

# **TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF GENDER DIFFERENCES WITH RESPECT TO WHITEWATER RAFTING PREFERENCES**

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**Abstract:** Previous literature suggests that there are an increasing number of females participating in outdoor recreation. However, the majority of outdoor programs are still designed under a male dominated paradigm. Few authors have dedicated attention to the special needs of female participants. Furthermore, very little if any attention has been given to the needs of females who assume leadership roles in the community or family and who are responsible for planning and organizing group trips to the outdoors. This lack of attention is contrary to the importance that this market can have for a commercial outdoor recreation outfitter. It is therefore important to determine what type of outdoor experiences interest this market as well as to determine their preferences and the way they establish relationships with their outdoor recreation providers. As both genders are involved in planning outdoor experiences, it is necessary to gain further insight into the differences that exist to enable marketers to create more accurate strategies for attracting clients.

The purpose of this study was to examine whether there were gender differences among individuals who take groups rafting (group leaders) with respect to the characteristics of the individual, the characteristics of the group, the type of activity sought and they type of relationships they establish with the outdoor recreation provider. The sample consisted of 279 randomly selected individuals (48% females and 52% males) who had purchased a rafting trip for eight or more people from a rafting outfitter in the Southeastern region of the United States. The data were collected with a mail survey. A 48% response rate was achieved and subsequent analysis revealed that there was no threat of non-response bias.

The analysis revealed that female group leaders were significantly more likely to take groups rafting on less challenging rivers. Females were significantly more likely to take family members and friends rafting, whereas males were the predominant leaders in church groups. There were no significant differences with respect to the trip purpose.

As for the type of customer/provider relationships established, males reported to receive more status from the provider and reported to invest more love and money in the provider. In light to these findings it is suggested that marketers of rafting outfitters and perhaps other outdoor recreation providers pay closer attention to the differences between their female and male market segments. Specifically, outfitters that provide activities with different difficulty levels should examine and rework their promotional materials to determine the attracting factors to women. In addition, outfitters should reevaluate the way they relate to their customers and assure that they implement relationship-building strategies that accommodate male and female group leaders alike.

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## **Introduction**

The predominant marketing paradigm is male dominated – all potential customers are marketed to based on preferences exhibited by males and principles defined by males. However, female group leaders can be a very important segment for outdoor recreation outfitters. It has been noted in the literature that female participation in outdoor recreation is increasing dramatically (Henderson, 2000). In addition, the female market segment is as important or more important than the male market segment. In fact, women account for more consumer dollars than men (Horowitz, 1995). Another aspect that accentuates women's importance as consumers is the notion that women are more likely to develop emotional attachments with their providers (Myers, 1994) and are more likely to share information about the provider with their friends (Popcorn & Marigold, 2000). The benefits of continuing relationships with customers and word of mouth advertising are well documented in the literature. Customers with an emotional attachment to the company are less price sensitive, more resistant to advertising from competitors, and tend to buy premium products (Morais, 2000). Another factor reinforcing the importance of the female segment is that they have a strong influence in the recreation participation of their family members. Women are the link between their generation and the next (Henderson, 2000; Simmons Market Research Bureau, 1994). Women are often responsible for the recreation choices of their children which is critical because the literature suggests that an important determinant of whether or not people will participate in outdoor recreation as an adult is whether or not they have previous experience and specifically if they participated as a child (Henderson, 2000).

This study is focused on female customers who took a group on a rafting trip with a professional outfitter. These group leaders are a very important market segment for outfitters because each group leader is responsible for bringing many customers and therefore responsible for a substantial amount of revenue. In addition, group leaders introduce the outfitter and the recreation activity to a large number of first time customers who may later come back individually (Kwortnik & Manciny, 1997; Morais, 2000). Due to their role in family groups and community groups, females often assume the position of group leaders. Most

outdoor recreation outfitters are aware of the importance of group leaders to their business and often spend substantial resources to nurture their relationships with this market segment. In contrast these outfitters have only recently started to realize the importance of marketing specifically to female group leaders. The marketing strategies targeted to this segment are typically the same as those used to target male segments.

