

EVIDENCE FOR GROUP-BASED SCHADENFREUDE FROM THE GENDER DOMAIN: FROM INTRAGROUP TO INTERGROUP RIVALRY

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In three studies we examine evidence for the occurrence of intergroup schadenfreude in the realm of gender relations. In Study 1, female students read a scenario about a male or female high-flying but overconfident student who fails a job interview, having previously read a text about global warming (low gender salience) or feminism (high gender salience). Female schadenfreude toward the male target's failure was higher, particularly in the high salience condition. In Study 2, male and female participants showed higher levels of schadenfreude toward a candidate of the opposite gender who had received preferential treatment in a business environment, but who was subsequently demoted. In Study 3, male participants showed significantly higher levels of schadenfreude toward a woman suffering a (non-fatal) car crash compared to a man suffering the same fate, but a reversal of this pattern for women was not significant. In sum, all three studies show evidence of intergroup schadenfreude in the realm of gender. We discuss reasons for the specific patterns of findings as well as differences with other research demonstrating greater schadenfreude toward same-gender targets.

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"It is not enough that you succeed; others must fail"
(attributed to Gore Vidal)

Schadenfreude is the pleasure derived from another's misfortune, typically resulting from events or agents other than the self. Until quite recently schadenfreude has been considered quite a personal emotion, with the target seen as getting his/her just desserts (e.g., Feather & Sherman, 2002), or because it affords the perceiver some measure of solace or even symbolic revenge (Nietzsche, 1887/1967), resulting from envy (e.g., Smith et al., 1996; van Dijk, Ouwerkerk, Goslinga, Nieweg, & Gallucci, 2006), or other threats to identity (e.g., Leach, Spears, Branscombe, & Doosje, 2003). However, in recent years the burgeoning field of research on group based emotions, especially as explanations for the varied and different forms of prejudice toward outgroups, has opened the door to consider an intergroup form of schadenfreude, as a quite specific form of emotional prejudice (Leach & Spears, 2008; Leach et al., 2003). For example Leach et al. showed that the Dutch experienced schadenfreude toward the Germans (a major soccer rival) losing the world cup, especially when reminded of their own recent or past failures in this domain. In this paper I present some evidence for intergroup schadenfreude for the case of gender.

The idea that people can experience group-based forms of emotions that (like their interpersonal variants) motivate and guide their behavior is no longer new. Given the evidence already established by research by ourselves and others that schadenfreude can operate at the inter-



group level and serve various group functions why do we need further evidence for intergroup schadenfreude from other domains or groups? There are several reasons why this is important and interesting. First of all, despite the earlier work showing that schadenfreude can be experienced at the group level (Leach & Spears, 2008; Leach et al., 2003), because such research has typically focused on a particular outgroup, without always comparing to schadenfreude toward an equivalent *ingroup* target, it is not always possible to conclude that an ingroup bias has occurred (one key signature of intergroup behavior). Put the other way around, if levels of a negative emotion such a schadenfreude are just as high for an in-group target as for an outgroup target, it maybe be difficult to conclude that this is evidence of an intergroup emotion, or indeed that ingroup forms of the emotion are any different (e.g., more intense) than interpersonal or intragroup forms. In order to test this properly, ideally we need to use complete designs in which ingroup and outgroup are represented as participants as well as targets. This aim is realized in two of the three studies presented here.

Second, gender forms a particularly interesting test-bed of evidence for intergroup schadenfreude. Despite conflicts and tensions between the sexes, not least the historical disadvantage suffered by women as a result of patriarchy and sexism, the relations between the sexes can also often be characterized by harmony, attraction, and close interpersonal relationships. For such reasons we might expect gender to provide a conservative test of intergroup schadenfreude compared to more antagonistic intergroup relations.

