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Malicious Pleasure: *Schadenfreude* at the Suffering of Another Group

Colin Wayne Leach

Russell Spears

Nyla R. Branscombe

Bertjan Doosje

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### Abstract

Two studies examined intergroup *schadenfreude* -- malicious pleasure at an outgroup's misfortune. Study 1 showed that *schadenfreude* regarding a German loss in soccer was increased by interest in soccer and threats of Dutch inferiority. The effect of inferiority threat was especially strong for participants less interested in soccer, as the more interested showed relatively high *schadenfreude*. Study 2 replicated these effects by showing a similar pattern of *schadenfreude* regarding losses by Germany and Italy in another setting. However, *schadenfreude* toward legitimately superior Italy was lower when a norm of honest and direct expression was made salient to participants lower in soccer interest. These results establish *schadenfreude* as an emotion that is moderated by the salient dimensions of particular intergroup relations.

### Malicious Pleasure: *Schadenfreude* at the Suffering of Another Group

It is the wreckage of what surrounds me that provides the foundation for my virility (Fanon, 1967, p.211).

We are not always the most noble of creatures. Although we should feel sympathetic when seeing others suffer, we sometimes feel pleased. The German word *schadenfreude* (shadEn froy dE) describes this malicious pleasure (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989). Heider (1958, ch.11) argued that *schadenfreude* is malicious because pleasure is a “discordant” reaction to another’s misfortune. Unlike the “concordant” reaction of sympathy, *schadenfreude* establishes an antagonistic relationship to the unfortunate other. For this reason Heider saw *schadenfreude* as harmful to social relations.

*Schadenfreude* may in fact present a particularly insidious threat to social relations. Unlike the more legitimate feelings of “pride” or “gloating” in the active defeat of another through direct competition (e.g., Leach & Spears, 2002), *schadenfreude* is only enabled when a third party or circumstance causes another’s misfortune (for discussions see Leach, Snider, & Iyer, 2002; Ortony et al, 1988). This is why Nietzsche (1967) contrasted the pleasure of passively “seeing” others suffer (i.e., *schadenfreude*) to the pleasure of actively “making” others suffer. He argued that seeing others suffer provides a more insidious, and thus illegitimate, pleasure because it is not actively earned through direct competition.

Despite its destructive potential as a particularly insidious form of malice toward others, there has been little research of *schadenfreude*. In fact, no work has examined *schadenfreude* in the relations between *groups*. Thus, we draw on Nietzsche to propose three factors that should moderate feelings of intergroup *schadenfreude* at outgroups’ misfortunes. We examine these three propositions in two studies with real-world groups.

### 1. Domain Interest Should Increase *Schadenfreude*

Although *schadenfreude* is directed toward others, it is strongly tied to the (individual or group) self. For this reason Nietzsche believed that *schadenfreude* toward others' misfortunes is greatest in those domains that are self-relevant (see also Heider, 1958). This suggests the proposition that intergroup *schadenfreude* should be greatest when an outgroup suffers in a domain of interest to ingroup members. For example, those most interested in international soccer should feel the most pleasure in response to a rival country's downfall *in soccer*. This is because greater interest in the domain increases the self-relevance of others' performance within the domain.

Although focused on the interpersonal level, a number of emotion theories also propose that others' misfortunes in self-relevant domains promote *schadenfreude* (e.g., Lazarus, 1991; Ortony et al, 1988; R. H. Smith et al, 1996). Although not specifically concerned with intergroup *schadenfreude*, research in the social identity theory tradition is also consistent with this notion. For example, a number of studies have shown the negative evaluation of outgroups to be greatest in domains most relevant to ingroup identity (e.g., Mummendey & Schreiber, 1983; Mummendey & Simon, 1989). Thus, there is good reason to propose that the malicious pleasure of *schadenfreude* should be greatest when outgroups falter in a domain of interest to the ingroup.

### 2. The Threat of Status Inferiority Should Increase *Schadenfreude*

Our second proposition is that *schadenfreude* should be increased by threats to the ingroup's status. Nietzsche argued that those who are threatened by the possibility of their own inferiority have "a desire to deaden pain by means of affect" (p.127). Thus, feeling pleasure at another's misfortune can act as an "imaginary revenge" against the threat of inferiority. In

essence, Nietzsche suggested that the affective pleasure of *schadenfreude* is a way in which ingroups can compensate for a status inferiority that threatens their self-worth.

Although an examination of interpersonal emotion, R. H. Smith et al. (1996) have shown *schadenfreude* to result from perceived inferiority in much the same way as Nietzsche suggested. Under the guise of a career advising program, they exposed students to a male peer whose superiority (or inferiority) to them was made clear. As expected, the superior peer made participants feel inferior. The peer then suffered (or did not suffer) the misfortune of being denied admission to medical school. Those who perceived themselves as more inferior to the superior peer felt more pleasure when he suffered a misfortune. Importantly, R. H. Smith et al. showed that feeling inferior to the successful peer is what led to *schadenfreude* in response to his misfortune.

At the intergroup level, social identity research also suggests that threats to ingroup status will increase malicious responses to outgroups that pose such a threat (for reviews see Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears & Doosje, 1999; Mummendey & Otten, 1998). For example, members of actual low status groups, whose group identity is “chronically” threatened by their relative inferiority to higher status groups, evaluate outgroups most negatively (Mullen, Brown, & Smith, 1992). So too have more “acute” threats of group inferiority, in the form of poor performance on a specific task, been shown to make more negative evaluations of outgroups that perform better (for a review see Mummendey & Otten, 1998). Thus, there is general support for the proposition that the threat of ingroup inferiority can increase *schadenfreude* toward outgroups that present such a threat.

Although *schadenfreude* may serve as an opportunistic form of revenge against outgroups that evoke the threat of ingroup inferiority, Nietzsche’s notion of imaginary revenge

also suggests another possibility. Indeed, the idea is reminiscent of the displacement (or scapegoating) argument that the threat of ingroup inferiority posed by a superior outgroup can lead to prejudice toward an unrelated target (see Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford; Allport, 1954; Fromm, 1941). Although not based in psychodynamic theory, some prejudice research has shown that the threat of inferiority prompted by one outgroup is associated with malicious feelings toward an unrelated outgroup (e.g., Campbell, 1971; Kessler & Mummendey, 2001; Vanneman & Pettigrew, 1972). This kind of prejudice is more clearly malicious because it is a wholly self-serving attempt to use an outgroup's lower status to compensate for one's own inferiority. In a similar way, a more clearly malicious and self-serving form of *schadenfreude* may occur when an ingroup responds to the threat of status inferiority by feeling pleasure toward an unfortunate outgroup that does not pose the status threat. Thus, our second proposition is that the threat of ingroup inferiority should promote *schadenfreude* toward the threatening outgroup as well as toward unrelated outgroups that can serve as a target (perhaps because they are seen as rivals).