Contrary to the undifferentiated marketing approach used by outfitters, the existing marketing literature indicates that "women and men don't think the same way, don't communicate the same way, don't buy for the same reasons" (Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 1998, p. 131). Several authors indicated that female customers not only have different product preferences than men but they also relate with the providers of those products in very different ways (Henderson, 2000; Myers, 1994; Popcorn & Marigold, 2000). Myers (1994), for example, indicated that female consumers prefer to reduce uncertainty on their purchase decisions. Evidence of this is the observation that females tend to do more extensive research before they make a decision. In addition, females tend to place a great importance on the opportunities for interacting with other customers (Henderson, 2000; Popcorn & Marigold, 2000). With respect to customer / provider relationships, females tend to prefer collaborative processes where they are able to explain their specific needs to the provider (Myers, 1994). Myers adds that females have grown more aware of their importance as customers and have begun to demand to be treated with due respect.

The previous paragraphs explained that females are an increasingly important market segment and that they are different from men with respect to their behavior as consumers. Despite this, little literature has attempted to investigate these gender differences. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine whether or not there were differences between females and males who take groups rafting (group leaders) with respect to their preferences for the activity and the type of relationship they establish with the outfitter. Hence, the following research hypotheses were tested:

- Hyp 1. There are no significant gender differences with respect to river choice;
- Hyp 2. There are no significant gender differences with respect to affiliation with group members;
- Hyp 3. There are no significant gender differences with respect to trip purpose;
- Hyp 4. There are no significant gender differences with respect to group leaders' perceptions of the providers' resource investments in them (PPRI);
- Hyp 5. There are no significant gender differences with respect to group leaders' reported resource investments on the provider (CRRI).

#### **Method**

The data were obtained with a self-administered questionnaire mailed to individuals who had purchased a rafting trip with an outfitter in the Southeastern United

States. The administration process followed a modified Dillman technique consisting of one packet with a letter requesting participation in the study and the instrument, a thank you/ reminder card (one week later), and a second packet with a cover letter and an additional copy of the instrument (three weeks after the first mailing).

The sample size of the study was determined base on an a-priori Power analysis (Cohen, 1988). Despite the scarcity of its use, power analysis is seen by many authors as being the most important factor to determine sample size (Cohen, 1988; Faul & Erdfelder, 1992; Parks, Shewokis, & Costa, 1999). In order to conduct this analysis, the significance level was set to  $\alpha=.05$ ; the desired statistical power was set to .80 ( $\beta=.20$ ); and the effect size considered meaningful was  $r=.20$ . Considering these values, the necessary sample size for the study was calculated to be 194 subjects (Cohen, 1988; Faul & Erdfelder, 1992). The response rates observed in similar studies ranged between 60% and 20% (Katcham, 1990; Morais, Backman, & Backman, 1999). Consequently the surveys were mailed to a total of 600 customers.

The 600 participants were selected with a stratified proportional random sampling procedure. The strata were created based on the four rivers where the outfitter operated and based on the three seasons: Spring, summer and fall. From those questionnaires mailed out, 23 were returned because of unusable addresses. Of the 577 remaining, 279 were returned and usable for a 48.35% response rate. Due to the moderate response rate a threat of non-response bias was considered. A first test of non-response bias compared the sample and the population and found no significant differences in selected demographic variables (i.e., group size, state of residence). The threat of non-response bias was further examined by comparing the responses of participants with those from a small sample of non-respondents interviewed by phone. This analysis did not reveal evidence of non-response bias as there were no significant differences between the two groups with respect to key variables (i.e., age, intentions to repurchase a rafting trip, past purchases, word of mouth communications, information search, and resistance to counter-persuasion).

#### **Operationalization of Dependent Variables**

To test hypotheses 1, 2 and 3, categorical variables were used. The whitewater rafting provider that collaborated with the study offered rafting trips in four different rivers. The sample population was then asked to record the latest river they had rafted with the provider. The item read, "indicate in which river you took your latest trip with Outfitter A." This variable was deemed important because each river was characterized with different levels of difficulty and tended to facilitate different types of recreational experiences. To test the second hypothesis it was necessary to identify what was the affiliation of the group leaders with the rest of the group members. The hypothesis was tested with four dichotomous items. The question read, "Check the boxes that best describe your affiliation with the group members." This variable was examined because previous research has suggested that social group is a very important variable in predicting

outdoor recreation participants' motivations and preferences (Manning, 1999). Lastly, purpose of the trip was examined to test hypothesis three. Purpose of trip was assessed with five dichotomous items. The question read, "indicate what were the primary purposes of your latest trip with Outfitter A." This variable was examined because the literature reviewed indicated that males and females often have different reasons for the purchases they make.

