of stress people who are more greatly impacted by the event will tap more into their dispositional savoring capacity and that this will be protective of their adjustment outcomes. The notion that people will savor more in times of stress (or perceive greater savoring) is supported by recent research that found people perceived used savoring strategies when they were experiencing critical events (e.g., Monteiro & Marques Pinto, 2017).

As theorized, savoring has been linked to positive affect in numerous studies (e.g., Kiken, Lundberg, & Fredrickson, 2017), which offers an explanation for the finding that savoring has a stress-buffering effect on psychological adjustment (e.g., Ford et al., 2017). Just as positive affect co-occurs with negative affect during times of stress, savoring co-occurs with coping strategies that regulate distress (Folkman, 2008). Savoring upregulates positive emotions, and it is possible these positive emotions provide a 'psychological break', which supports ongoing coping efforts and restores resources depleted by stress (Lazarus, Kanner, & Folkman, 1980). In addition, the broaden and build theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2001) posits that positive emotions, which are upregulated by savoring, are adaptive in the stress process because they broaden attentional focus and build personal resources, such as resources for maintaining and strengthening the couple relationship (Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008).

Savoring in Couples Coping with Stress

At present, it is unknown how savoring might operate in couples who have experienced a stressful life event. Couples research on gratitude (a unique savoring response that involves positive appreciative attention: Lyubomirsky, 2011) found that the man's gratitude was related to lower depressive symptoms for the woman (Chang, Li, Teng, Berki, & Chen, 2013). Also, research on long-term committed couples coping with breast cancer showed that capitalization (i.e., the process of disclosing

a positive event to someone: Langston, 1994) enhances relationship wellbeing above and beyond the effects of event positivity and social support attempts (Otto, Laurenceau, Siegel, & Belcher, 2015). This research on capitalization indicates that capitalization is important in its own right in the couple stress process and supports the examination of savoring as a resource for couples facing stress. Research on savoring, in particular, in couples is needed because although savoring has similarities to gratitude and capitalization, gratitude has a more specific appreciative focus than savoring, and although capitalization might include savoring, there are many types of savoring that do not include disclosing a positive event to another person.

In couples who have experienced a stressful life event, savoring might operate similar to positive reappraisal (see Samios & Baran, 2018) because it is also a form of meaning-focused coping; but positive reappraisal is of the stressor or what the stressor means, where in contrast, savoring is about assigning positive meaning to even ordinary events and experiences, intensifying and prolonging that positive meaning and emotional experience. For example, in spite of distress felt in the aftermath of the death of a parent, one might savor in the moment a conversation with family members at the wake, savor a past event shared with the deceased parent, savor the anticipated future occasion of dedicating an achievement to the deceased parent, and savor the sight of sunrise over the ocean. In a couples context, savoring could be used by one or both partners to change the meaning of the stressor to something more favorable or to reconsider their beliefs, revise goals, and reinstate their sense of purpose, and by doing so, help rebuild meanings for them and/or their partner (consistent with a dyadic approach to meaning making: Samios & Baran, 2018).

The present study examines data from 128 couples to test hypotheses about how savoring operates at the couple level in times of stress. First, it was hypothesized there will be both actor and partner effects of the psychological impact of event on savoring. Although it is plausible the direction of the actor effect could be negative or positive, consistent with meaning-making theory, we proposed that greater actor impact of event would predict greater actor savoring. Because we hold that savoring is a pro-relationship process, the partner effect was predicted to be positive in direction, such that one's partner's higher scores on the impact of event will predict one's higher scores on savoring. Second, it was hypothesized there will be positive actor and partner effects of savoring on relationship satisfaction and that the partner effect will be stronger going from the woman to the man. Third, it was hypothesized that savoring will buffer the actor and partner effects of the impact of event on poorer relationship satisfaction. Finally, it was hypothesized that positive affect will mediate the relationship between savoring and relationship satisfaction at the intra- and interpersonal levels.

Method

Participants and Recruitment

Data from 128 Australian opposite-sex couples who experienced a stressful life event in the past year were analyzed for this study. Participants were recruited from the university community through the psychology research noticeboard and convenience snowball sampling at the university, workplaces, and social networks. From the original data set ($N = 135$ couples), the data of 7 couples were excluded from the analyses because the couple members either did not specify their stressful life event ($n = 5$ couples) or wrote there was nothing they had been stressed about in the past year ($n = 2$ couples). The couples in the study had been in their relationship for an average of 6.68 years ($SD = 8.56$ years; range 4 months to 47 years) and over half of couples were classed as 'adult' couples (58.6%)—as opposed to 'emerging adult' couples—because at least one member of the couple was aged over 25. Most couples were in a committed non-domestic relationship (54.7%); the remaining couples were in a de facto (10.9%), engaged (8.6%), or marital (25.8%) relationship. The men were 30.29 years of age on average ($SD = 10.88$; range = 19–74) and the women were 28.81 years of age on average ($SD = 9.91$; range = 18–64). The sample included participants of various ancestries, including

Northwest European (men: 43.8%; women: 44.7%) Asian (men: 26.4%; women: 26.8%); and Southern/Eastern European (men: 13.2%; women: 10.6%). Half of the men (50.4%) and over half of the women (57.9%) had completed tertiary education and most of the men (59.2%) and 40.5% of women were employed full time or were self-employed.