### 3. Legitimizing Circumstances Increase (Opportunistic) *Schadenfreude*

Nietzsche described *schadenfreude* as extremely opportunistic. Given that it is passive and indirect, *schadenfreude* relies on circumstances that cause another's misfortune and make it legitimate for the ingroup to enjoy the opportunity (Brigham et al., 1997; Heider, 1958; R. H. Smith, 1991). As Nietzsche put it (1967, p.123), our "[...]most secret tyrant-appetite disguises itself in words of virtue." For example, *schadenfreude* appears less legitimate when another's achievement is seen as deserved. This was shown recently in a study of interpersonal *schadenfreude* toward high achieving peers. Feather and Sherman (2002) showed that perceiving a peer's achievement as illegitimate (because it was undeserved) increased pleasure at the peer's

subsequent failure. In much the same way, intergroup *schadenfreude* should be sensitive to circumstances that make it appear more or less legitimate. For example, *schadenfreude* should be less legitimate in response to the misfortune of an outgroup that establishes itself as (legitimately) superior to the ingroup. Although the ingroup should want to be pleased at the misfortune of a superior outgroup, the outgroup's superiority should make *schadenfreude* at one (perhaps isolated) misfortune appear illegitimate.

A number of social identity theorists have made a similar claim by arguing that an ingroups' negative reaction to outgroups can be "constrained" by conditions that make it appear illegitimate (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; for a review see Spears, Jetten, & Doosje, 2001). For example, research has shown that low status groups are unlikely to devalue high status groups that enjoy a socially legitimated superiority (e.g. Doosje, Spears & Koomen, 1995; Ellemers, van Rijswijk, Roefs, & Simons, 1997). In fact, when a high status group's superiority is seen as legitimate lower status groups evaluate the high status group as superior in relevant attributes. Thus, low status groups confirm the "reality" of high status group's legitimate superiority. When a high status group's position is seen as illegitimate, however, low status groups appear less constrained and evaluate high status groups more negatively (Jetten, Spears, Hogg, & Manstead, 2000). Thus, there is good reason to believe that, like other intergroup evaluations, *schadenfreude* is less legitimate in response to the misfortune of a legitimately superior outgroup.

#### *Schadenfreude as an Intergroup Emotion*

The idea that we can feel emotion as a result of our group identity and our ingroup's relation to outgroups is a natural extension of theories of the group self, such as social identity and self-categorization theory. If we can define ourselves at the group level (in terms of nationality, ethnicity, or gender, for example), we should experience not just personal emotions,

but also intra- and inter-group emotions. Following this notion, E. R. Smith (1993) argued that the study of prejudice and intergroup relations is enriched by attention to emotion. He argued that specific emotions represent the evaluations ingroups make of outgroups better than more general notions of prejudice or group bias. There is now growing evidence that the study of specific intergroup emotions enables a more substantive characterization of evaluation in the context of intergroup relations (for reviews see Leach et al. 2002; Mackie & Smith, 2002).

*Schadenfreude* is an emotion important to intergroup relations because it is the *misfortune* of an outgroup that is explicitly enjoyed. This malicious pleasure distinguishes *schadenfreude* from positively valenced forms of intergroup evaluation that more actively celebrate an ingroup's superiority with little apparent malice or derogation (e.g., "pride" or "gloating"). The passive and indirect nature of the malice in *schadenfreude* also distinguishes it from the active and direct antipathy shown in the anger expressed toward outgroups in direct competition with the ingroup (e.g., Kessler & Mummendey, 2001; Leach, Iyer, & Pedersen, 2002; Mackie et al. 2000). Thus, *schadenfreude* constitutes a unique intergroup emotion that has not been studied within the prejudice or social identity traditions or their recent extension in the notion of intergroup emotion.

### Present Studies

Sport can arouse great passions, especially when a favorite team locks horns with a long-standing rival. This is partly due to the fact that sports teams often represent important group identities (Branscombe & Wann, 1991). We therefore examined intergroup *schadenfreude* within the context of international soccer competition. We were particularly interested in Dutch reaction to the fortune of their neighbor and rival, Germany. Physical proximity, greater size, and better international recognition and influence make Germany a highly salient and important outgroup



rival for the Dutch (as we establish in a pilot study below). In Study 2, we also examine *schadenfreude* toward Italy, a rival mainly in the domain of a particular soccer tournament in which they were matched against the Netherlands.

### *Hypothesized Explanations*

The three propositions we developed above, supported by Nietzsche's philosophy as well as social identity theory and the intergroup emotion perspective, serve as our general hypotheses. First, we hypothesized that *schadenfreude* increases when an outgroup's misfortune occurs in a domain of interest to the ingroup. The role of interest in the domain of the outgroup's misfortune is examined in both studies. Second, we hypothesized that the threat of ingroup inferiority increases *schadenfreude* toward rival outgroups, whether they pose the threat or not. We examine the effect of an acute and chronic threat of inferiority on *schadenfreude* toward an unrelated outgroup in Study 1. We examine the effect of an acute threat in *schadenfreude* toward an unrelated outgroup and toward the outgroup posing the threat in Study 2. Third, we hypothesized that the circumstances surrounding an outgroups' misfortune moderate the legitimacy, and thus level, of *schadenfreude*. In Study 2 we examine the legitimate superiority of the outgroup as a way to delegitimize, and thus decrease, *schadenfreude*. We also examine ingroup norms as moderators of the legitimacy of *schadenfreude*.

### *Accounting for Individual Differences*

Given that *schadenfreude* has been most often discussed in the context of interpersonal relations, we thought it important to account for the effects of individual-level factors. Showing that group-level factors explain intergroup *schadenfreude* above and beyond individual-level explanations should help establish *schadenfreude* as an intergroup phenomenon. Interestingly, research has shown individuals to vary in their propensity to enjoy others' suffering (see R. H.