Hypotheses four and five focused on the type of relationships established between the group leaders and the provider. To examine these customer/provider relationships a resource investment framework was used. This framework was initially developed to explain relationships of friendship by Foa and Foa (1974) and was later successfully applied to customer/provider relationships (Morais, 2000). This framework proposes that the type of relationships established between customers and providers is determined by the type of resources that they invest in each other. This study used scales developed by Morais (2000) to assess the types of investments made: the Providers' Perceived Resource Investments scale (PPRI) and the Customers' Reported Resource Investments scale (CRRRI). Both scales consisted of 14 items organized in four dimensions, anchored with 5-point frequency ordinal measurements (1=never to 5=always). Examples of items from the PPRI scales are: "the outfitter treated me as an important customer" and "the outfitter educated me about all aspects of running the trip." Examples of items in the CRRRI scales are: "I consider the outfitter's staff to be my close friends" and "I spent a lot of time and money to make this trip happen."

## Analysis and Results

Although the study hypotheses do not address socio-demographic differences between females and males, the authors feel that it would be beneficial to provide a comparative description of both groups. For this purpose, adequate descriptive statistics were used depending on the level of data used. As can be observed on Table 1, participants were in average 40.3 years old, stayed an average of 2.1 nights in the region, traveled approximately 5 hours to the rafting destination, had rafted with the specific outfitter an average of 1.4 times before their last trip, and considering all rafting trips, they had rafted an average of 1.8 times. Table 1 also shows that the participants came predominantly from large cities (25.0%), small cities (25.4%), and from small towns (22.7%). Interestingly, from those participants that came from a suburb (18.8%) the majority of them were males (65.3%), and from the participants that came from a rural area (8.1%) the majority were females (76.2%). The most frequently observed types of employment were management (37.8%), sales (21.2%), teaching (16.0%), and students (10.3%). As shown in Table 1, a larger proportion of females reported sales (63.6%) and student (68.8%) as their occupations, whereas a larger proportion of males reported teaching (66.0%). Although participants belonged to households with incomes varying from lower than \$25,000 to more than \$95,000 Table 1 shows a clear gender imbalance. Specifically, whereas 61.3% of group leaders with household incomes lower than \$50,000 were females, only 38.1% of group leaders with household incomes higher than \$50,000 were females.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Female and Male Group Leaders

| Variable                     | Females<br><i>Mean (SD)</i> | Males<br><i>Mean (SD)</i> | Sample<br><i>Mean (SD)</i> |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| Age                          | 39.3 (11.0)                 | 41.4 (10.1)               | 40.3 (10.2)                |
| Length of stay (# of nights) | 2.2 (3.6)                   | 1.9 (1.9)                 | 2.1 (2.8)                  |
| Distance traveled (hours)    | 5.0 (3.6)                   | 5.1 (3.5)                 | 5.0 (3.5)                  |
| Times rafting with outfitter | 1.4 (.8)                    | 1.5 (.8)                  | 1.4 (.8)                   |
| Total times rafting          | 1.7 (1.1)                   | 1.9 (1.1)                 | 1.8 (1.1)                  |
|                              | Frequency (% by gender)     | Frequency (% by gender)   | Frequency (% of total)     |
| Residence community          |                             |                           |                            |
| Large city                   | 28 (43.1)                   | 37 (56.9)                 | 65 (25.0)                  |
| Small city                   | 35 (53.0)                   | 31 (47.0)                 | 66 (25.4)                  |
| Small town                   | 30 (50.8)                   | 29 (49.2)                 | 59 (22.7)                  |
| Suburb                       | 17 (34.7)                   | 32 (65.3)                 | 49 (18.8)                  |
| Rural area                   | 16 (76.2)                   | 5 (23.8)                  | 21 (8.1)                   |
| Employment                   |                             |                           |                            |
| Manager                      | 29 (49.2)                   | 30 (50.8)                 | 59 (37.8)                  |
| Sales                        | 21 (63.6)                   | 12 (36.4)                 | 33 (21.2)                  |
| Retired                      | 2 (50.0)                    | 2 (50.0)                  | 4 (2.6)                    |
| Student                      | 11 (68.8)                   | 5 (31.2)                  | 16 (10.3)                  |
| Manufacturing                | 1 (10.0)                    | 9 (90.0)                  | 10 (6.4)                   |
| Teacher                      | 11 (44.0)                   | 14 (66.0)                 | 25 (16.0)                  |
| Craftsperson                 | 0 (0.0)                     | 5 (100.0)                 | 5 (3.2)                    |
| Household income level       |                             |                           |                            |
| Less than 55K                | 65 (61.3)                   | 41 (38.7)                 | 106 (41.9)                 |
| More than 55K                | 56 (38.1)                   | 91 (61.9)                 | 147 (58.1)                 |

