

1 **Ocean heat storage rate unaffected by MOC weakening**  
2 **in an idealised climate model**

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6 **Key Points:**

- 7 • A deep MOC connects the ocean surface to its interior and enhances heat stor-  
8 age rate under global warming  
9 • The AMOC may give the Atlantic its enhanced heat storage rate relative to the  
10 Pacific in recent decades  
11 • MOC weakening has little impact on ocean heat storage rate due to compensat-  
12 ing physical processes

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## 13 **Abstract**

14 To study the role of the Atlantic meridional overturning circulation (AMOC) in climate  
 15 change, we perform an abrupt CO<sub>2</sub>-doubling experiment using a coupled atmosphere-  
 16 ocean-ice model with a simple geometry that separates the ocean into small and large  
 17 basins. As in observations and high-end climate models, the small basin exhibits a MOC  
 18 and warms at a faster rate than the large basin. In our set-up, this contrast in heat stor-  
 19 age rates is  $0.6 \pm 0.1 \text{ W m}^{-2}$ , and we argue that this is due to the small basin MOC.  
 20 However, the MOC weakens significantly, yet this has little impact on the small basin's  
 21 heat storage rate. We find this is due to the effects of both compensating warming pat-  
 22 terns and interbasin heat transports. Thus, although the presence of a MOC is impor-  
 23 tant for enhanced heat storage, MOC weakening is surprisingly unimportant.

## 24 **Plain Language Summary**

25 The oceans take up the vast majority of the excess heat energy due to global warm-  
 26 ing. One of the most important large-scale ocean circulations is the Atlantic meridional  
 27 overturning circulation (AMOC). Under global warming, it's been suggested that this  
 28 circulation is important for capturing and storing heat energy in the deep ocean. In or-  
 29 der to examine this process more closely, we use a simple computer model of a world with  
 30 no land masses and only two ocean basins: a small basin with a circulation similar to  
 31 the AMOC, and a large basin without. We mimic global warming by increasing the CO<sub>2</sub>  
 32 in the model atmosphere, and we find that the small basin warms at a faster rate than  
 33 the large basin. In observations, the AMOC has weakened since the mid-twentieth cen-  
 34 tury, and some worry that surface warming will intensify in response to the Atlantic stor-  
 35 ing less heat energy in the deep ocean. In our experiment, the overturning circulation  
 36 does weaken, but this weakening does not affect the heat storage rate in the small basin.  
 37 This is a surprising result and casts doubt on the concern that a weaker AMOC will lead  
 38 to rapid surface warming in Earth's future climate.

## 39 **1 Introduction**

40 Due to anthropogenic carbon emissions, there is now greater absorbed solar radi-  
 41 ation than outgoing long-wave radiation over the surface of the Earth, leading to a pos-  
 42 itive imbalance, designated Earth's energy imbalance (EEI) (Von Schuckmann et al., 2016;  
 43 Trenberth et al., 2014; Hansen et al., 2011). The vast majority (~93%) of the excess en-  
 44 ergy resulting from this imbalance manifests as an increase in ocean heat content (OHC)  
 45 (Stocker, 2014), and improving estimates of OHC has been highlighted as critical to con-  
 46 straining EEI and thus understanding Earth's heat storage (Von Schuckmann et al., 2016).

47 Ocean heat uptake (OHU) acts as a buffer for surface warming. If more energy is  
 48 taken into the ocean interior, then less is absorbed at the atmospheric surface; indeed,  
 49 so-called 'surface warming hiatuses' have been linked to periods of enhanced ocean heat  
 50 uptake (Drijfhout et al., 2014; Watanabe et al., 2013; Meehl et al., 2011). Recently, more  
 51 attention has been drawn to the role of ocean circulation on heat uptake (e.g. Marshall  
 52 et al. (2015); Winton et al. (2013)), particularly that of the Atlantic's meridional over-  
 53 turning circulation (AMOC). It is possible that the presence of this circulation gives the  
 54 Atlantic its enhanced warming rate compared to the Pacific, as seen in observations (e.g.  
 55 Chen and Tung (2014); Desbruyeres et al. (2017); Zanna et al. (2019)).

56 The depth and strength of the AMOC positively correlates with the depth of global  
 57 ocean heat storage (OHS) across models participating in the fifth phase of the Coupled  
 58 Model Intercomparison Project (CMIP5) (Kostov et al., 2014), and its multidecadal vari-  
 59 ability has been linked to periods of enhanced global surface warming and cooling (Chen  
 60 & Tung, 2018). The AMOC's role in global OHS is especially interesting due to the pos-  
 61 sibility of it weakening in the future. A robust weakening response of the AMOC with

62 global surface warming ( $\sim 0.05$  Sv per year) is seen across CMIP5 models (Weaver et al.,  
 63 2012), and observations point to the AMOC having weakened since the mid-twentieth  
 64 century (Caesar et al., 2018). Model biases may favour a stable AMOC, and it is still  
 65 a concern that the AMOC could collapse in the future, leading to abrupt changes in cli-  
 66 mate (Caesar et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2017).