Smith et al., 1996; Leach, Iyer, & Irvin, 2000). Leach, Smith, and Garonzik (2000) have, in fact, shown people to differ in their propensity for interpersonal *schadenfreude*. We therefore utilized their measure to account for such effects.

The personal degree of (dis)liking for an outgroup has also been shown to affect interpersonal *schadenfreude* (R. H. Smith et al., 1996), and might account for negative responses to the outgroup whether or not they suffer a misfortune. We therefore measured individual differences in (dis)liking of outgroups to account for such effects. This should help us rule out the possibility that *schadenfreude* is simply a function of disliking and make more clear the unique form of malice present in this emotion.

Lastly, we assessed level of identification with the ingroup as it has been consistently shown to explain levels of outgroup devaluation (see Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999, for a review). Again, accounting for these alternative explanations should enable a more stringent test of intergroup *schadenfreude*.

#### Pilot Studies: Examining Rivalry with Germany and Interest in Soccer

Before proceeding to an examination of our central hypotheses we wanted to test the notion that the Dutch view Germany as a rival in soccer and more generally. If Germany is not seen as a rival the outgroup may make little sense as a target of *schadenfreude* that seeks to compensate for a general threat of ingroup inferiority. We also wanted to establish the reliability and validity of our measure of domain interest before using it as a variable in subsequent studies. We therefore conducted two short pilot studies with these aims in mind.

#### Pilot Study 1

In the first pilot study, we examined our notion that the Dutch view Germany as a rival group. Thus, we posed several questions to a sample of 24 University of Amsterdam students, who participated in a mass testing session for course credit.

On a 7 point bi-polar scale participants reported the extent to which they saw “Germany” (1) or “the Netherlands” (7) as having greater status internationally. The Mean response of 3.71 ( $SD = .95$ ) indicated that the Dutch saw Germany as having slightly higher status than the Netherlands. Using a similar scale we asked participants whether “Germany” (1) or “the Netherlands” (7) had more power internationally. The Mean response of 2.83 ( $SD = 1.09$ ) indicated that Germany was perceived as more powerful. On 7 point Likert-type scales, anchored by the responses “strongly disagree” (1) and “strongly agree” (7), participants also reported perceiving a general rivalry with Germany ( $M = 5.63$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ) and some degree of envy for German soccer success specifically ( $M = 4.35$ ,  $SD = 2.23$ ). In sum, Dutch participants see Germany as a successful rival in general and envy them in the domain of soccer. Germany is, therefore, a likely target of Dutch *schadenfreude*.

#### Pilot Study 2

In a second pilot study, we further examined the degree to which the Dutch see Germany as a rival in the domain of soccer. We also examined the reliability and validity of our measure of soccer interest, given its importance to our argument. This was accomplished by giving a brief questionnaire to 60 first year psychology students at the University of Amsterdam, who participated in a mass testing session for course credit.

Two questions assessed the extent of the Dutch rivalry with Germany in soccer. The first question directly asked whether Germany was a rival for the Dutch in international soccer. Responses ranged from (1) “not at all agree” to (7) “very much agree.” The second question

asked if the German national soccer team was stronger than the Dutch team. In this bi-polar format, responses ranged from (1) “Dutch team stronger” to (7) “German team stronger.” As shown in Table 1 participants tended to agree that Germany was a rival in soccer, with a mean response just above the mid-point of the scale. Participants tended to see the Dutch as a slightly stronger soccer team, with responses just below the mid-point of this scale. Taken together, these responses suggest that Germany is seen as a near equal status rival in soccer and should thus be a relevant target for Dutch *schadenfreude* despite the fact that Germany does not evoke a direct threat of Dutch inferiority in the settings examined.

As in Studies 1 and 2 below, soccer interest was assessed by a three item scale that proved reliable here ( $\alpha = .95$ ). To provide some construct validity evidence for our soccer interest scale we also included a 7 item measure of Dutch group identification (see Studies 1 and 2), that proved reliable here ( $\alpha = .94$ ). We argued above that those more interested in the domain get more enjoyment from seeing a rival lose in the specific domain. As such, interest in the domain of the rival’s loss is a context-specific way of examining the relevance of a rival’s loss for the (group) self. This makes domain interest quite different to other assessments of relevance, like level of overall identification with the ingroup. To provide some support for our reasoning that soccer interest is a better, more context-specific, measure of relevance of the rival’s loss to the self we examined its’ associations with the questions regarding the Dutch soccer rivalry with Germany. These relationships can be compared to that obtained for the more general measure of national group identification.

The first panel of Table 1 shows that participants expressed a moderate level of interest in soccer, with a mean at the mid-point of the scale. Levels of national group identification were slightly higher. Importantly, the correlations between soccer interest and the other measures,

shown in Table 1, support our conceptualization of soccer interest. Thus, soccer interest was moderately correlated to disagreement with the view that Germany is a better soccer team. Although group identification was correlated to soccer interest, group identification had no association with this relative evaluation of the two countries. Only interest in soccer was correlated with seeing the ingroup team as stronger. Thus, interest in soccer appears to better assess participant's investment in the domain in which rivals might suffer a misfortune.

### Study 1: The World Championship of Soccer

This study was conducted just after the 1998 Soccer World Cup, a tournament that excites great interest and passion the world over. We were particularly interested in Dutch reactions to the elimination of Germany. This outgroup's unexpected loss to Croatia in the quarterfinal provided the Dutch ample opportunity for intergroup *schadenfreude*. Importantly, the German loss had no implications for Dutch success as Germany was placed in a different grouping of teams and exited the tournament earlier than the Netherlands.

In addition to offering a first demonstration of intergroup *schadenfreude*, this study examined our propositions that (1) interest in the domain of the rival's loss and (2) the threat of ingroup inferiority increase *schadenfreude* toward an outgroup unrelated to the threat. In the context of the World Cup we hypothesized that the German loss should be more pleasing to those ingroup members highly interested in soccer and threatened by information that their ingroup is inferior in World Cup soccer.

Given that the social identity research has examined both "chronic" and "acute" threats of group inferiority, we operationalized threat in these two ways. First, we introduced a threat of chronic inferiority, by reminding half the respondents of the Netherlands' historically weak credentials in international soccer. We made the Netherlands' chronic inferiority in soccer salient

by reminding them of the relatively superior world cup success of other soccer nations (i.e., Brazil, England). Second, we introduced a more acute threat of inferiority by reminding participants of the Netherlands' specific World Cup loss to Brazil during the tournament. Making salient the Netherlands' painful loss in the 1998 World Cup tournament should provide a more circumscribed and acute threat of inferiority in this particular tournament. Importantly, these threats of Dutch inferiority were unrelated to their relationship to Germany.