In order to test if there were gender differences with respect to trip characteristics and group leader preferences, Chi-square tests were computed. A Chi-square test conducted to examine gender differences in river choice yielded a significant effect,  $\chi^2(3, N=271)=7.61, p=.055$ . As shown on Table 2, females were significantly more likely to choose the Nantahala, the Ocoee and the Pigeon Rivers. In contrast males were significantly more likely to choose taking their group to the Chattooga River. Comparing the rivers preferred by females with those preferred by males it is apparent that females tended to choose recreational rivers with moderate difficulty. Males, on the other hand, tended to prefer a wild and scenic river characterized by higher levels of difficulty. Therefore, the results provided support to Hypothesis 1.

In a test of gender differences with respect to the group leader's affiliation with the members of the group significant effects were found in several variables. Specifically, Table 3 shows that females were significantly more likely to take family members rafting ( $\chi^2(1, N=273)=9.29, p=.002$ ). The percentage of females that

reported taking family members on the rafting trip was 62% whereas only 41% of males reported taking their family members. Females were also more likely to take friends rafting ( $\chi^2(1, N=273)=3.79, p=.052$ ). Accordingly, 66% of females reported taking friends rafting whereas only 54% of males reported the same. No gender differences were found with respect to the proportion of group leaders that took business associates rafting ( $\chi^2(1, N=273)=.17, p=.677$ ). On the other hand, a significantly larger percentage of males reported taking members of a church group than females ( $\chi^2(1, N=273)=5.49, p=.019$ ). In this case, 39% of males reported taking members of a church group rafting whereas only 21% of females reported the same. In sum, the results provided partial support to Hypothesis 2.

In order to test whether or not there were gender differences with respect to the group leader's purpose for the trip, Chi-square tests were computed. As shown on Table 4, the Chi-square tests conducted to examine gender differences in purpose of trip yielded nonsignificant effects ( $p>.10$ ). Based on these findings Hypothesis 3 was rejected.

Table 2. Gender Differences in River Choice

| Variables                       |           | Female |      | Male |      |
|---------------------------------|-----------|--------|------|------|------|
|                                 |           | n      | %    | n    | %    |
| River choice                    | Chattooga | 38     | 28.8 | 59   | 42.4 |
|                                 | Nantahala | 30     | 22.7 | 26   | 18.7 |
|                                 | Ocoee     | 49     | 37.1 | 47   | 33.8 |
|                                 | Pigeon    | 15     | 11.4 | 7    | 5.0  |
| $\chi^2(3, N=271)=7.61, p=.055$ |           |        |      |      |      |