67 A weakening AMOC results in a weakening of the northward oceanic meridional  
 68 heat transport (MHT), which could explain the conspicuous region of cooling in the sub-  
 69 polar North Atlantic found in maps of temperature trends (Rahmstorf et al., 2015). It's  
 70 been suggested that this North Atlantic surface cooling reduces the sea-air temperature  
 71 difference, and so reduces the sensible heat flux from the ocean to the atmosphere i.e.  
 72 an increase in ocean heat uptake (Drijfhout et al., 2014; Winton et al., 2013).

73 This appears to be at odds with the idea that a deeper and stronger AMOC re-  
 74 sults in more global ocean heat storage (Kostov et al., 2014). However, this inconsistency  
 75 may disappear if we clarify the distinction between *uptake* and *storage*. Over an ocean  
 76 column, a change in OHC is due to the net air-sea heat flux  $\mathcal{F}_s$  ( $\text{W m}^{-2}$ ) as well as the  
 77 heat transport into or out of the column:

$$78 \quad \partial_t \int_{-H}^0 \rho_0 c_p \theta \, dz = \mathcal{F}_s - \rho_0 c_p \int_{-H}^0 \nabla \cdot (\mathbf{v}\theta) \, dz \quad (1)$$

79 where  $\theta$  is the oceanic potential temperature,  $\rho_0$  the seawater density, and  $c_p$  the spe-  
 80 cific heat capacity of seawater. Heat uptake is synonymous only with  $\mathcal{F}_s$  (i.e. heat pen-  
 81 etrating the ocean surface), while heat storage refers to an increase in OHC (l.h.s. of equa-  
 82 tion 1). Thus, OHU and OHS can be very different regionally due to the ocean heat trans-  
 83 port divergence  $\nabla \cdot (\mathbf{v}\theta)$ . Only globally are they equivalent, when this divergence term  
 84 vanishes. Thus, it's possible that a weaker AMOC can cause an increase in heat uptake  
 85 regionally at the same time as a decrease in heat storage globally.

86 Recent work (Saenko et al., 2018) has cast doubt on the observed model correla-  
 87 tion between AMOC strength and heat storage (Kostov et al., 2014), suggesting that the  
 88 eddy parameterisation affects both AMOC strength and global OHU efficiency, thus caus-  
 89 ing a spurious correlation between the two quantities. But without a better conceptual  
 90 grasp on how the AMOC affects OHS, it is unclear whether this correlation is spurious  
 91 or not. Furthermore, these studies (Saenko et al., 2018; Kostov et al., 2014) establish a  
 92 link between the AMOC and *global* OHS, while it may be easier to first consider the AMOC's  
 93 influence on heat storage within the Atlantic basin itself. Given the importance of con-  
 94 straining and monitoring EEI through OHC observations, and the possibility that the  
 95 AMOC may continue to weaken into the future, it is imperative to better understand  
 96 the AMOC's role in ocean heat uptake and storage as the world continues to warm.

97 To this end, we examine the response of a coupled atmosphere-ocean-ice general  
 98 circulation model under an abrupt doubling of atmospheric  $\text{CO}_2$ . The model geometry  
 99 invokes two sea-floor to sea-surface meridional barriers that separate the ocean into small  
 100 and large basins. The small basin exhibits an overturning circulation akin to the AMOC,  
 101 while the large basin does not. We look at the basins' individual responses rather than  
 102 taking a global perspective, and we isolate the effect of the small basin MOC by focus-  
 103 ing on small-large basin differences. We describe the model formulation and geometry  
 104 in section 2. In section 3, we present results from the abrupt  $\text{CO}_2$ -doubling experiment  
 105 where we find and define a heat storage contrast between the small and large basins, and  
 106 explore the role of the small basin's MOC in establishing this contrast. A discussion is  
 107 given in section 4, and we conclude in section 5.

## 2 Model Description and Set-up

The model uses the Massachusetts Institute of Technology general circulation model (MITgcm) code (Marshall, Adcroft, et al., 1997; Marshall, Hill, et al., 1997). Both the atmosphere and ocean component models use the same cubed-sphere grid at a C24 resolution (24x24 points per face, giving a resolution of  $3.75^\circ$  at the equator). The atmosphere has a low vertical resolution of five levels, and its physics is based on the ‘simplified parameterisations primitive-equation dynamics’ (SPEEDY) scheme (Molteni, 2003). The ocean is flat-bottomed with a constant depth of 3 km, and is split into 15 levels with increasing vertical resolution from 30 m at the surface to 400 m at depth.