Although the chronic and acute forms of inferiority threat are slightly different, we expected both independently to increase intergroup *schadenfreude*. We also thought it possible that the two forms of threat could interact with soccer interest. Although those lower in soccer interest should express less *schadenfreude* at Germany's loss, the threat of relative inferiority should increase their *schadenfreude*. However, because those higher in soccer interest should already express high *schadenfreude*, such threats might affect them less.

### *Method*

#### Participants

First year psychology students at the University of Amsterdam (49 males and 98 females, evenly distributed across conditions) participated in a mass testing session for course credit.

#### Design

In a three factor design, "threat of chronic inferiority" (Dutch general world cup inferiority salient vs. control) and "threat of acute inferiority" (Dutch specific world cup inferiority salient vs. control) were both manipulated as between participant factors while "soccer interest" was measured with a scale. Just before the manipulations were introduced, soccer interest was assessed by three items ("I am interested in soccer"; "I enjoy watching soccer on TV"; and "I have regularly watched/listened to the World Cup"). Responses were given on a 7

point Likert-type scale that ranged from “very much disagree” (1) to “very much agree” (7). When combined, these items formed a reliable scale ( $\alpha = .91$ ).

In the chronic threat condition, participants were asked about the World Cup soccer performances of The Netherlands compared to England and Brazil. These questions were designed to make salient The Netherlands’ historical failings in World Cup soccer and chronic inferiority compared to the other two countries. For example, participants were asked to check which of the three countries had won the most World Cups. Of the 71 participants in the chronic threat condition, 69 (97%) answered Brazil correctly. Participants were also asked to indicate whether England or Brazil had eliminated the Netherlands from the World Cup most often; 65 of 71 participants (92%) answered Brazil correctly. Thus, those in the chronic threat condition were well aware of The Netherlands long-standing inferiority in World Cup soccer. In the control condition, similarly worded questions asked which of the same three countries was most involved in political and economic issues in Europe.

Following the chronic threat manipulation, a threat of acute inferiority was manipulated by varying the order in which the relevant World Cup matches were evaluated. In the acute threat condition, respondents first answered questions concerning the Brazil vs. Netherlands semi-final match. Participants were informed that the Netherlands had lost to Brazil 4-2 and were asked several questions regarding their interest in and knowledge of this result. This was followed by similar questions regarding Germany’s 3-0 loss to Croatia in the quarterfinal. In the control condition, this order was reversed so that participants rated the German loss to Croatia before the (threatening) Dutch loss to Brazil.

Individual Differences: Covariates

Degree of national identification was measured on the first page of the questionnaire with a seven item scale used in previous research (see Ellemers et al. 1999). Responses were given on a 7 point Likert-type scale that ranged from “very much disagree” (1) to “very much agree” (7) and the scale proved reliable ( $\alpha = .91$ ). This was followed by single item measures of liking for Germany and other soccer oriented countries, rated from “very little” (1) to “very much” (7). At the end of the questionnaire, participants completed Leach et al.’s (2000) four item measure of dispositional interpersonal *schadenfreude* ( $\alpha = .82$ ).

#### Dependent measure

To assess their feelings about the losers of the relevant World Cup matches, participants rated six emotion terms (*schadenfreude* - “leedvermaak,” relieved - “opgelucht,” happy - “blij,” satisfied “vergenoegd,” sympathy - “sympathie,” and sad - “verdrietig”) on 7-point scales (“not at all” to “very much”). A principle-axis factor analysis with oblique rotation produced a two-factor solution explaining 61.8 % of the variance in the items. Satisfied, relieved, happy, and *schadenfreude* formed the dominant items on the first factor (all loadings exceeded .60) whereas the two sympathy items formed a distinct second factor ( $r = .09$ ). This supported our expectation that *schadenfreude* is a distinct emotional response to another group’s misfortune.<sup>1</sup> When combined, the four relevant items formed a reliable measure of *schadenfreude* regarding Germany’s loss ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

#### Results

Using SPSS GLM, a 2 (Chronic threat: Dutch chronic inferiority salient vs. Control) x 2 (Acute threat: Dutch acute inferiority salient vs. Control) x the continuous measure of soccer interest design was analyzed, with Dutch identification, disliking of Germans, and dispositional *schadenfreude* treated as covariates. Participant’s sex was excluded here, as it produced no



reliable main or interaction effects in prior analyses. Although some might argue that participant's sex should be an important predictor in a sport domain, level of interest in soccer appeared to account for the variance that might otherwise be more indirectly explained by sex.

Confirming prior research on interpersonal *schadenfreude*, several of the covariates were predictive of intergroup *schadenfreude* (see Table 2). Accounting for these effects allows a more powerful test of whether the hypothesized explanations of intergroup *schadenfreude* offer additional explanatory value.

As expected, greater *schadenfreude* was reported by those higher in soccer interest,  $F(1, 131) = 26.19, p < .001$ . Those exposed to a threat of acute inferiority,  $F(1, 131) = 7.04, p = .009$ , and those exposed to a threat of chronic inferiority,  $F(1, 131) = 9.12, p = .003$ , also expressed greater *schadenfreude* than those in the matching control conditions. These main effects were qualified by a threat of chronic inferiority x soccer interest interaction,  $F(1, 131) = 5.42, p = .021$ . The reliable interaction between threat of chronic inferiority and soccer interest establishes that soccer interest predicts *schadenfreude* differently across conditions of chronic inferiority. Although similar in pattern, the threat of acute inferiority by soccer interest interaction did not reach conventional levels of reliability,  $F(1, 131) = 3.37, p = .07$ . Confirming the independence of the two forms of inferiority threat, the two did not interact with each other ( $p > .10$ ), nor did the two forms of threat interact with soccer interest to produce a 3-way interaction ( $p > .10$ ).

As shown in Figure 1, level of soccer interest is a strong positive predictor of *schadenfreude* for those not exposed to the threat of their group's chronic inferiority in soccer,  $b = .422 (SE = .08), p < .001$ . This slope shows that in the absence of threat, those lowest in soccer interest expressed relatively little mean level *schadenfreude* regarding Germany's loss. Despite the absence of threat, however, *schadenfreude* increased with higher levels of interest in the

domain. In fact, at the highest levels of soccer interest those not exposed to the threat of inferiority expressed as much *schadenfreude* as those threatened.