The case of gender is also important because, in the specific realm of schadenfreude research, some scholars have argued that we are more likely to experience schadenfreude toward others from the *same* gender group, because these people form our most relevant comparison others and thus the most relevant rivals. As such we are more likely to benefit when it comes to the potential uplift (albeit malicious) from seeing a relevant rival fail or fall, especially when we envy them (van Dijk et al., 2006). Because such research suggests the *opposite* of intergroup schadenfreude for gender (i.e., *intra*group schadenfreude), it is worth considering this research in a little more detail so that we can get a better understanding of whether, and when, intergroup schadenfreude might occur.

van Dijk et al. (2006) adapted the classic paradigm in which Smith and colleagues (1996) had demonstrated schadenfreude toward a successful, high-flying student, envied by participants, who subsequently suffered a fall from grace. In their research, van Dijk et al. found that male and female participants tended to experience higher schadenfreude to such a target when they were the same gender as themselves. They explained this in terms of the greater comparative relevance of the more similar others (e.g., Tesser, Millar, & Moore, 1988). In this case there seemed to be stronger evidence of intragroup schadenfreude, than intergroup schadenfreude (i.e., pleasure at the downfall of an outgroup member). However, one reason for this might have been that gender, as an intergroup categorization at least, was not very salient or relevant to the context in which this emotion was experienced in this paradigm. The context of study success (and failure) is arguably very important to students but perhaps relates more to their personal identity and achievements as individuals, and is not especially relevant to the intergroup relations that can afflict and divide men and women. In the current research we therefore aimed in various ways to make the "gender divide" more salient and relevant to the comparative context, to examine whether the intergroup (as opposed to the intragroup) form of this emotion might emerge the stronger when given an opportunity to do so.



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OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

In Study 1, we provide schadenfreude opportunity for female studies, using the classic paradigm of Smith et al. (1996) in which a successful student fails at a job interview, but manipulated the salience of the gender dimension in terms of a text taken from the internet that participants read beforehand. In Study 2, we move focus onto the realm of business (banking) in which gender competition and sexism could be salient, and also manipulated whether sexism might have played a role in the prior success of the person suffering the downfall (a demotion). Finally, in Study 3, we examine a schadenfreude opportunity in a stereotypically male domain (driving) to see whether this also renders the gender dimension more salient and thereby increases any intergroup schadenfreude due to a downfall in this domain (a car crash).

STUDY 1

In this study we presented female undergraduates with a scenario in which a high flying but overconfident student (male vs. female) subsequently fails at a job interview. We predicted that women will experience enhanced schadenfreude to the male target, but especially when the gender dimension is made salient previously.

METHOD

Participants and Design

Participants were female undergraduate students from Cardiff University (N=64), randomly allocated to a 2 (target: male vs. female) \times 2 (gender salience: high vs. low) between participants design.

Procedure and Materials

Gender salience was manipulated by requiring half the participants to read a Wikipedia text about global warming before the schadenfreude opportunity was presented (low gender salience) or a text about feminism (high salience). Participants then read the following scenario, in an ostensibly unrelated study:

Lucy [Mark] is a 25 year old woman [man]. S/he left university with a first class honors degree, is very popular with everyone s/he meets and has never experienced or contemplated failure. Lucy [Mark] is extremely confident and is all too aware of her/his positive attributes.

Lucy [Mark] goes for an interview for a position in the business domain. S/he is competing against three other candidates. Lucy [Mark] is confident that the interview went very well and feels certain s/he will get the job. A week later Lucy [Mark] receives a letter informing her/him that s/he has been unsuccessful at interview. One of the other candidates got the job.



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Dependent Measures

Schadenfreude was measured by two scales. For the first, used by van Dijk et al. (2006), participants rated agreement to four statements (What happened gives me satisfaction; What happened to ... gives me pleasure; I can't suppress a smile when I think about what happened; I had to laugh a bit at this situation) on 7-point Likert scales (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree) (Cronbach's alpha = .84). The participants then rated how they felt toward the target person on a range of emotions including joy, satisfaction, pleasure, happiness ($1 = not \ at \ all$, 7 = extremely) taken to form a second schadenfreude scale (Leach et al., 2003) (alpha = .93).

RESULTS

An ANOVA for the first Likert scale measure of schadenfreude as a function of target and salience resulted in a main effect of target: F(1, 60) = 5.68, p = .02, $\eta_p^2 = .086$, such that the male target induced relatively more schadenfreude (M = 2.98, SD = 1.23) than the female target (M = 2.29, SD = 1.08). Although the predicted interaction was not significant, F(1, 64) = 1.98, P = .16, P = .032, the specific simple effect for the male targets was significant, P(1, 60) = 7.18, P = .009, P = .009, with schadenfreude to the male target higher in the gender salient condition (P = 3.27, P = 1.20) than the nonsalient condition (P = 3.27, P = 1.20) than the nonsalient condition (P = 3.27, P = 1.20) to salient condition (P = 3.27, P = 1.20). Although the pattern of means was similar on the second, emotion rating, measure of schadenfreude, none of the effects were reliable.