Mesoscale eddies are parameterised as an advective process (Gent & McWilliams, 1990) and an isopycnal diffusion (Redi, 1982), both with a transfer coefficient of  $1200 \text{ m}^2 \text{ s}^{-1}$ . Ocean convection is represented by an enhanced vertical mixing of temperature and salinity (Klinger et al., 1996), while the background vertical diffusion is uniform and set to  $3 \times 10^{-5} \text{ m}^2 \text{ s}^{-1}$ . There are no sea-ice dynamics, but a simple two and a half layer thermodynamic sea-ice model (Winton, 2000) is incorporated. The seasonal cycle is represented, but there is no diurnal cycle.

The model is configured with the idealised ‘Double-Drake’ (DDrake) geometry as seen in previous work (e.g. Ferreira et al. (2010, 2015); Ferreira and Marshall (2015)), which is an aquaplanet with two narrow vertical barriers that extend from the sea floor to the sea surface. The barriers are set  $90^\circ$  apart at the North Pole and extend meridionally to  $35^\circ\text{S}$ . This separates the ocean into small and large basins, with both of them connected by a ‘southern ocean’ region south of  $35^\circ\text{S}$ . The small and large basins in this configuration exhibit distinctive Atlantic-like and Pacific-like characteristics, with the small basin being warmer and saltier, and exhibiting a deep interhemispheric MOC (see figure S1 in supporting information). The model geometry captures two important asymmetries relevant to the Earth’s climate: a zonal asymmetry splitting the ocean into small and large basins, and a meridional asymmetry allowing for circumpolar flow in the Southern Hemisphere, but not in the Northern Hemisphere.

The model is spun up for 6000 years until a statistically steady state is reached. The time-mean of the last 50-year integration is used as the equilibrated control climate state. We abruptly change the longwave absorption in the  $\text{CO}_2$  band, causing an initial top-of-atmosphere forcing (EEI) of approximately  $3.7 \text{ W m}^{-2}$ , thus mimicking an abrupt doubling of atmospheric  $\text{CO}_2$  (Myhre et al., 1998), and run for an additional 200 years. The imposed EEI results in a warming of the climate system, and we diagnose the ensuing responses of the small and large basins relative to the control climate.

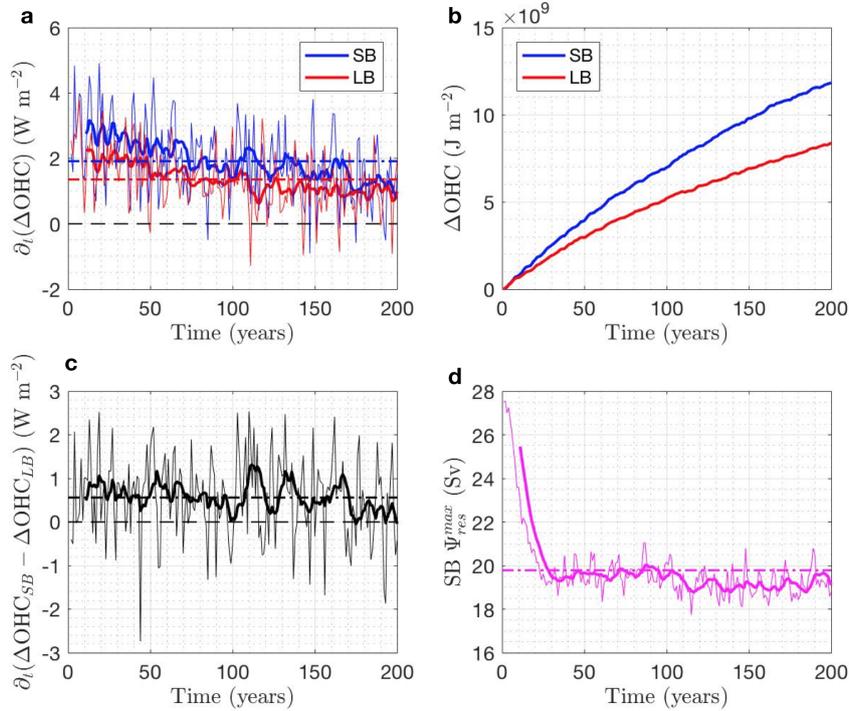
## 3 Results

### 3.1 Heat Storage Rates

The small basin (SB) warms at a faster rate than the large basin (LB) (figure 1a). The large basin’s surface area is three times larger than that of the small basin, yet it only takes up 2.21 times more heat energy in joules over the course of the simulation. By considering areal proportions of the total global OHC increase, we find that this is due to a combination of the SB taking up more heat than expected for its size, and the LB taking up less than expected (see figure S2 in supporting information).