Table 3. Gender Differences in Group Leader's Affiliation with Members

| Variables                       |     |  | Female |      | Male |      |
|---------------------------------|-----|--|--------|------|------|------|
|                                 |     |  | n      | %    | n    | %    |
| Members of group are family     | Yes |  | 62     | 47.0 | 41   | 39.1 |
|                                 | No  |  | 70     | 53.0 | 100  | 70.9 |
| $\chi^2(1, N=273)=9.29, p=.002$ |     |  |        |      |      |      |
| Variables                       |     |  | Female |      | Male |      |
|                                 |     |  | n      | %    | n    | %    |
| Members of group are friends    | Yes |  | 66     | 50.0 | 54   | 38.3 |
|                                 | No  |  | 66     | 50.0 | 87   | 61.7 |
| $\chi^2(1, N=273)=3.79, p=.052$ |     |  |        |      |      |      |
| Variables                       |     |  | Female |      | Male |      |
|                                 |     |  | n      | %    | n    | %    |
| Members of group are business   | Yes |  | 26     | 19.7 | 25   | 17.7 |
|                                 | No  |  | 106    | 80.3 | 116  | 82.3 |
| $\chi^2(1, N=273)=.17, p=.677$  |     |  |        |      |      |      |
| Variables                       |     |  | Female |      | Male |      |
|                                 |     |  | n      | %    | n    | %    |
| Members of group are church     | Yes |  | 21     | 15.9 | 39   | 27.7 |
|                                 | No  |  | 111    | 84.1 | 102  | 72.3 |
| $\chi^2(1, N=273)=5.49, p=.019$ |     |  |        |      |      |      |

**Table 4. Gender Differences in Purpose of Trip**

| Variables                         |     | Female   |      | Male     |      |
|-----------------------------------|-----|----------|------|----------|------|
|                                   |     | <i>n</i> | %    | <i>n</i> | %    |
| To be on the river                | Yes | 67       | 43.2 | 53       | 37.6 |
|                                   | No  | 75       | 56.8 | 88       | 62.4 |
| $\chi^2(1, N=273)=.89, p=.346$    |     |          |      |          |      |
|                                   |     | Female   |      | Male     |      |
|                                   |     | <i>n</i> | %    | <i>n</i> | %    |
| Participate in outdoor recreation | Yes | 86       | 65.2 | 83       | 58.9 |
|                                   | No  | 46       | 34.8 | 58       | 41.1 |
| $\chi^2(1, N=273)=1.14, p=.285$   |     |          |      |          |      |
|                                   |     | Female   |      | Male     |      |
|                                   |     | <i>n</i> | %    | <i>n</i> | %    |
| Get away                          | Yes | 27       | 20.5 | 26       | 18.4 |
|                                   | No  | 105      | 79.5 | 115      | 81.6 |
| $\chi^2(1, N=273)=.18, p=.674$    |     |          |      |          |      |
|                                   |     | Female   |      | Male     |      |
|                                   |     | <i>n</i> | %    | <i>n</i> | %    |
| Time with friends                 | Yes | 91       | 68.9 | 87       | 61.7 |
|                                   | No  | 41       | 31.1 | 54       | 38.3 |
| $\chi^2(1, N=273)=1.57, p=.210$   |     |          |      |          |      |
|                                   |     | Female   |      | Male     |      |
|                                   |     | <i>n</i> | %    | <i>n</i> | %    |
| For the challenge                 | Yes | 98       | 74.2 | 100      | 70.9 |
|                                   | No  | 34       | 25.8 | 41       | 29.1 |
| $\chi^2(1, N=273)=.38, p=.539$    |     |          |      |          |      |

In order to test whether or not there were gender differences with respect to the types of resources invested by the outfitter on the group leaders, independent samples T-tests were computed. As shown on Table 5, the analysis revealed that males reported receiving status from the provider significantly more often than females ( $t(271)=9.29, p=.100$ ). No significant gender differences were found with respect to the group leaders' perceptions of outfitter's investments of love ( $t(271)=.22, p=.829$ ), information ( $t(271)=.64, p=.523$ ), and money ( $t(271)=.837, p=.403$ ). These findings provided very weak support to hypothesis 4. Hence, it was concluded that female and male group leaders perceived to have received equal amounts of resource investments from the outfitter.

Independent samples T-tests were also conducted to test if there were gender differences with respect to the types of resources invested by the group leader on the outfitter. As shown on Table 5, the analyses revealed that males reported to have invested more love ( $t(271)=-2.72, p=.007$ ) and money ( $t(271)=-2.17, p=.031$ ) on the provider significantly more often than females. No significant gender differences were found with respect to the group leaders' investments of status ( $t(271)=.61, p=.545$ ) and information ( $t(271)=.01, p=.996$ ). These findings provided some support to hypothesis 5. It was concluded that male group leaders invested love and money in the outfitter more frequently than female group leaders but they did not differ with respect to investments of status and information.