Although *schadenfreude* was less affected by level of soccer interest under the threat of group inferiority than in the control condition, the slope for interest was positive and reliably different from zero,  $b = .170$  ( $SE = .08$ ),  $p = .04$ . Thus, those with greater interest expressed higher levels of *schadenfreude*. Unlike those not under threat, however, those who were threatened by group inferiority showed relatively high mean levels of *schadenfreude* even when not interested in soccer. This is why the intercept of the slope for those under threat is higher than the intercept of the slope for those in the control condition.

### *Discussion*

Study 1 provides evidence for ingroup member's expression of *schadenfreude* in response to an outgroup loss. The degree of this malicious pleasure was explained by our first two hypotheses. First, those more interested in soccer expressed greater *schadenfreude*. Thus, those Dutch with the greatest interest in the domain of soccer gained the most pleasure from being reminded of Germany's loss in the most important soccer tournament in the world. This is consistent with our proposition that *schadenfreude* is greatest in domains relevant to ingroup members.

Second, two different threats of group inferiority increased intergroup *schadenfreude*. The threat of the Netherlands' chronic inferiority in soccer increased Dutch *schadenfreude* toward Germany. The more acute threat presented by the Netherlands' specific world cup loss to Brazil also increased *schadenfreude*. Thus, the threat of a one-time inferiority in a specific match promoted *schadenfreude* in much the same way as chronic inferiority in the domain. This provided further support for our notion that *schadenfreude* toward a specific outgroup rival is

strongly tied to more general concern for ingroup inferiority. In fact, *schadenfreude* toward Germany was the result of threats presented by Dutch inferiority to other outgroups. In this way *schadenfreude* appeared to be more of a compensation for the threat of ingroup inferiority rather than a competitive reaction to a threatening outgroup. That the threat of ingroup inferiority led to greater *schadenfreude* toward an outgroup, also shows that *schadenfreude* can be a decidedly intergroup phenomenon. The intergroup nature of Dutch *schadenfreude* toward the Germans was further supported by the fact that individual differences in interpersonal *schadenfreude* and personal disliking of Germans, while predictive of *schadenfreude*, did not account for the hypothesized effects.

Importantly, the threat of ingroup inferiority and interest in soccer also interacted to predict *schadenfreude*. Thus, intergroup *schadenfreude* was the result of an interaction between an introduced threat and a pre-existing interest in the domain of the outgroup's misfortune. More specifically, when the Netherlands' chronic inferiority in World Cup Soccer was not salient those more interested in soccer expressed relatively high levels of *schadenfreude*. That those with strong interest in the domain in which an outgroup suffered a misfortune expressed strong *schadenfreude* in the absence of threat suggests that those high in domain interest may be chronically threatened. As such, those high in domain interest expressed strong *schadenfreude* when the misfortune of an outgroup simply gave them a legitimate opportunity to do so.

Degree of soccer interest played less of a role, however, under conditions of threat. When the Dutch were threatened with their chronic inferiority in World Cup soccer, even those low in soccer interest expressed greater *schadenfreude* than those who were not threatened in this way. Although those lower in soccer interest expressed little *schadenfreude* under normal

circumstances, the threat of group inferiority increased their pleasure at an outgroup's loss in the domain in which they had been threatened.

In sum, Study 1 provided support for our first two hypotheses. Interest in the domain and the threat of ingroup inferiority both increased levels of *schadenfreude* regarding Germany's loss to a third party. Study 2 was designed to replicate these results and to extend them by also examining our third hypothesis that group-based *schadenfreude* should be moderated by circumstances that make it more or less legitimate.

### Study 2: The European Championship of Soccer

In 2000, the Netherlands' national soccer team competed with some of the finest teams in the world for the coveted European Championship. England eliminated Dutch rival Germany early in the tournament, precluding Dutch competition with Germany and any material benefit from the German loss. The Netherlands proceeded to the semi-final round, but were defeated by Italy. This defeat was especially bitter, because the Dutch had tied Italy in regulation only to lose in "sudden death" overtime. New found rival Italy was, however, defeated in the final by France. These actual events set the stage for intergroup *schadenfreude* toward both Germany and Italy.

### *Pilot Study 3: Examining Dutch Rivalry with Germany and Italy*

Before proceeding, we examined perceptions of the two target groups used in the study. We wanted to be sure that both groups were seen as rivals (to some degree) and that perceptions of each National team's strength and legitimacy were in line with our expectations. Thus, we administered a brief questionnaire to 119 first year psychology students at the University of Amsterdam, who participated in a mass testing session for course credit. These 10 questions were an expanded version of the questions asked about the Dutch rivalry with Germany in Pilot Study 2. Thus, participants were asked to what degree they saw (1) Germany and Italy as general

rivals for the Dutch, (2) Germany and Italy as soccer rivals, (3) Germany and Italy as a stronger team than the Netherlands. Participants were also asked to what degree they believed Dutch people in general, or they personally, would see it as legitimate if Germany or Italy were successful and reached the semi-final round of the tournament.

As shown in the second panel of Table 1, participants saw Germany as a more general rival than Italy. Although Italy and Germany were seen as equal soccer rivals, it is worth noting that agreement that both teams were rivals of the Dutch was above the mid-point of the scale. Thus, both teams were considered fairly strong rivals. Although there was no difference in perceived soccer rivalry, Italy was judged to be a stronger team. Indeed, Italy was evaluated as stronger than Germany and, at an absolute level, stronger than the Netherlands. This was corroborated by the findings that individuals themselves reported viewing success by Italy as more legitimate than success by Germany. Participants also reported the view that most Dutch would see Italy's success in the tournament as more legitimate than the same level of success achieved by Germany. Taken together, these results suggest that Germany and Italy are both seen as rivals for the Dutch. They also suggest that the Italian soccer team is viewed as somewhat superior and that this superiority is judged to be legitimate. As such, the fate of Germany and Italy in the 2000 European Championship appears to be an appropriate context in which to examine our hypotheses regarding *schadenfreude* toward rival outgroups under differing circumstances of threat and legitimacy. Importantly, as in Study 1, the outgroups' losses had no direct implications for the success of the Dutch team although Italy's loss had especially clear psychological implications.