To compare the two basins’ efficiencies in storing heat, we look at basin OHC changes divided by the respective basin’s surface area (in  $\text{J m}^{-2}$ ). We use  $\Delta s$  to represent changes to quantities due to the abrupt  $\text{CO}_2$ -doubling. After 200 years’ warming, the final anomalous OHC difference,  $\Delta\text{OHC}_{SB} - \Delta\text{OHC}_{LB}$ , is  $3.45 \times 10^9 \text{ J m}^{-2}$  (figure 1b), and in terms of heat storage *rates* in  $\text{W m}^{-2}$ , this translates to a time-mean heat storage contrast of  $0.6 \pm 0.1 \text{ W m}^{-2}$  (figure 1c). There is large interannual variability in the heat storage

157 rates, and the heat storage contrast shows no discernible trend over the 200 years. At  
 158 the same time, we see that the SB MOC strength weakens rapidly by  $\sim 25\%$  during the  
 159 first 30 years (figure 1d), after which it remains quite stable between 18 and 20 Sv (1 Sv  
 160  $\equiv 10^6 \text{ m}^3 \text{ s}^{-1}$ ).



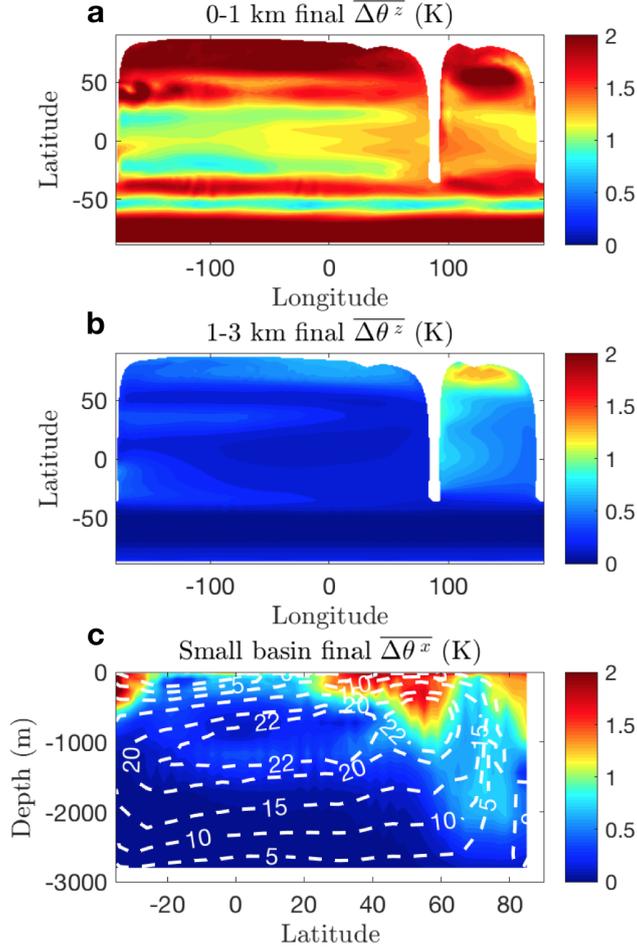
**Figure 1.** Time series of (a) SB and LB heat storage rates; (b) OHC anomalies; (c) the difference in heat storage rates i.e. the heat storage contrast; and (d) SB MOC strength following an abrupt doubling of  $\text{CO}_2$ . Thick lines are decadal running means and horizontal dash-dot lines indicate time-mean values. The time-mean heat storage contrast is  $0.6 \pm 0.1 \text{ W m}^{-2}$  (standard error).

### 161 3.2 Role of the Small Basin MOC

162 To make the connection with the SB MOC, we look at the spatial pattern of the  
 163 vertically-averaged potential temperature response  $\Delta\theta$  for different depth intervals (fig-  
 164 ure 2a, b). The upper 1 km reveals pronounced warming at high latitudes, a conspic-  
 165 uous pool of warming at  $40\text{-}60^\circ\text{N}$  in the SB, and enhanced warming at  $40^\circ\text{S}$  where there  
 166 is zonal circumpolar flow, reminiscent of warming behaviour along the Antarctic Circum-  
 167 polar Current (ACC) (Armour et al., 2016). Below 1 km depth, the temperature anomaly  
 168 in the SB appears to flow along a deep western boundary current, coincident with the  
 169 lower limb of its MOC. Note there are no large temperature anomalies at depth in the  
 170 LB or southern ocean regions.