Measures

Impact of the Stressful Life Event

Couples were asked to identify the most stressful life event they experienced as a couple in the past year before independently rating the stressful life event from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*) with regards to the perceived stress at the time of the event. In addition, couple members completed the 22-item Impact of Event Scale Revised (Weiss & Marmar, 1997), which measures the degree of distress experienced in the past 7 days with regard to traumatic stress symptoms associated with a particular life event. Eight items measure a person's experience of intrusion (e.g., "Any reminder brought back feeling about it"), eight items measure their experience of avoidance (e.g., "I felt as if it hadn't happened or wasn't real"), and the remaining six items measure their experience of hyperarousal (e.g., "I felt irritable and angry"). All items are rated from 0 (*not at all*) to 4 (*extremely*) and the mean score for all items (overall impact of event) was used in addition to mean scores for each of the subscales. An overall score was used in multivariable analyses because exploratory factor analysis has supported a single-factor solution (Creamer, Bell, & Failla, 2003). The Impact of Event Scale Revised has evidenced adequate construct validity and the lack of social desirability effects (Beck et al., 2008). Observed Cronbach's alphas for the overall impact of event were .96 and .95 for men and women, respectively. The observed Cronbach's alphas for the subscales were also adequate (intrusion: .93 men, .91 women; avoidance: .91 men, .89 women; hyperarousal: .88 men, .83 women).

Savoring Capacity

The 24-item Savoring Beliefs Inventory (Bryant, 2003) was used to assess participants' appraisal of their capacity to savor through reminiscence (e.g., "I enjoy looking back from happy times from my past"), savor the moment (e.g., "I know how to make the most of a good time"), and savor through anticipation (e.g., "I can enjoy pleasant events in my mind before they actually occur"). Each subscale consists of 8 items and each item is rated from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Each subscale was formed by reverse scoring negatively worded items and then calculating the average. An overall (or total) savoring score was also calculated in the same way. The Savoring Beliefs Inventory has been used to measure savoring capacity in previous research (e.g., Ford et al., 2017; Kiken et al., 2017) and has been related to savoring strategies (Beaumont, 2011). The Savoring Beliefs Inventory has evidenced good reliability and construct validity (Bryant, 2003). Observed Cronbach's alphas were .86, .83, and .84 for men and .86, .81, and .86 for women for savoring through reminiscence, savoring the moment, and savoring in anticipation, respectively. Observed Cronbach's alpha for overall savoring was .94 for men and women.

Positive Affect

Positive affect was measured using a total score of ratings on the five positive affect items from the Bradburn Affect Balance Scale (Bradburn, 1969). Participants rate the extent to which they have felt each of the five positive states (e.g., "particularly excited or interested in something") during the past few weeks from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very often*). Confirmatory factor analyses provide support for the positive affect items to be used independently of the negative affect items (Helmes, Goffin, & Chrisjohn, 2010) and internal consistency for the positive affect items has been adequate in previous research (e.g., Helmes et al., 2010). Observed Cronbach's alpha for both men and women was .92.

Relationship Satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction was measured by the 7-item Abbreviated Spanier Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Sharpley & Rogers, 1984). This abbreviated form of the Spanier Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976) consists of: three items that measure philosophy of life from 0 (*always disagree*) to 5 (*always agree*); three items that measure time spent together from 0 (*never*) to 5 (*more often*); and one item that measures global perception of happiness in the relationship from 0 (*extremely unhappy*) to 6 (*perfect*). Participant ratings for the 7 items were summed. The 7 items of the abbreviated scale can discriminate between people who are high and people who are low on dyadic adjustment (Sharpley & Cross, 1982) and the abbreviated scale correlates strongly with other relationship adjustment and satisfaction scales (Funk & Rogge, 2007). Observed Cronbach's alpha was .81 for men and .77 for women.

Procedure

The human research ethics committee of the authors' institution approved the present cross-sectional study. All prospective participants were provided with a study explanatory statement before they volunteered to participate. Both online ($n = 36$ couples, 28.1%) and hardcopy surveys were completed, the latter of which were returned to the researchers in reply-paid envelopes where a code was used to pair couple member surveys so couple members could send their survey back independently from their partner. Students who participated in the study (approximately 13%) received course credit for their participation.

Analytic Strategy

Following preliminary analyses, an APIM (Kenny et al., 2006) was performed to test actor and partner effects of the impact of event on savoring, which was then followed by three APIMs, each testing the actor and partner effects of a temporal orientation of savoring on relationship satisfaction. These APIMs all included moderation (thus, each is an APIMoM) and were performed with multilevel modelling from the pairwise data set using Mixed Models in SPSS Version 24. Multilevel modelling can be used to test moderation in APIMs (Garcia, Kenny, & Ledermann, 2015) and is preferable to structural equation modelling when there are a large number of variables and equality constraints would be needed (Ledermann & Kenny, 2017). Finally, to examine if savoring 'works through' positive affect at the dyadic level to impact relationship satisfaction, an actor-partner interdependence mediation model (APIMeM: Ledermann, Macho, & Kenny, 2011) was performed with the dyad data set using structural equation modelling in Amos Version 24. Structural equation modelling is superior to multilevel modelling for performing dyadic mediation analyses (Ledermann & Kenny, 2017). A missing value analysis revealed there was less than 5% missing data and data were missing completely at random. Because dyad is the unit of analysis, and in the same vein that grand-mean (rather than group-mean) centering is recommended for dyadic data analyses (Kashy & Donnellan, 2012), grand means were computed across genders for relevant items and then imputed to manage missing data.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