DISCUSSION

As predicted, schadenfreude was stronger toward the male target, and especially so when the gender context was made more salient by reading a text about feminism beforehand. Although this pattern was only reliable on the first, Likert scale measure of schadenfreude, it may be that the emotional benefit of this emotion (i.e., imaginary revenge toward a rival group) was already achieved and satisfied by the first measure.

This provides the first clear evidence that women might experience more schadenfreude to the opposite gender than to the same gender targets when gender relations become salient (cf. van Dijk et al., 2006). However, a clear shortcoming of this study is that we only recruited participants from one gender (i.e., women) so it is not clear that intergroup schadenfreude operates for both men and women. Indeed, because sexism is likely to be more of an issue for women, gender may be more likely to be salient for them. For example, some previous research suggests that, given the status advantage of men, males are sometimes less likely to show forms of ingroup bias than women (e.g., Hogg & Turner, 1987). It is therefore important to investigate whether an equivalent intergroup schadenfreude effect for male participants occurs with respect to female targets who provide them with a schadenfreude opportunity, using a more complete design.



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STUDY 2

In this study we presented participants of both genders with a scenario in which a male *or* female employee of a bank was promoted by a team leader amid rumors that this leader had shown favoritism to the candidate for personal, *or* for sexist reasons (i.e., promale or profemale depending on the gender of the candidate). After poor performance, the candidate is demoted by the manager, over the head of the team leader, thus providing a schadenfreude opportunity. Once again we predicted greater schadenfreude toward the opposite gender target, especially when sexism was rumored to be a reason for the promotion (i.e., high gender salience).

METHOD

Participants and Design

Participants were male and female undergraduate students from Cardiff University (N = 160; 80 women, 80 men), participating for course credits, randomly allocated to a 2 (participant gender: male vs. female) \times 2 (sexism present: yes vs. no) between-participants design.

Materials and Procedure

Participants were informed that the study was designed "to assess the validity of performance appraisal methods when making decisions about internal promotion," and told it would take approximately 15 minutes. They then read the following text: You will be provided with an incident, in which an internal promotion is made within a large corporate bank… you will be asked to complete a series of response scales… A job opportunity has arisen in the finance department of a large corporate bank based in London. The successful candidate will receive a higher salary and more job responsibilities. Two employees within the department have been identified as potential candidates for internal promotion: Paul Stewart and Sarah Foley. Both employees have come highly recommended by their supervisor, have a 2:1 (namely, an upper second class degree, suggesting high competence) in accountancy from a respected university and both individuals are hard working and have worked for the company for a minimum of five years.

The team leader of the finance department was designated the responsibility of selecting the right person for the open position by the manager of the firm. After assessing each candidate's suitability to the job, the team leader decided to offer the job opportunity to Sara [Paul]. Sarah [Paul] was delighted to be offered the position, as s/he had great aspirations to achieve. The company is proud of its performance appraisal methods and their validity in predicting appropriate candidates for internal promotion.

[Sexism manipulation:]

...However, a colleague in the know commented that Sarah [Paul] probably got the job because s/he was one of the team leader's favoritism condition/no sexism).

[*Or*:]

...However, a colleague in the know commented that Sarah [Paul] probably got the job because the team leader prefers to work with women [men].



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[Schadenfreude opportunity toward Sarah/Paul:]

The manager of the firm assessed Sarah's [Paul's] work on her/his first assignment. It was decided that Sarah's [Paul's] work was not up to standard and that s/he was not cut out for the position. The manager demoted Sarah [Paul] back to her/his previous job.

Dependent Measures

The same two four-item measures of schadenfreude were used as in Study 1, and in the same order, namely the Likert scale measure (alpha = .86) and the emotion ratings measure (alpha = .89). In addition, a four-item measure of dispositional schadenfreude was used (see Leach et al., 2003; Smith et al., 1996) to control for any individual differences in this variable (alpha = .74).