171 The MOC's role is made even clearer when we plot the control residual overturning  
 172 ( $\Psi_{res}^{ctrl}$ ) on top of the final zonally-averaged  $\Delta\theta$  in the SB (figure 2c). There is a dis-  
 173 tinctive convective chimney at  $60\text{-}80^\circ\text{N}$ , collocated with the downwelling branch of  $\Psi_{res}^{ctrl}$ .  
 174 The  $\Delta\theta$  structure also approximates the pattern of the streamlines, and we see an iso-  
 175 lated pool of warm water between 1 and 1.5 km depth near the equator, suggesting the

176 equatorward advection of temperature anomalies into this region away from the high latitudes of deep water formation.  
 177



**Figure 2.** Vertically-averaged  $\Delta\theta$  (in K) after 200 years following an abrupt doubling of atmospheric  $\text{CO}_2$  in DDrake for the depth intervals (a) 0-1 km and (b) 1-3 km. The temperature anomaly at depth follows a deep western boundary current in the small basin. (c) Zonally-averaged  $\Delta\theta$  (colour, in K) in the small basin after 200 years' warming, and streamlines (white dashed contours, in Sv) for the control residual overturning  $\Psi_{res}^{ctrl}$ .

178 **3.3 MOC Weakening**

179 From the previous section, it is clear that the SB MOC plays an important role in  
 180 setting the heat storage contrast between the two basins of DDrake. However, the SB  
 181 MOC strength weakens rapidly by  $\sim 25\%$  during the first 30 years, after which it remains  
 182 stable between 18 and 20 Sv (figure 1d). The heat storage contrast remains approximately  
 183 constant over the 200 years (figure 1c), so we find that this MOC weakening has little,  
 184 if any, impact on the heat storage contrast.

185 To explain this, consider the vertical heat flux associated with the SB MOC, ap-  
 186 proximated by  $\rho_0 c_p \Psi_{res} \delta\theta$  (in W), where  $\delta\theta$  is the temperature difference across the down-  
 187 welling and upwelling branches of the circulation i.e.  $\theta_{\downarrow} - \theta_{\uparrow}$ . We take vertically-averaged  
 188  $\theta$  values in the latitude bands  $60\text{-}80^\circ\text{N}$  and  $30\text{-}50^\circ\text{S}$  in the SB sector for  $\theta_{\downarrow}$  and  $\theta_{\uparrow}$ , re-

189 spectively. Considering orders of magnitude,  $\rho_0 = 1030 \text{ kg m}^{-3}$ ,  $c_p = 3994 \text{ J kg}^{-1} \text{ K}^{-1}$ ,  
 190  $\Psi_{res} \sim \mathcal{O}(10^7) \text{ m}^3 \text{ s}^{-1}$ , and  $\delta\theta \sim \mathcal{O}(1) \text{ K}$ . Together, these estimates give a scaling of  
 191  $\sim \mathcal{O}(10^{13}) \text{ W}$ . As the SB surface area is  $\sim \mathcal{O}(10^{13}) \text{ m}^2$ , we find that the heat flux due  
 192 to the SB MOC should be  $\sim \mathcal{O}(1) \text{ W m}^{-2}$ , which is the same order as the heat storage  
 193 contrast found in figure 1c.

194 Following the CO<sub>2</sub>-doubling, we must consider the change in the MOC heat flux,  
 195  $\Delta\mathcal{H}_{MOC} = \rho_0 c_p \Delta(\overline{\Psi_{res} \delta\theta})$ . Let overlines represent time-mean quantities in the control  
 196 integration. (Again,  $\Delta$ s represent changes to quantities due to the CO<sub>2</sub>-doubling.)  
 197 A change in the MOC heat flux (divided by  $\rho_0 c_p$ ) is then:

$$198 \quad \Delta(\overline{\Psi_{res} \delta\theta}) = \underbrace{\Delta\overline{\Psi_{res} \delta\theta}}_{>0} + \underbrace{\overline{\Psi_{res}} \Delta(\delta\theta)}_{>0} + \underbrace{\Delta\overline{\Psi_{res}} \Delta(\delta\theta)}_{<0} > 0 \quad (2)$$

199 where we take the convention that a downward heat flux is positive. There are two pro-  
 200 cesses to consider: one due to  $\Delta\overline{\Psi_{res}}$  (MOC weakening) and one due to  $\Delta(\delta\theta)$  (differ-  
 201 ential warming). We find that  $\theta_{\downarrow}$  warms at a faster rate than  $\theta_{\uparrow}$ , so that  $\Delta(\delta\theta) > 0$  (see  
 202 figure S3 in supporting information). The second term in equation 2 is then positive, lead-  
 203 ing to an increase in the anomalous downward heat flux.