From 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*), couple members each provided their retrospective stress ratings for the most stressful event they experienced as a couple in the past 12 months. Participant ratings ranged from 1 (0.8%) to 7 (31.6%) with a mean of 5.40 ($SD = 1.48$). (Note that for the two participants who reported that they experienced no stress at all, their partner experienced stress rated greater than 'not at all'). The categories of stressful life event couples reported sharing were: intimate

relationship stressor (31.3%); death or loss (13.3%); injury, illness, or accident (12.5%); financial problems and/or unemployment (10.9%); couple life event (9.4%); family problems (7.0%), study or work problems (7.0%); travel or relocation (4.7%); contact with crime/violence (3.1%); and natural disaster (0.8%).

Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations between study variables for men and women are presented in Table 1. As it can be seen on the diagonal, all intercorrelations between couple members' scores on study variables were significant and positive, such that partners' scores on all study variables are related. Paired samples *t*-tests found that men's and women's scores on study variables were significantly different for savoring through reminiscence and overall savoring, such that women scored higher than men on savoring through reminiscence ($t(127) = 2.14$, $p = .035$) and overall savoring ($t(127) = 2.11$, $p = .037$).

APIM Predicting Savoring from Impact of Event

An APIM (Kenny et al., 2006) was performed to test the actor and partner effects of the overall impact of event on overall savoring. This APIM also examined the interaction between actor and partner effects of impact of event (i.e., actor impact of event × partner impact of event), age of the couple (coded −1 *emerging adult*, 1 *adult*), actor gender (coded −1 *female*, 1 *male*), and interaction terms of actor and partner effects with gender (i.e., actor impact of event × gender, partner impact of event × gender). The age of the couple was entered into the initial APIM tested because age of the couple related negatively to overall savoring ($r_{pb} = -.22$, $p < .001$), but because it did not predict savoring and did not alter the substantive interpretation of the model, it was dropped from the final model (which was estimated using REML). We note that APIMs were also performed predicting each temporal orientation of savoring; however, there was the same pattern of findings for each temporal orientation of savoring, and so reporting on overall savoring adequately conveys the links between the impact of event and savoring in an APIM. Because a chi-square difference test revealed there was no difference between the model that included gender and gender interactions and the model that did not (χ^2 (4) = 6.90, $p = .141$), the dyads were treated as indistinguishable and the model reported does not include gender.

Pseudo R^2 indicated the model accounted for 9.9% of the variance in overall savoring. Although the actor effect of the impact of event on overall savoring was not significant ($B = 0.04$, $SE = 0.14$, $p = .757$), the partner effect was ($B = 0.38$, $SE = 0.14$, $p = .006$). This partner effect was positive, indicating that one's own higher scores on savoring are predicted by their partner's higher scores on the impact of event. Further, the interaction of actor and partner impact of event predicted overall savoring ($B = -0.22$, $SE = 0.09$, $p = .018$). This interaction, which is plotted in Figure 1, was probed and it was found that for relatively low levels (i.e., 1 *SD* below the mean) of actor impact of event the relationship between partner impact of event and actor overall savoring was positive and significant ($B = 0.35$, $SE = 0.12$, $p = .006$) and for relatively high levels (i.e., 1 *SD* above the mean) of actor impact of event, the relationship between partner impact of event and overall actor savoring was nonsignificant ($B = -0.05$, $SE = 0.10$, $p = .579$).

APIMs Predicting Relationship Satisfaction

Three APIMs were conducted to test the actor and partner effects of each temporal orientation of savoring on relationship satisfaction, in addition to whether the actor and partner effects of the impact of event on relationship satisfaction are moderated by each temporal orientation of savoring. The temporal orientations of savoring were tested in separate models because they were strongly intercorrelated (average *r* for men = .83 and for women = .82). Each model examined actor and partner effects of impact of event, actor and partner effects of savoring, interactions between actor effects of impact of event and savoring (i.e., actor impact of event × actor savoring, actor impact of event × partner savoring), interactions between partner effects of impact of event and

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for study variables.