### *Present Study*

In fact, the actual events of the 2000 European Championship of soccer allowed us to examine all three of our hypotheses regarding intergroup *schadenfreude*. First, to replicate Study 1, we again examined interest in the domain of soccer as facilitating *schadenfreude*. Given that those higher in soccer interest should express the most *schadenfreude*, we expected those lower in interest to be most sensitive to the manipulations of threat and legitimacy we discuss below.

Second, we further replicate Study 1 by examining the acute threat of ingroup inferiority brought out by a specific loss to a rival. This time the Dutch loss was to Italy. We expect that this acute threat of group inferiority should work the same way as in Study 1 and increase *schadenfreude* toward general rival Germany.

Third, we consider the opportunistic nature of *schadenfreude* by examining the role of legitimacy concerns in facilitating or constraining it. The particular situation of the European Championship presented us with an opportunity to examine the role of outgroup superiority in making *schadenfreude* less legitimate. Given that the Dutch loss to Italy served as an acute threat of inferiority that was expected to increase *schadenfreude* toward Germany we also examined the effect of this threat on *schadenfreude* toward Italy itself. Although we know from Study 1 that the threat of inferiority caused by an ingroup loss increases *schadenfreude* regarding an unrelated German loss, we do not know if this kind of threat can increase *schadenfreude* toward the specific rival that caused the threat. It could certainly be argued that *schadenfreude* should increase when one has the opportunity to feel pleased about the loss of a rival that has recently defeated one's group. This would make *schadenfreude* a kind of actual revenge against those who present the threat of group inferiority.

The social identity notion of “reality constraints,” however, suggests to us that being defeated by a rival should establish them as legitimately superior. *Schadenfreude* toward a legitimately superior rival should be less legitimate. Thus, a recent defeat should decrease *schadenfreude* toward the group that has achieved relative superiority by directly defeating the ingroup. In the present case, making salient the Dutch loss to Italy should decrease *schadenfreude* toward Italy given this rival’s established superiority to the Netherlands. This same reminder of the loss to Italy should operate, however, as an inferiority threat when the Dutch are presented with an opportunity for *schadenfreude* toward Germany (just as in Study 1). In other words, in the present case, a recent reminder of the loss to Italy may operate either as a reality constraint or an inferiority threat, depending on the rival toward which *schadenfreude* is directed.

Ingroup norms are another factor that should moderate the legitimacy and thus the level of *schadenfreude*. For example, the expression of *schadenfreude* may be more legitimate within the context of a norm for honesty and directness relative to the norm of tolerance that may generally be in operation. By reducing the undesirability of malicious pleasure, a norm of honesty and directness might enable greater levels of *schadenfreude* toward all outgroups. This would suggest that legitimacy concerns moderate the expression of *schadenfreude* (on the questionnaire), rather than the emotional experience itself. We, however, agree with Nietzsche that the legitimacy of the emotion itself is moderated by factors like outgroup superiority. Thus, rather than expecting the norm for honesty to disinhibit *schadenfreude* toward legitimately superior Italy we believe that the norm will reinforce this reality constraint. As such, participants should show *less schadenfreude* when encouraged to be honest and direct about Italy’s legitimate superiority.

How might the effects of domain interest, threat, and legitimacy concerns outlined here combine? From Study 1 we might expect main effects of domain interest and threat as before (although the loss to Italy is a reality constraint as well as a threat with respect to the Italian rival). However, interest moderated the effects of inferiority threat in Study 1, and this may also be the case here. If this operates in the same way as Study 1 we would expect inferiority threat, and possibly also legitimacy concerns, to have greater impact on *schadenfreude* for those lower in domain interest, who seem more sensitive to circumstance. In this case we should expect those lower in interest to show more *schadenfreude* toward the German rival after exposure to the Italian loss (i.e. a threat) but less *schadenfreude* toward the Italian rival (i.e. a reality constraint). This pattern might be especially clear when the salient norm encourages people to express their feelings honestly and directly. Responses of high interest people may be less influenced by these contextual factors, assuming their readiness to feel *schadenfreude* is already present, and that they are also more resistant to conceding a rival's legitimate superiority.

As in Study 1, we also accounted for the effects of group identity as well as the more individual-level explanations of *schadenfreude* in this study.

### *Method*

#### Participants

Participants were 252 Dutch first year psychology students at the University of Amsterdam (62 males and 190 females who were evenly distributed across conditions), who participated in a mass testing session for course credit.

#### Design

In the four factor design, acute threat of inferiority, the rival experiencing a loss, and ingroup norm were manipulated as between participant factors and interest in soccer was



measured with the same scale used in Study 1 ( $\alpha = .91$ ). As in Study 1, the threat of ingroup inferiority was made salient or not by varying the order of the soccer matches to be evaluated. In the acute threat condition, participants were reminded of the details regarding the Netherlands' bitter loss to Italy in the European Championship. They then responded to questions regarding this match. In the control condition, participants first rated a match where Germany or Italy lost.

The specific rival was manipulated by having participants evaluate the tournament loss of either a general (Germany) or particular (Italian) rival. As shown in Study 1, Germany is a general rival toward whom the Dutch express *schadenfreude*. The Netherlands' rivalry with Italy is more specific, relating mainly to their head to head match in the European Championship. In this rivalry, Italy established itself as superior in the European Championship by defeating the Netherlands in a head to head match. When made salient, Italy's specific superiority should decrease Dutch *schadenfreude* toward them, especially under a norm of honesty and directness.

Either a norm of tolerance or honesty/directness, both of which are seen as prototypically Dutch (see Hamstra et al., 1999), was made salient to participants. Again, we reasoned that a norm of tolerance should be similar to that generally in operation when evaluating national groups. Indeed, part of the social undesirability of *schadenfreude* has to do with the possibility that it may be taken as a sign of intolerance or prejudice.<sup>2</sup> Thus, relative to a norm of tolerance, a norm of honesty/directness should reinforce the legitimacy of the superior rival, Italy, when this country's superiority is most salient. Thus, honesty and directness should reduce *schadenfreude* toward Italy when their superiority to the Dutch is salient. If, however, the honesty/directness norm disinhibits the expression of *schadenfreude*, it should lead to greater *schadenfreude* toward both Germany and Italy (especially under the threat of ingroup inferiority).