204 Now, we know that the MOC weakens ( $\Delta\overline{\Psi_{res}} < 0$ ), so one might think that this  
 205 process compensates the differential warming (as  $\Delta(\delta\theta) > 0$ ). Importantly, however,  
 206 in the control integration,  $\overline{\delta\theta} = -0.7 \text{ K} (< 0)$ , indicating that the MOC is thermally  
 207 direct and transports heat *upwards*. So, the first term in equation 2 is in fact *positive*.  
 208 Both the differential warming *and* the MOC weakening processes contribute to an *in-*  
 209 *crease* in the anomalous downward heat flux. Only their interaction  $\Delta\overline{\Psi_{res}} \Delta(\delta\theta)$  is neg-  
 210 ative, leading to an upward heat flux. These terms are plotted (in  $\text{W m}^{-2}$ ) in figure 3a.  
 211 Notably, the two terms involving  $\Delta\overline{\Psi_{res}}$  (i.e. MOC weakening) compensate each other,  
 212 while the dominant term is  $\overline{\Psi_{res}} \Delta(\delta\theta)$ , so the control overturning is still playing a promi-  
 213 nent role.

214 The anomalous downward MOC heat flux thus increases with time, and most rapidly  
 215 during the MOC weakening. Why this increase in  $\Delta\mathcal{H}_{MOC}$  does not lead to an increase  
 216 in the heat storage contrast remains to be explained. If we consider the air-sea heat flux  
 217 (heat uptake) compared to the increase in OHC (heat storage) in the small basin, we find  
 218 that the small basin *leaks heat* across 35°S to the southern ocean region at a rate of  $\sim 0.5$   
 219  $\text{W m}^{-2}$ , and this leakage rate increases with time (figure 3b).

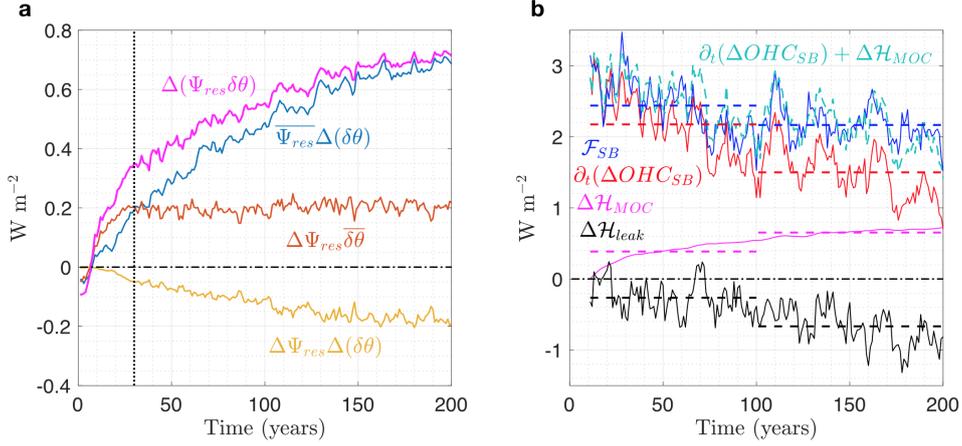
220 Recall equation 1. For an increase in OHC in the small basin, we can write

$$221 \quad \partial_t(\Delta\text{OHC}_{SB}) = \mathcal{F}_s^{SB} - \rho_0 c_p \int_{-H_{SB}}^0 \nabla \cdot (\Delta(\mathbf{v}\theta_{SB})) dz = \mathcal{F}_s^{SB} + \Delta\mathcal{H}_{leak} \quad (3)$$

222 where we define  $-\rho_0 c_p \int_{-H_{SB}}^0 \nabla \cdot (\Delta(\mathbf{v}\theta_{SB})) dz = \Delta\mathcal{H}_{leak}$  as the SB heat leakage rate  
 223 across 35°S. From figure 3b, we see that  $\Delta\mathcal{H}_{leak}$  and  $\Delta\mathcal{H}_{MOC}$  compensate each other,  
 224 especially on long timescales (see dashed lines). This is made even clearer in an energy  
 225 budget sense, where we find that  $\partial_t(\Delta\text{OHC}_{SB}) + \Delta\mathcal{H}_{MOC} \approx \mathcal{F}_s^{SB}$  (light blue, dashed),  
 226 which implies that  $\Delta\mathcal{H}_{MOC} \approx -\Delta\mathcal{H}_{leak}$ . So, as the SB MOC heat flux increases, this  
 227 permits more heat to penetrate the ocean surface, causing an increase in the surface heat  
 228 flux  $\mathcal{F}_s^{SB}$ . However, this additional heat input is then lost to the southern ocean, which  
 229 ensures that the heat storage contrast remains stationary.