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	*M*	*SD*
1. Intrusion	**.51*****	.81***	.81***	.95***	.05	−.15	−.08	−.06	−.27**	−.18*	1.14	1.05
2. Avoidance	.82***	**.44*****	.78***	.93***	−.04	−.20*	−.13	−.13	−.27**	−.15	1.03	0.98
3. Hyperarousal	.80***	.70***	**.41*****	.91***	−.08	−.30**	−.22*	−.21*	−.33***	−.21*	0.86	0.94
4. Overall impact of event	.96***	.92***	.88***	**.49*****	−.02	−.22*	−.14	−.13	−.30**	−.19*	1.02	0.93
5. Savoring through reminiscence	−.05	−.13	−.22*	−.13	**.73*****	.82***	.84***	.95***	.52***	.29***	4.45	1.27
6. Savoring the moment	−.07	−.16	−.28**	−.17	.84***	**.52*****	.83***	.94***	.52***	.30**	4.49	1.13
7. Savoring through anticipation	−.11	−.15	−.28**	−.18*	.85***	.78***	**.56*****	.94***	.52***	.27**	4.40	1.15
8. Overall savoring	−.08	−.16	−.27**	−.17	.96***	.92***	.94***	**.65*****	.55***	.31***	4.45	1.11
9. Positive affect	−.20*	−.23**	−.34***	−.26**	.62***	.54***	.62***	.63***	**.45*****	.44***	15.77	4.68
10. Relationship satisfaction	−.17	−.26**	−.29**	−.25**	.23**	.37***	.27**	.31***	.42***	**.62*****	24.95	5.21
M	1.22	1.06	0.89	1.07	4.62	4.65	4.59	4.63	16.45	24.80		
SD	1.03	0.94	0.88	0.89	1.26	1.09	1.23	1.12	4.53	4.97		

Notes: Male ($n = 128$) statistics are above the diagonal; female ($n = 128$) statistics are below the diagonal. Intercorrelations between couple members are presented in bold on the diagonal.
*$p < .05$.
**$p < .01$.
***$p < .001$.

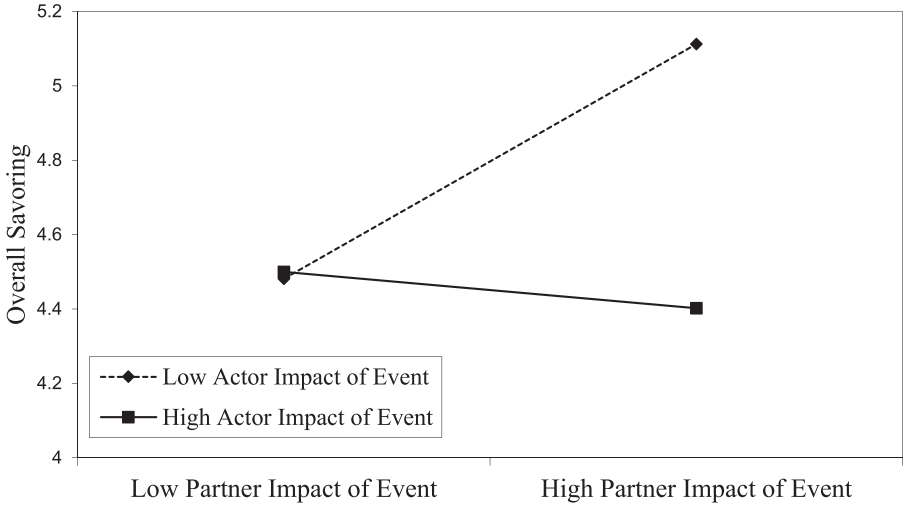

Figure 1. The relationship between partner impact of event and overall savoring is moderated by the actor effect of the impact of event. Depicted are slopes for 1 *SD* above and 1 *SD* below the mean for the actor impact of the event.

savoring (i.e., partner impact of event × actor savoring, partner impact of event × partner savoring), the interaction between the actor and partner effect of impact of event (i.e., actor impact of event × partner impact of event), the interaction between the actor and partner effect of savoring (i.e., actor savoring × partner savoring), age of couple (coded −1 *emerging adult*, 1 *adult*), gender (coded −1 *female*, 1 *male*), and interactions of actor and partner effects with gender (i.e., actor impact of event × gender, partner impact of event × gender, actor savoring × gender, partner savoring × gender). Age of couple was entered in the APIMs because it related to savoring; adult couples had lower scores on savoring through reminiscence ($r_{pb} = -.20$, $p = .002$), savoring the moment ($r_{pb} = -.22$, $p = .001$) and savoring through anticipation ($r_{pb} = -.22$, $p = .001$).

Chi-square difference tests found that the model that treated dyad members as distinguishable based on gender was not significantly different to one that treated the dyad members as indistinguishable when the models included savoring through reminiscence (χ^2 (6) = 3.66, $p = .723$) or savoring in anticipation (χ^2 (6) = 5.20, $p = .518$) as the predictor. When savoring the moment was the predictor examined, the model was significantly better when it included gender and gender interactions (χ^2 (6) = 14.01, $p = .030$). Thus, the models reported for savoring through reminiscence and savoring through anticipation as predictors were analyzed as indistinguishable and the model with savoring the moment as the predictor was analyzed as distinguishable. We re-ran the models after trimming the interactions of actor impact of event × partner impact of event and actor savoring × partner savoring because they were not significant for any of the models. We also re-ran the models without couple age because this covariate was a nonsignificant predictor of relationship satisfaction and its removal did not alter the substantive interpretation of the findings. The final APIMs were estimated using REML and are summarized in Table 2.

In all three models, there was a significant actor effect of the impact of event (but no significant partner effect of the impact of event) on relationship satisfaction; one's own impact of event predicted their own poorer relationship satisfaction. In the model that examined savoring through reminiscence as the indicator of savoring (Model 1), neither the actor nor partner effect of savoring through reminiscence was significant; further, there were no significant interaction terms.