In a two-paragraph segment, participants were told that different European nationalities are characterized by different attributes. In one condition, Dutch norms of tolerance were emphasized by telling participants that the Netherlands was known throughout the world for its tolerance of other groups. The statement also stated that tolerance was a very positive attribute. In the other condition, Dutch norms of honest and direct expression were emphasized and valorized. The scenario stated, for example, that the Dutch “are well known for openly and honestly daring to say what they think without necessarily paying attention to the consequences. Moreover, being direct is generally seen as a clearly positive characteristic by people from other countries.”

Our norm manipulation appeared successful given participants’ responses to a self-stereotyping measure that asked them to rate to what degree the Dutch possessed certain attributes. Those exposed to the tolerance norm ( $M = 5.32$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ) rated the Dutch as more “tolerant” than those exposed to the honest and direct norm ( $M = 5.06$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ ),  $F(1, 273) = 2.85$ ,  $p = .09$ . This difference remained even with alternative explanations of *schadenfreude* controlled ( $p = .06$ ). Those exposed to the honest and direct norm ( $M = 5.54$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ) rated the Dutch as more “direct” than those exposed to the tolerance norm ( $M = 4.93$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ),  $F(1, 273) = 13.19$ ,  $p \leq .001$ . This effect remained reliable when the alternative explanations of *schadenfreude* were controlled ( $p \leq .001$ ).

#### Alternative Explanations: Covariates

Dutch national identification ( $\alpha = .86$ ), dislike of the two rivals (Germany and Italy), and dispositional interpersonal *schadenfreude* ( $\alpha = .80$ ) were used as covariates. Given that participant’s sex showed no main or interaction effects in preliminary analyses it was not included here.

## Dependent Measure

As in Study 1, participants indicated their feelings about the loser of the relevant matches. They were asked to rate five emotion terms designed to assess *schadenfreude* (*schadenfreude* - “leedvermaak”, happy - “blij”, and three synonyms of satisfied - “vergenoegd,” “voldoening,” “genoegdoening”). When combined, these items formed a reliable measure of *schadenfreude* regarding the (German or Italian) rival’s loss ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

## Results

After accounting for the covariates (see Table 2), only one of the hypothesized explanations of intergroup *schadenfreude* produced a reliable main effect. As in Study 1, those more interested in soccer expressed greater *schadenfreude* at the loss of a rival,  $F(1, 247) = 34.77, p < .001$ . This is further confirmation of hypothesis 2. Thus, interest in the domain of a rival’s misfortune increases *schadenfreude* in response to their misfortune.

The three manipulated factors produced a reliable three-way interaction,  $F(1, 247) = 5.16, p = .02$ . This effect was further moderated by soccer interest, resulting in a reliable four-way interaction between all hypothesized explanations,  $F(1, 247) = 4.80, p = .03$ . Given the small cell sizes produced by any other analysis, we treated soccer interest as a dichotomous factor to decompose this complex interaction. Those scoring below the median score of “4.33” (50%) were coded as lower in interest, while those scoring above the median were coded as higher in interest. A simple effects test showed the interaction of the three manipulated variables to be marginally reliable for those lower in soccer interest,  $F(1, 236) = 3.34, p = .07$ , but not for those higher,  $F(1, 236) = .43, p = .51$ . As in Study 1, those higher in soccer interest appear less sensitive to manipulations designed to moderate levels of *schadenfreude*. Their relatively high levels of *schadenfreude* suggest that they see it as legitimate to express *schadenfreude* regardless

of the situation (see Figure 2a). Those lower in soccer interest appear more sensitive to the context, as they were in Study 1. Thus, we focus on those lower in soccer interest.

#### Participants lower in soccer interest

Simple effects tests for participants lower in soccer interest showed those exposed to a tolerance norm manipulation to show equivalent *schadenfreude* across levels of threat and rival,  $F(1, 114) = 1.53, p = .22$  (see the right side of Figure 2b). Pairwise comparisons did not show any of these means to differ reliably from one another. When a norm of honesty/directness was made salient, however, the *schadenfreude* of those lower in soccer interest was affected by the threat and rival manipulations,  $F(1, 114) = 3.94, p = .05$ . As shown on the left side of Figure 2b the acute threat of ingroup inferiority appeared to increase *schadenfreude* toward Germany ( $M_s$  2.55 vs. 1.98), although this moderate difference was not reliable (pairwise comparison  $p = .30$ ). However, participants did show greater *schadenfreude* toward Germany ( $M = 2.55, SE = .35$ ) than Italy ( $M = 1.73, SE = .30$ , pairwise comparison  $p = .08$ ) when threatened under an honesty/directness norm.

Importantly, the threat presented by the Netherlands' loss to Italy appeared to constrain *schadenfreude* toward Italy. When a norm of honesty/directness was salient, those lower in soccer interest expressed relatively high *schadenfreude* regarding Italy's loss ( $M = 2.69, SE = .37$ ). When reminded of Italy's particular superiority over the Netherlands, however, the norm of honest and direct expression reduced *schadenfreude* toward legitimately superior Italy ( $M = 1.73, SE = .30$ , pairwise comparison  $p = .05$ ).

#### Discussion

Intergroup *schadenfreude* was again demonstrated in response to the misfortune of a national rival. Intergroup *schadenfreude* was not fully explained by more individual-level factors

or by simple ingroup identification. Thus, there is again good evidence that *schadenfreude* can be a decidedly intergroup phenomenon based in ingroup members reactions to a rival outgroup 's misfortune.

Consistent with hypothesis 1, interest in the domain in which rivals suffer a misfortune plays an important role in intergroup *schadenfreude*. As in Study 1, those more interested in soccer expressed greater *schadenfreude* in response to the loss of a rival. Interest in the domain also moderated the effects of the hypothesized explanations of *schadenfreude*.

Although those lower in interest showed less *schadenfreude* overall, as in Study 1 they were more affected by the manipulations designed to moderate it. When the Dutch lower in soccer interest were made to think of themselves as honest and direct, the manipulations of acute threat and rival outgroup moderated *schadenfreude*. Thus, participants showed higher *schadenfreude* toward Germany than Italy when threatened by the ingroup loss to Italy (under the honesty/directness norm). Although the effect of acute threat on *schadenfreude* toward Germany under the honesty/directness norm was not reliable, the mean differences were consistent with hypothesis 2. Thus, there was some indication that threat increased *schadenfreude* toward a rival unrelated to the threat.