## 230 4 Discussion

231 The key process governing the enhanced heat storage rate in the SB is the rapid  
 232 subduction of surface temperature anomalies into the interior associated with its MOC.  
 233 We acknowledge that this relies on an implicit connection between deep convection and



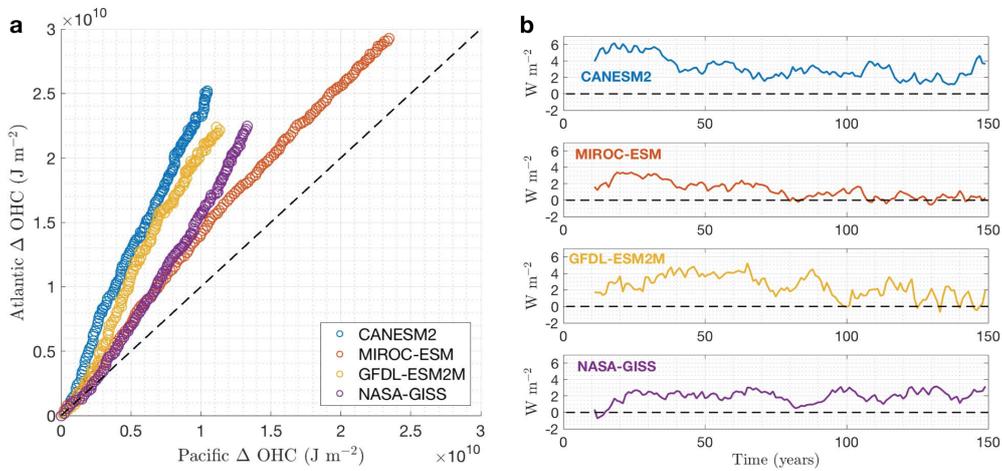
**Figure 3.** (a) Decomposition of the change in SB downward (positive) MOC heat flux ( $\Delta(\Psi_{res}\delta\theta)$ , magenta) into differential warming ( $\overline{\Psi_{res}}\Delta(\delta\theta)$ , blue), MOC weakening ( $\Delta\Psi_{res}\overline{\delta\theta}$ , orange), and nonlinear ( $\Delta\Psi_{res}\Delta(\delta\theta)$ , yellow) terms (in  $W m^{-2}$ ). A vertical dotted line is plotted at 30 years to separate the weakening and non-weakening MOC regimes. (b) Decadal running means of the SB heat uptake rate ( $\mathcal{F}_s^{SB}$ , blue), heat storage rate ( $\partial_t(\Delta OHC_{SB})$ , red), MOC heat flux ( $\Delta\mathcal{H}_{MOC}$ , magenta), and leakage rate to the southern ocean ( $\Delta\mathcal{H}_{leak} = \partial_t(\Delta OHC_{SB}) - \mathcal{F}_s^{SB}$ , black) (in  $W m^{-2}$ ). Note that the sum of the heat storage rate and MOC heat flux (light blue, dashed) almost matches the heat uptake rate. Horizontal dashed lines are centennial time-means.

234 a MOC, which is perhaps an oversimplification as the relationships between deep wa-  
 235 ter formation and overturning are complex and remain unclear (Straneo, 2006; M. S. Lozier,  
 236 2012). Nevertheless, the centrality of the SB MOC for its enhanced heat storage rate high-  
 237 lights the importance of the present-climate AMOC, which could help explain the At-  
 238 lantic’s observed enhanced warming rate compared to the Pacific (Chen & Tung, 2014;  
 239 Desbruyeres et al., 2017; Zanna et al., 2019).

240 Weakening of the AMOC has been seen in observations and climate models (Rahmstorf  
 241 et al., 2015; Srokosz & Bryden, 2015; Caesar et al., 2018; Weaver et al., 2012; Gregory  
 242 et al., 2005), and it has been suggested that a continued weakening in the future could  
 243 lead to a loss of this deep ocean heat storage mechanism, resulting in an accelerated warm-  
 244 ing of surface temperatures (Chen & Tung, 2018). However, we think this view focuses  
 245 too narrowly on  $\Delta\Psi_{res}$  and, as we have found in our experiments, considering  $\Delta(\Psi_{res}\delta\theta)$   
 246 paints a more complicated picture.