In the model that examined savoring the moment (Model 2), a significant actor effect of savoring the moment was found on relationship satisfaction (though no partner effect was found). Specifically, one's own savoring the moment predicted one's own greater relationship satisfaction. The actor effect of savoring the moment was moderated by gender as was the partner effect of savoring

Table 2. APIMs estimating actor and partner effects of savoring through reminiscence (Model 1), savoring the moment (Model 2), and savoring through anticipation (Model 3) on relationship satisfaction.

	Relationship satisfaction							
Model 1[a]	*B*	*SE*	Model 2[b]	*B*	*SE*	Model 3[a]	*B*	*SE*
Intercept	23.86	2.25	Intercept	22.10	2.51	Intercept	24.72	2.59
			Gender[c]	−1.36	0.90			
IES-R			IES-R			IES-R		
Actor	−3.06*	1.28	Actor	−5.90***	1.29	Actor	−4.67***	1.19
Partner	−0.61	1.28	Partner	1.22	1.29	Partner	0.36	1.19
Savoring			Savoring			Savoring		
Actor REM	0.78	0.50	Actor MOM	1.44**	0.51	Actor ANT	0.29	0.42
Partner REM	−0.18	0.50	Partner MOM	−0.55	0.51	Partner ANT	0.05	0.42
Interactions								
Actor IES-R*actor REM	0.25	0.34	Actor IES-R*actor MOM	0.36	0.27	Actor IES-R*actor ANT	0.76*	0.29
Actor IES-R*partner REM	0.29	0.34	Actor IES-R*partner MOM	0.88**	0.30	Actor IES-R*partner ANT	0.23	0.30
Partner IES-R*actor REM	−0.11	0.34	Partner IES-R*actor MOM	−0.42	0.30	Partner IES-R*actor ANT	−0.36	0.30
Partner IES-R*partner REM	0.02	0.34	Partner IES-R*partner MOM	−0.08	0.27	Partner IES-R*partner ANT	0.07	0.29
			Actor MOM*gender	−0.69*	0.34			
			Partner MOM*gender	1.03**	0.34			
−2 Restricted log likelihood = 1470.63			−2 Restricted log likelihood = 1442.25			−2 Restricted log likelihood = 1461.56		

Notes: *B* = unstandardized coefficient; *SE* = standard error. IES-R = Impact of Event Scale Revised total score (overall impact of the event); REM = savoring through reminiscence; MOM = savoring the moment; ANT = savoring through anticipation; Actor = actor effect; Partner = partner effect. Pseudo R^2 Model 1 = .02; Pseudo R^2 Model 2 = .21 for women and .26 for men; Pseudo R^2 Model 3 = .08.

[a]Models analyzed as indistinguishable.

[b]Model analyzed as distinguishable.

[c]Gender coded -1 (*female*), 1 (*male*).

*$p < .05$.

**$p < .01$.

***$p < .001$.

the moment. To estimate simple slopes separately for men and women, a two-intercept model was tested (Kashy & Donnellan, 2012). The results of this model found that the actor effect of savoring the moment is positive and significant for women ($B = 1.81$, $SE = 0.44$, $p < .001$) but nonsignificant for men ($B = 0.54$, $SE = 0.44$, $p = .216$). Regarding the partner effect of savoring the moment, this relationship was significant and positive going from the woman to the man ($B = 1.68$, $SE = 0.45$, $p < .001$) and nonsignificant going from the man to the woman ($B = -0.21$, $SE = 0.43$, $p = .615$). The actor effect of the impact of event was moderated by partner savoring the moment. As it can be seen in the first interaction in Figure 2, the slope for low (i.e., 1 *SD* below the mean) partner savoring the moment is negative and significant ($B = -2.85$, $SE = 1.10$, $p = .010$) and the slope for high (i.e., 1 *SD* below the mean) partner savoring the moment is also negative but nonsignificant ($B = -0.89$, $SE = 1.42$, $p = .532$).

Regarding Model 3, which examined savoring through anticipation, the actor effect of the impact of event was moderated by actor savoring through anticipation. As displayed in the second interaction in Figure 2, both the slope for low actor savoring through anticipation ($B = -2.16$, $SE = 1.25$, $p = .087$) and high actor savoring through anticipation ($B = -0.35$, $SE = 1.69$, $p = .839$) are negative though nonsignificant.

Mediation Analyses

An APIMeM (Ledermann et al., 2011) tested a dyadic mediation model where overall savoring is the predictor variable, positive affect is the mediator, and relationship satisfaction is the outcome variable (refer to Figure 3). An APIMeM is an extension of the APIM to the case of mediation, and as can be seen in Figure 3, there are 2 actor and 2 partner effects between overall savoring and positive affect (*a*