RESULTS

An ANOVA on the Likert schadenfreude measure, controlling for dispositional schadenfreude, as a function of participant gender, target gender, and the presence of sexism, resulted in the predicted interaction between participant gender and target gender: F(1, 151) = 10.56, p = .001, $\eta_p^2 = .086$. The male target induced more schadenfreude among women (M = 3.03, SD = 1.19) than men (M = 2.54, SD = 1.13), whereas the female target attracted more schadenfreude among men (M = 2.82, SD = 1.16) than among women (M = 2.19, SD = 0.98). However, this interaction was not further qualified by the effect of sexism as a reason for taking the candidate on (Fs < 1 for all effects involving the sexism factor). Although the pattern of means for the gender \times target interaction was similar, there were no significant effects on the second emotion rating measure of schadenfreude.

DISCUSSION

In the present study, using a "complete" design, we found evidence of intergroup schadenfreude for both men and women (thus toward a female and male target respectively), in the domain of business. That is, participants showed more schadenfreude toward an outgroup target than an ingroup target, for both genders albeit again only on the first (Likert scale) measure of schadenfreude. Once again it may have been that any emotional benefit of schadenfreude was already satisfied by the time participants responded to the second measure.

Interestingly, however, this effect was *not* further strengthened (statistically moderated) when the target was favored for reasons relating to the sexist bias of the team leader, rather than favoritism more framed more personally. It seems that the favoritism of the team leader was sufficient to evoke similar levels of intergroup schadenfreude toward the outgroup target who suffered the subsequent ignominy of a demotion. One could infer that the gender dimension in this context was sufficiently salient already. The business and specifically banking domain could be seen as a male dominated area which could make women sensitive to the advantage of men in this context. However, that men also showed intergroup schadenfreude suggests that they too were sensitive to the gender dimension, and perhaps to women getting an unfair advantage in this



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domain. In the following study we choose a domain that is perhaps even more clearly associated with men, and even male chauvinism, to see whether this might enhance male schadenfreude toward women targets.

What is clear from this study is that there was more evidence for intergroup than intragroup schadenfreude. How do we explain this difference with the earlier research of van Dijk et al. (2006) which found greater evidence of schadenfreude to a same sex target? One clear possibility is that the banking context did not evoke the interpersonal/intragroup comparative context that can motivate rivalry with the same gender targets (i.e., more similar comparison others), as was the case when the targets were also students, like the participants themselves (see van Dijk et al., 2006). In the present context it seems that participants related to the targets more in terms of their group identities, and how these group identities distinguished them as a group from the outgroup. In the next study we also aimed to make gender identity salient through the gender stereotypes (and intergroup rivalries) associated with that domain, namely driving behavior.

STUDY 3

In the present study we move from the business domain to one where there is arguably an even more clear-cut gender-typing associated with that domain than the business domain used in the previous studies. Driving behavior is a good example of a domain in which gender is salient for both men and women, albeit perhaps for different reasons. On the one hand, driving is a domain, interest or skill that is often more stereotypically associated with men, and men may therefore be particularly likely to utilize a schadenfreude opportunity against women in this domain. On the other hand, with this in mind, women may also be likely to use the opportunity to derive enjoyment from a male failure in "their" stereotypic domain. We therefore assessed the reactions of both men and women to a (non-fatal) car accident caused and suffered by a male versus a female target. As a further test of whether such effects might be sensitive to gender-specific stereotypes we also manipulated whether a contributing factor to the accident was gender stereotypic, namely whether the person was driving fast and recklessly (more male gender stereotypic) or slowly and overcautiously (more female gender stereotypic). Specifically, we predicted that participants would experience stronger schadenfreude toward opposite gender target (i.e., intergroup schadenfreude) and more so if the reason for the accident was gender stereotypic. On this occasion we reverse the order of our two schadenfreude measures to assess whether any effects are primarily found on the first schadenfreude measure encountered or whether there is something about the differential sensitivity of these measures that accounts for the stronger effects on the Likert scale measure.