247 Our explanation of the constancy of the SB/LB heat storage contrast relies on a  
 248 southward transport of heat from the small basin to the southern ocean region of DDrake.  
 249 This is similar to the ‘redistribution temperature’ response seen in Xie and Vallis (2012)  
 250 where, in an idealised model of the Atlantic ocean, the MOC weakening serves to trans-  
 251 port heat from the Northern Hemisphere high latitudes towards the Southern Hemisphere.  
 252 However, we note that across CMIP5 models, the Southern Ocean dominates ocean heat  
 253 uptake and exports approximately half of the energy it takes up *northwards* (Frölicher  
 254 et al., 2015); this northward transport is also supported by observations, which results  
 255 in a delayed warming of the Southern Ocean (Armour et al., 2016). We suspect that the  
 256 circumpolar-average picture in these studies obscures a southward transport from the  
 257 Atlantic basin to the Southern Ocean.

258 Nevertheless, our analysis paves a way towards understanding the AMOC’s role in  
 259 ocean heat storage in observations and more complicated climate models. A preliminary  
 260 look at four CMIP5 models shows that there is a heat storage contrast between the At-  
 261 lantic and Pacific basins (defined from 30°S to 65°N) in abrupt CO<sub>2</sub>-quadrupling exper-  
 262 iments (figure 4). Under this more intense forcing scenario, the multi-model time-mean  
 263 heat storage contrast is 2.2 W m<sup>-2</sup>. Looking at individual models, the contrast persists  
 264 in the models CANESM2 and NASA-GISS-E2-H, but closes in MIROC-ESM and GFDL-  
 265 ESM2M. This could be due to different model AMOC responses and, particularly, whether  
 266 the control model AMOC cells are thermally direct (flux heat upward, like the SB MOC)  
 267 or indirect (flux heat downward), but warrants further study. For example, Zika et al.  
 268 (2013) diagnosed overturning cells in UVic ESM and found that the cell coincident with  
 269 the AMOC was thermally indirect, so our results might not apply to this model. In any  
 270 case, we suggest that the AMOC is at least responsible for the existence of a contrast  
 271 in each of these CMIP5 models, just as the SB MOC is responsible for the contrast in  
 272 DDrake.



**Figure 4.** (a) Atlantic vs. Pacific top-3 km column-averaged annual OHC anomalies (in  $J m^{-2}$ ) following an abrupt quadrupling of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> in CMIP5 models. Atlantic and Pacific basins defined from 30°S to 65°N. The deviation from the identity line (black dashed) highlights the Atlantic’s enhanced warming rate relative to the Pacific in these experiments. (b) Decadal running means of individual model Atlantic–Pacific heat storage contrasts  $\partial_t(\Delta OHC_{Atl} - \Delta OHC_{Pac})$  (in  $W m^{-2}$ ).

## 273 5 Conclusion

274 Using an idealised coupled climate model under an abrupt doubling of atmospheric  
 275 CO<sub>2</sub>, we have shown that an ocean basin endowed with a MOC experiences an enhanced  
 276 heat storage rate due to a rapid subduction of surface temperature anomalies into its  
 277 interior. Similar to Kostov et al. (2014), who found no significant correlations between  
 278 the AMOC weakening and the depth of heat storage in CMIP5 models, we find no sig-  
 279 nificant relationship between the small basin’s MOC weakening and its weakening heat  
 280 storage rate in our set-up. Moreover, we find that the heat storage contrast between the  
 281 two basins of DDrake remains almost constant during the period of MOC weakening,  
 282 and throughout the rest of the simulated 200 years on decadal timescales.

283 Contrary to expectations, we find that the anomalous downward MOC heat flux  
 284  $\Delta\mathcal{H}_{MOC}$  *increases* as the SB MOC weakens. Furthermore, by decomposing the MOC  
 285 heat flux into MOC weakening and differential warming components (equation 2), we  
 286 find that the dominant term is in fact from differential warming, with the control over-  
 287 turning playing a prominent role (figure 3a). Finally, although  $\Delta\mathcal{H}_{MOC}$  increases, this  
 288 does not lead to an increase in the heat storage contrast, as this additional heat input  
 289 is subsequently lost to the southern ocean region (figure 3b). Thus, although the pres-  
 290 ence of a MOC is important for the small basin’s enhanced heat storage rate, the change  
 291 in MOC strength is surprisingly unimportant.

292 Our results underline the importance of the AMOC in ocean heat storage, and for  
 293 its accurate representation in other, predictive climate models. Continued observational  
 294 monitoring efforts such as RAPID (Smeed et al., 2018) and the Overturning in the Sub-  
 295 polar North Atlantic Program (OSNAP) (M. Lozier et al., 2019), in conjunction with  
 296 more advanced high-resolution climate models, should drive a deeper understanding of  
 297 the AMOC, but we also encourage the use of simpler, more conceptual models such as  
 298 DDrake in order to make sense of this increasing complexity.

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 303 [node.llnl.gov/search/cmip5/](https://esgf-node.llnl.gov/search/cmip5/)).

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