**Table 5. Gender Differences in Type of Investments Made by Provider and Group Leaders**

| Variable                             | Female        | Male          | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>p</i> |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|----------|-----------|----------|
|                                      | <i>M (SD)</i> | <i>M (SD)</i> |          |           |          |
| PPRI                                 |               |               |          |           |          |
| Perceived investments of Love        | 2.61 (.77)    | 2.59 (.72)    | .22      | 271       | .83      |
| Perceived investments of Status      | 2.90 (.96)    | 3.09 (.97)    | -1.64    | 271       | .10      |
| Perceived investments of Information | 3.15 (.88)    | 3.22 (.93)    | -.64     | 271       | .52      |
| Perceived investments of Money       | 2.49 (1.23)   | 2.61 (1.34)   | -.84     | 271       | .40      |
| CCRI                                 |               |               |          |           |          |
| Reported investments of Love         | 2.46 (.98)    | 2.79 (1.02)   | -2.72    | 271       | .01      |
| Reported investments of Status       | 3.94 (.83)    | 3.88 (.84)    | .61      | 271       | .55      |
| Reported investments of Information  | 2.15 (.99)    | 2.15 (.98)    | .01      | 271       | .99      |
| Reported investments of Money        | 3.68 (.94)    | 3.94 (1.04)   | -2.17    | 271       | .03      |

Note:  $N(\text{females})=132, N(\text{males})=141$

## Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this study was to examine whether or not there were gender differences among individuals who take groups rafting (group leaders) with respect to their preferences for the activity and the type of relationship they establish with the outfitter. A random sample of group leaders who took a group rafting with a commercial outfitter during 1999 were sent a mail survey assessing their river choice, type of affiliation they had with group members, the purpose of the trip, the type of resources invested between them and the outfitter, and a number of selected socio-demographic variables. Statistical analyses revealed that female group leaders were more likely to choose less challenging rivers whereas male group leaders were more represented in a more challenging and wilderness river. Females group leaders tended to bring friends and family to the rafting trip whereas males were the predominant group leaders of church groups. Males reported to have received more status from the outfitter than females and reported to have invested more love and money.

### Implications for Research

The present findings are generally consistent with the literature with respect to the notion that females and males tend to develop relationships with their providers in very different ways. This study revealed that male group leaders received significantly more status and invested significantly more love and money than female group leaders. Interestingly, most of the existing relationship marketing literature does not consider the possible intervening effect of gender differences. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) suggested that additional relationships marketing research might benefit from including gender in the analysis. The gender differences observed in the present study confirm these authors' proposition and therefore it is suggested that subsequent studies of customer / provider relationships should pay closer attention to gender differences.

Previous outdoor recreation literature has provided substantial evidence of differences in the preferences of various types of participants. For example Ewert (1993) reported that climbers with different skill levels preferred different types of experiences for climbing in Alaska. Ewert and Hollenhorst (1994) found additional differences in recreation preferences between rafters with various specialization levels. Literature addressing the preferences of female and male participants is, however, very scarce. This study indicates that there are such differences and due to the size and continuing growth of the female segment, it has become more important to understand them in order to more effectively market to them.

### Implications for Practice

Overall, the findings indicate that outdoor recreation providers should look at females and males as two segments of their market that have different preferences and want to relate to them in very different ways. Outfitters need first to examine the various products they offer and

determine which are more attractive to females and males. Knowing this may be the first step to understanding their segments and more effectively interacting with them. In this study females were more likely to take family and friends to recreational rivers whereas males tended to prefer more challenging rivers. Subsequent research should address more specific attributes of the recreational experience besides the river characteristics and group type.

The results suggested that males invested substantially more love in the outfitter than females. These findings, however, contradict previous literature. In fact, most authors agree that females are more likely to want to establish close relationships with their providers. Hence it would be expected that they would report investing more love, status and information than males. A reasonable explanation for this discrepancy could be the notion that females did not have the opportunity to create the types of relationships they desired. Additional research is needed to further examine this hypothesis, however, the present findings indicate that outfitters need to create an atmosphere where females can develop closer relationships with them and their staff members.

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