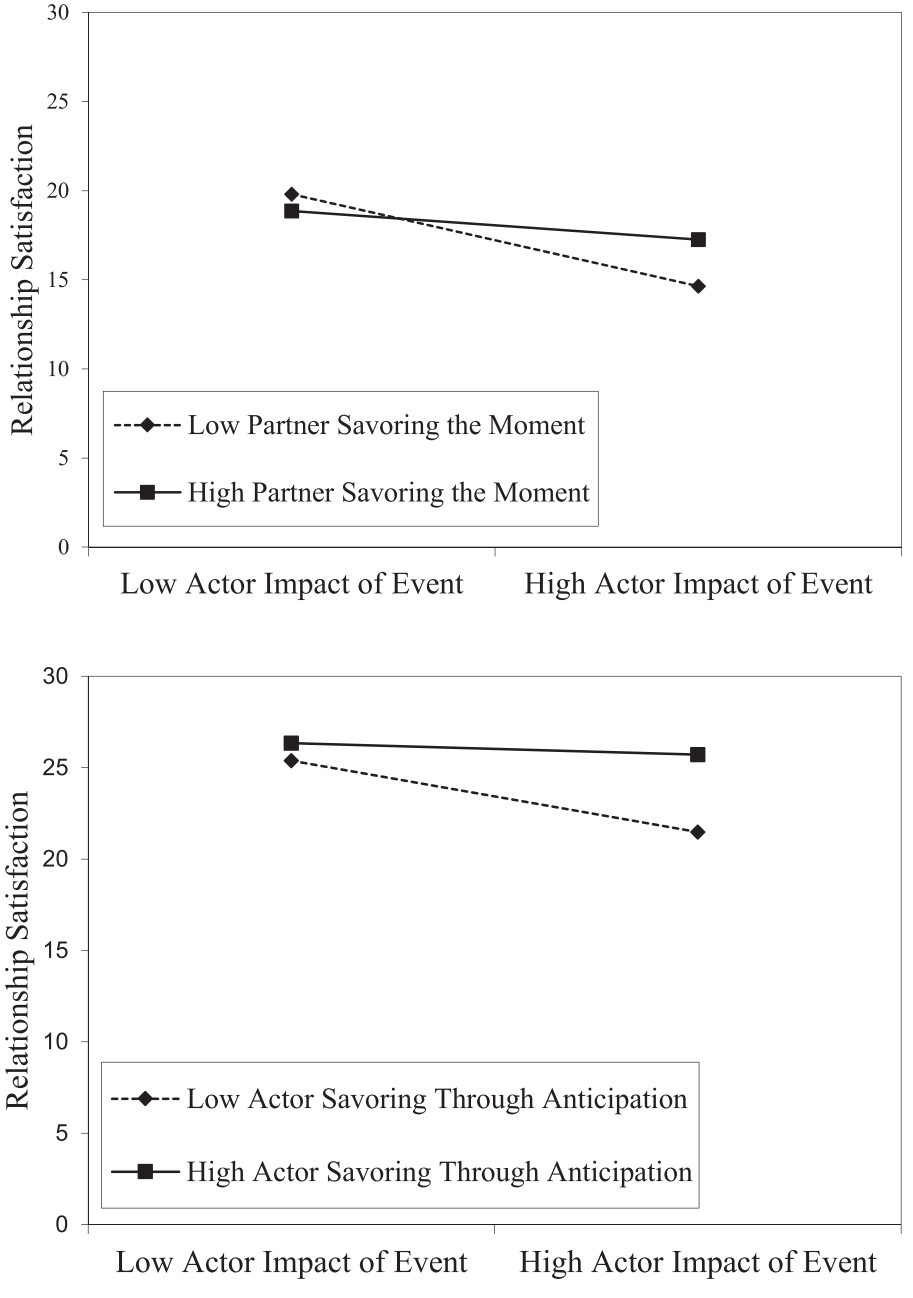

Figure 2. The relationship between actor impact of event and relationship satisfaction is moderated by partner savoring the moment and actor savoring through anticipation. Depicted are slopes for 1 *SD* above and 1 *SD* below the mean for the moderator.

effects), 2 actor and 2 partner effects between positive affect and relationship satisfaction (*b* effects), and 2 actor and 2 partner effects between overall savoring and relationship satisfaction (*c*′ effects). Of the 2 actor effects for each part of the model, 1 is for the man and 1 is for the woman, and regarding the 2 partner effects for each part of the model, 1 goes from the male to the female (called female partner effects) and 1 goes from the female to the male (called male partner effects). In this model, there are 8 indirect effects tested, which include actor-actor for both partners ($a_{AF}b_{AF}$ for the female and $a_{AM}b_{AM}$ for the male), partner-partner for both partners ($a_{PM}b_{PF}$ for the female and $a_{PF}b_{PM}$ for the