METHOD

Participants and Design

Participants were male and female undergraduate students from Cardiff University (N = 120; 60 men and 60 women), participating for course credits, randomly allocated to a 2 (partici-

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pant gender: male vs. female) \times 2 (target gender: male vs. female) \times 2 (driving behavior: risky vs. cautious) between-participants design.

Materials and Procedure

Participants were asked to read a newspaper extract with the expectation that they would be asked questions based on its content. The text, containing the manipulations, read as follows:

Yesterday evening, drivers on the A329 experienced heavy delays following a car crash. It has emerged that the incident was the result of the over cautious [risky] driving behavior of young female [male] driver Sarah Davidson [John Peters].

[Driving behavior manipulation (risky vs. cautious):]

...Speed cameras confirmed that a mile before the accident Sarah Davidson [John Peters] was travelling, unusually slowly, at speeds well below the speed limit.

Reports suggest that s/he was still travelling very slowly, as if signaling to other drivers that she was ready to leave the road and indicated a junction too early in an attempt to turn into a residential area. The accident occurred when a vehicle aiming to join the road at the first junction pulled out, believing it was safe to do so, in accordance to Davidson's [Peters'] signaling.

A witness who was lucky enough to avoid the collision was disgusted with Davidson's [Peters'] driving leading up to the accident and later described her/his confusing signaling and low speed as "Over cautious and unnecessary, with a clear danger to others on the road."

[*Or*:]

...Speed cameras confirmed that a mile before the accident Sarah Davidson [John Peters] was travelling, unusually fast, at speeds well above the speed limit.

Reports suggest that s/he was still travelling very quickly, not signalling to other drivers that s/he was ready to leave the road and indicated too late in an attempt to turn into a residential area. The accident occurred when a vehicle was unable to stop, joined the road, believing it was safe to do so, in accordance to Davidson's [Peters'] signaling.

A witness who was lucky enough to avoid the collision was disgusted with Davidson's [Peters'] driving leading up to the accident and later described her/his late signaling and high speed as "Over risky and unnecessary, with a clear danger to others on the road."

[*Both*:]

Miraculously, no one was hurt, but several cars involved in the accident were severely damaged or written off with insurance claims reaching well in excess of £10,000.

This scenario was followed by the dependent measures.

Dependent Measures

The same two four-item measures of schadenfreude were used as in Study 1, but this time starting with the emotion rating measure (joy, satisfaction, pleasure, happiness; alpha = .87) followed by the four item Likert scale (alpha = .86). Dispositional schadenfreude was also used as a covariate as in Study 2 (alpha = .74). We also included additional measures that did not produce systematic results and are not further discussed here (but available on request from the author).



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RESULTS

An ANOVA on the schadenfreude measure, controlling for dispositional schadenfreude, as a function of participant gender, target gender, and the driving behavior factor, resulted in the predicted interaction between participant gender and target gender on the Likert measure, F(1,111) = 7.65, p = .007, $\eta_p^2 = .065$, and also approached significance on the emotion rating measure, F(1, 111) = 3.81, p = .054, $\eta_p^2 = .033$. However, the simple effect of target was only reliable for female targets on both measures, F(1, 115) = 6.49, p = .012 for the Likert measure and F(1, 115) = 6.49. 115) = 4.40, p = .038 for the emotion rating measure. For the Likert measure, although the male target induced only slightly more schadenfreude among women (M = 1.84, SD = 0.88) than among men (M = 1.71, SD = 1.04), the female target attracted considerably more schadenfreude from men (M = 2.37, SD = 1.30) than from women (M = 1.47, SD = 0.77). This pattern was similar for the emotion rating measure: the male target actually induced slightly less schadenfreude among women (M = 1.45, SD = 0.78) than among men (M = 1.58, SD = 0.87), but again the female target attracted considerably more schadenfreude from men (M = 2.08, SD = 1.35) than from women (M = 1.33, SD = 0.50). These effects were not further qualified by the effect of driving behavior (nonsignificant for all interactions involving the sex-stereotyping of behavior factor). In addition, there was a main effect for participant gender such that men displayed higher levels of schadenfreude than women overall on both measures.