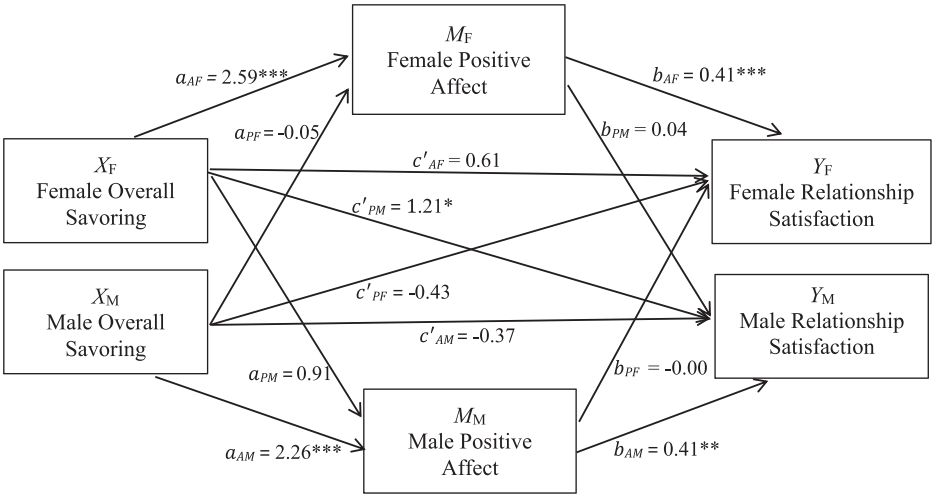

Figure 3. Unstandardized estimates for the actor-partner interdependence mediation model predicting relationship satisfaction. *X* denotes the predictor (initial) variable; *M* denotes the mediator; and *Y* denotes the outcome. Traditional mediation paths are represented by *a*, *b* and *c*′, where *a* by *b* is the indirect effect and *c*′ is the direct effect. The subscript *A* denotes actor affect; *P* denotes partner effect. The subscript *F* refers to female and *M* refers to male. Scores on model variables for the partners are related; Error terms for the partners are also related.

male), actor-partner for both partners ($a_{AM}b_{PF}$ for the female and $a_{AF}b_{PM}$ for the male) and partner-actor for both partners ($a_{PF}b_{AF}$ for the female and $a_{PM}b_{AM}$ for the male). The male and female direct effects in the model were constrained together in Amos ($a_{AF} = a_{AM}$, $a_{PF} = a_{PM}$, $b_{AF} = b_{AM}$, $b_{PF} = b_{PM}$, $c'_{AF} = c'_{AM}$, $c'_{PF} = c'_{PM}$), and by incorporating the constraints together, the model fit was adequate (χ^2 (6) = 8.20, p = .224). Thus, the male and female direct effects were constrained together for a more parsimonious model, to have greater power, and avoid the risk of over-interpreting gender differences.

As displayed in Figure 3, paths *a* and *b* were significant for the actor effects only, such that one's own savoring predicts one's own greater positive affect and one's own positive affect predicts one's own greater relationship satisfaction. Path *c*′ was significant only for the male partner effect, indicating a direct effect between the female's overall savoring and her partner's greater relationship satisfaction. Bias-corrected confidence intervals were calculated based on 5000 bootstrapped samples using phantom models as outlined in Ledermann et al. (2011). Of the 8 simple indirect effects tested, only the actor-actor effects were significant, such that for both men and women their own savoring works through their own positive affect to influence their own relationship satisfaction (see Table 3).

Table 3. Unstandardized simple indirect effect estimates for the APIMeM.

	B	*SE of B*	*95% CI LL, UL*
Female actor-actor ($X_F \rightarrow M_F \rightarrow Y_F$) = $a_{AF}b_{AF}$	1.05***	0.32	0.50, 1.77
Male actor-actor ($X_M \rightarrow M_M \rightarrow Y_M$) = $a_{AM}b_{AM}$	0.93***	0.28	0.45, 1.62
Female partner-partner ($X_F \rightarrow M_M \rightarrow Y_F$) = $a_{PM}b_{PF}$	0.00	0.04	−0.09, 0.08
Male partner-partner ($X_M \rightarrow M_F \rightarrow Y_M$) = $a_{PF}b_{PM}$	−0.00	0.04	−0.12, 0.07
Female actor-partner ($X_M \rightarrow M_M \rightarrow Y_F$) = $a_{AM}b_{PF}$	−0.00	0.23	−0.51, 0.41
Male actor-partner ($X_F \rightarrow M_F \rightarrow Y_M$) = $a_{AF}b_{PM}$	0.10	0.33	−0.53, 0.77
Female partner-actor ($X_M \rightarrow M_F \rightarrow Y_F$) = $a_{PF}b_{AF}$	−0.02	0.13	−0.28, 0.22
Male partner-actor ($X_F \rightarrow M_M \rightarrow Y_M$) = $a_{PM}b_{AM}$	0.04	0.16	−0.28, 0.34

Notes: *X* = the initial variable (overall savoring); *M* = the mediating variable (positive affect); *Y* = the outcome variable (relationship satisfaction). The subscript *A* = actor effect; *P* = partner effect. The subscript *F* = female and *M* = male.
*p < .05.
**p < .01
***p < .001.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore savoring in couples who have experienced a stressful life event, which positioned savoring within the stress and coping literature and also within a systemic, dyadic context. All study variables were positively related for couple members, which not only highlights the nonindependence in data for people in an intimate relationship, but also shows that a stressor's impact on one couple member relates to that for the other couple member. The strong intercorrelations found between couple members' scores on the three temporal orientations of savoring might be due to couple members influencing each other's capacity for savoring, perhaps through savoring strategies that are social in nature (e.g., sharing with others: Bryant & Veroff, 2007) or by verbalizing their savoring process to their partner in real time as a form of 'communicated savoring'.