DISCUSSION

The results of Study 3 partially confirmed predictions. In this domain only male participants showed clear evidence of intergroup schadenfreude, in that their ratings were higher toward the female target than the equivalent male target. The absence of a similar effect for women (the pattern was in the right direction but not significant) could reflect that this domain is not important for them, or that, in line with van Dijk et al. (2006), they also see a female target as a relevant comparison other, providing an intragroup dimension that worked against the intergroup effect.

This interpretation remains speculative but it seems clear that the male participants did derive some greater satisfaction from seeing a woman having a car accident. This might reflect the fact that, at least some men, see driving as the province of men, with women who encroach on this domain with negative consequences, attracting the schadenfreude response.

Interestingly, the gender stereotypic (or counter-stereotypic) behavior associated with the crash did not moderate this effect. As in Study 2, a manipulation designed to enhance the gender salience of the schadenfreude opportunity did not increase the schadenfreude. Post hoc it is possible to speculate that men with sexist views on the driving skills of women, might be equally critical toward women who confirm a female stereotype (and drive cautiously) but also to women who "try to drive like men" (and drive more riskily).

Interestingly, reversing the order of the two schadenfreude measures did result for the first time in an almost significant parallel effect on the emotion rating measure (with the simple effect being significant). Although this supports the argument that having this measure in second place weakened the benefits of schadenfreude once experienced and expressed, the fact that the



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effect was present on the Likert measure, now placed second, suggest that this is (also) simply a more sensitive measure of this emotion.

Overall, the theoretical message of this study seems to be that it is important to take into account the domain in which the schadenfreude opportunity occurs and whether it is sufficiently relevant to make the intergroup dimension salient for the group concerned.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

To summarize, in three studies we have provided evidence for intergroup schadenfreude in the realm of gender. In Study 1, women felt more schadenfreude toward a high flying but overconfident student who subsequently failed a job interview when they were male rather than female, especially after gender was made salient. In Study 2, both women and men expressed more schadenfreude to a member of the opposite gender, than someone of the same gender, who received preferential treatment for a promotion, and who was subsequently demoted. In Study 3, men showed more schadenfreude toward a woman suffering a car accident, although women did not display an equivalent bias toward a man suffering the same accident. Overall the three studies provide clear evidence for "intergroup" schadenfreude and no clear evidence for intragroup schadenfreude — namely the prediction that people might display greater schadenfreude to targets from their own group, or own gender in this case (cf. van Dijk et al., 2006). Although Study 1 showed stronger intergroup schadenfreude under conditions designed to increase gender salience (reading a text about feminism vs. global warming), additional attempts to increase the salience and rivalry between the gender groups (citing sexism as a reason for promotion in Study 2; manipulating the gender-typing of the behavior in Study 3) did not further enhance intergroup schadenfreude effects. It seems that the salience of the gender categorization was already sufficient in these cases to evoke intergroup schadenfreude.

These studies are among the first published to explicitly demonstrate evidence for intergroup schadenfreude in complete designs (specifically Studies 2 and 3) where schadenfreude toward an outgroup target is compared to the same emotion against an ingroup target (cf. Leach & Spears, 2008; Leach et al., 2003). This provides further confirming evidence and validation for an intergroup form of schadenfreude that is distinct from interpersonal (or intragroup) variants of this emotion. Note also that in Studies 2 and 3 we also controlled for individual differences in the (dispositional) proclivity toward schadenfreude.

Demonstrating intergroup schadenfreude is particularly important and relevant for gender because previous research using a classic paradigm for researching schadenfreude in the interpersonal domain (i.e., van Dijk et al., 2006; see also Smith et al., 1996) had shown clear evidence that participants directed stronger schadenfreude toward targets from the same gender. However, this classic paradigm focused primarily on high-flying student targets, which may have encouraged more interpersonal/intragroup comparisons and rivalries with members of the ingroup. Invoking the business domain in Study 1 and Study 2 and the driving domain in Study 3, arguably rendered the intergroup dimension of gender more salient, paving the way for intergroup schadenfreude. Although gender is perhaps a unique group identity in that it can also be associated with more "outgroup" attraction at the interpersonal level, there are clearly times when both women and men see the opposite gender as a threatening or rival "outgroup." Under such condi-



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tions, when given the opportunity, they may well experience the malicious pleasure of schadenfreude even more than when a more similar, ingroup rival suffers a fall.

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