Although couple members' scores on study variables were related, women scored significantly higher than men on savoring through reminiscence and overall savoring. Women typically believe they are more capable of savoring, which might be because in response to a positive event, women share their positive feelings with others and outwardly express their feelings in nonverbal behavior more than men do (Bryant & Veroff, 2007). Women in this couple sample possibly reported greater capacity to savor through reminiscence because women are viewed as more responsible for emotion regulation in opposite-sex relationships (Nolen-Hoeksema & Jackson, 2001), and so perhaps women use savoring through reminiscence to gain new perspective and self-insight into current issues (Bryant, Smart, & King, 2005) for them self, their partner and the relationship.

Contrary to prediction, the actor effect of the impact of event on savoring was nonsignificant. It might be that the impact of the event does not hinder one's habitual savoring response even if one's state savoring (i.e., savouring as a transitory savouring response to a specific positive event: Jose, Lim, & Bryant, 2012) is 'disabled' at the peak of distress; but the negative bivariate correlations found between different impact of event measures and different temporal orientations of savoring at the individual level suggest that the nonsignificant actor effect is due to the nature of the dyadic sample, where a 'we', or collective approach to stress is taken. In support of our hypothesis and the notion of savoring as a pro-relationship process, there was a significant partner effect of the impact of event on savoring, which indicated that one perceives their savoring capacity to be greater when their partner has been impacted more by the stressor. This could also be evidence of adaptive complementary coping (Revenson, Abraído-Lanza, Majerovitz, & Jordan, 2005), whereby one partner is engaging in a meaning-making process that involves intrusive thoughts while the other is engaging in a meaning-making process (i.e., savoring) that gives them a 'break', restores positive emotions and assists them to find meaning in the stressful life event together.

We also tested an interaction between actor and partner impact of event in the prediction of savoring and this shed some light on the partner effect of the impact of event on savoring: it is only significant when the actor impact of event is low. This might suggest that when one partner is less impacted by the stressor, they have the capacity to savor and they do so to a degree that is commensurate with their partner's distress. This finding might also be explained by considering that one might perceive their savoring ability to be greater when they perceive their partner to be more distressed. Because the perception of a relative decrease in stress appears to enhance one's experience of savoring (Bryant & Veroff, 2007), it is possible that when one perceives their own impact of event (their stress) to be relatively low compared to that of their partner, their own savoring of positive events is experienced as increasingly intense as their partner appears more distressed.

We hypothesized there would be actor and partner effects of savoring on relationship satisfaction; however, there was only one significant actor effect and no significant partner effects. The significant actor effect for savoring the moment showed that one's greater savoring the moment predicted one's own greater relationship satisfaction. Savoring the moment likely offsets negative affective consequences of a stressful life event (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000), enabling people to enhance their own enjoyment of positive experiences in couple life, which is necessary for relationship success (Bryant & Veroff, 2007; Gottman & Notarius, 2000). As the study is cross-sectional, it is also possible

that couple members with greater relationship satisfaction are better able to savor in times of stress. Gender differences for the partner effect of savoring on relationship satisfaction were hypothesized and we found that gender interacted with not only the partner effect of savoring the moment but also the actor effect of savoring the moment. As expected, the woman's savoring the moment predicted her own and her partner's better relationship satisfaction. This supports research and theory that purports it is the woman's adaptive coping in times of stress that is most important for her and her partner (Bloch et al., 2014; Rusu et al., 2019).

As hypothesized, savoring buffered the negative effects of the impact of event on relationship satisfaction, but this was only for the partner's savoring the moment and the actor's savoring through anticipation. Of note, when one's partner's savoring the moment is relatively high there is no relationship between one's impact of event and relationship satisfaction, which suggests that savoring is a pro-relationship process that couple members engage in to protect the relationship from their partner's distress. This also supports a dyadic approach to meaning making in the aftermath of a stressful life event (e.g., Samios & Baran, 2018) in addition to other systemic approaches to stress (e.g., Patterson, 2002).

In terms of the mechanism through which savoring exerts its influence on relationship satisfaction, positive affect was found to be a mediator as predicted; however, mediation was only found at the intrapersonal level (and not the interpersonal level), such that one's savoring predicts their own greater positive affect, which in turn predicts their own greater relationship satisfaction. This indicates that positive affect is an intrapsychic mediator between savoring and relationship satisfaction (although of course the reverse order is possible that those who are more satisfied in their relationship have a greater positive affect and are in turn more likely to savor).

This study's strengths lie in the dyadic conceptualization of savoring as a pro-relationship process and protective resource for relationship satisfaction in times of stress, which 'works through' positive affect. Study limitations include: the moderate dyadic sample size, which limits power; the cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to infer the direction of relationships, especially with regard to mediation; the non-random sampling of couples, which limits the generalizability of the findings; and the reliance on self-report measures. Future longitudinal research on savoring in times of stress for a range of dyads (including same-sex couples) would further knowledge of the interpersonal effects of savoring. Such research should consider the role of one's perceptions of their partner's savoring capacity as well as factors that might explain gender differences, such as primary carer responsibilities in the home. We need to further our understanding of savoring in the face of stress in general, refining how we measure and conceptualize savoring as a meaning-focused coping response; nevertheless, the findings of the present study indicate that savoring is important for the couple relationship in times of stress and that couples therapists should consider the possibility that a couple member, especially a woman, is savoring for two (i.e., for herself and her partner).

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