When encouraged to be honest/direct, making salient the fact that the ingroup had lost to Italy decreased *schadenfreude* toward the legitimately superior Italians. In this way, honesty and directness appeared constrain illegitimate *schadenfreude* toward an outgroup that was in reality legitimately superior to the ingroup. This is further support for hypothesis 3, that the circumstances of a rival's misfortune (de)legitimate the malicious pleasure of *schadenfreude*. Importantly, this norm of honesty/directness did not make the expression of *schadenfreude* more legitimate toward Germany. Although norm increased the effect of legitimate superiority it did

not have a general effect on participants' willingness to express *schadenfreude*. Thus, Nietzsche's argument that legitimacy affects the experience of *schadenfreude* itself appears correct.

### General Discussion

Sometimes we enjoy the misfortunes of others. When told of other country's failures in important international sporting events, Dutch participants expressed some pleasure at their misfortune. This intergroup *schadenfreude* appeared to operate according to three general propositions we derived from Nietzsche, social identity theory, and the intergroup emotion perspective.

#### *1. Domain Interest Increases Intergroup Schadenfreude*

Nietzsche suggested that *schadenfreude* is most likely in domains important to the self. Social identity research has also shown group devaluation to be most prevalent in domains important to group identity (Mummendey & Schreiber, 1983; Mummendey & Simon, 1989). Our hypothesis that intergroup *schadenfreude* would be expressed most strongly when the domain of an outgroup's misfortune was of greater interest to the ingroup was supported in both studies. It is perhaps not surprising that those most interested in the domain of soccer most enjoyed a rival's loss in this domain. In fact, a rival's loss is more relevant to the self when one is interested in the domain. Given greater interest, a rival's loss may be more beneficial psychologically. Thus, those more interested in the domain may get more enjoyment from seeing a rival lose in the domain. In this way, interest in the domain of the rival's loss is a context-specific way of examining the relevance of a rival's loss for the self. This makes it quite different to other assessments of relevance, such as general level of group identification. In fact, the more *general*

nature of (national) group identification may explain why this measure tended to be unrelated to *schadenfreude* in these studies.

Perhaps as a result of their greater investment in the domain, those higher in soccer interest were less sensitive to manipulations designed to moderate *schadenfreude*. This may be due to the fact that people higher in domain interest are likely to be attuned to the limits and opportunities associated with *schadenfreude*. Indeed, the highly interested are likely to have confronted these conditions many times before, without needing to be made aware of them by external conditions (e.g. inferiority threats and reality constraints). The *schadenfreude* of those lower in interest, was, however, more sensitive to the circumstances under which rivals suffered a misfortune. Thus, the *schadenfreude* of those less interested in soccer was moderated by the threat of ingroup inferiority and the legitimacy of *schadenfreude*.

### 2. Threats of Ingroup Inferiority Increase Intergroup Schadenfreude

We also hypothesized that intergroup *schadenfreude* would be exacerbated by the threat of ingroup inferiority. Threats to ingroup inferiority were shown to most increase *schadenfreude* when domain interest was low. Thus, those with less interest in the domain expressed more *schadenfreude* when their group was threatened by relative inferiority. Those higher in domain interest expressed relatively high levels of *schadenfreude* without threat. Thus, these results confirm the role of threat in group evaluation more generally (see Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears & Doosje, 1999; Mummendey & Otten, 1998 for reviews), and extend them to the more subtle and contextual form represented by *schadenfreude*.

### 3. Intergroup Schadenfreude is Opportunistic / Sensitive to Legitimacy Concerns

It is not very legitimate to feel pleasure at others' misfortunes; indeed, *schadenfreude* is a malicious pleasure. In a third general hypothesis we suggested that intergroup *schadenfreude* is

extremely sensitive to aspects of the situation that make it seem more or less legitimate. We showed that there was less *schadenfreude* toward an outgroup that was legitimately superior to the ingroup when a norm of honest and direct expression was salient. Thus, legitimate superiority appeared to act as a “reality constraint” on *schadenfreude* when the ingroup was encouraged to be honest and direct. This is consistent with the previously discussed social identity research on the ways in which an ingroup’s devaluation of a superior outgroup is constrained by the reality of the outgroup’s legitimate status (Spears, Jetten, & Doosje, 2001). That *schadenfreude* toward a sports rival can be so easily constrained also serves to reinforce the point that it is extremely sensitive to the circumstances that make it more or less legitimate to feel such malicious pleasure. Although it is generally illegitimate to take pleasure in another’s misfortune, factors such as dislike, domain interest, and inferiority threat may make *schadenfreude* seem more legitimate.

#### *Possible Limitations*

Although there was consistent support for *schadenfreude* as an opportunistic pleasure at another group’s misfortune, the present studies are not free of limitations. We should note that statistical power was reduced given the complex interactions in Study 2. The small cell sizes that resulted likely hindered our ability to detect effects of smaller magnitude. Of course, this means that the detected effects were likely to be larger in size. It is also important to acknowledge that both demonstrations of intergroup *schadenfreude* were made in the context of sport. Given the acceptance of national competition in sport, it is possible that *schadenfreude* is more easily demonstrated in this context. It seems clear, however, that the level of *schadenfreude* shown in these two studies was not extreme. This may be due to the fact that taking pleasure in another’s misfortune is malicious and thus considered inappropriate. There was no evidence, however, that



concern for the social undesirability of expressing *schadenfreude* affected the results (see footnote 2). That *schadenfreude* was responsive to manipulations designed to increase it also argues against any notion that social desirability concerns distorted our findings.

Although *schadenfreude* may be relatively legitimate in the context of international sport competitions, there is little reason to believe that group members will be any less prone to *schadenfreude* when outgroups suffer a misfortune in other domains marked by legitimate competition, such as economics, politics, or military conflict. After the cold war and the fall of Soviet communism, for example, many of those long threatened by the specter of nuclear annihilation seemed to revel in the economic, political, and social crises experienced by the Soviet bloc. It should be the case, however, that *schadenfreude* will be decreased in domains in which such malicious pleasure is seen as illegitimate.

#### *Conceptual Implications*

For *schadenfreude* to occur, an ingroup must become aware of the misfortune suffered by an outgroup and enjoy it. Both studies showed intergroup *schadenfreude* to be extremely opportunistic – that is, sensitive to moderating contextual factors. This is consistent with an emerging view of group evaluation, where favoritism toward ingroups and derogation of outgroups is highly sensitive to contextual factors like threat, group status, and group size (see Diehl, 1990; Mullen, Brown, & Smith, 1992; Bourhis, 1994 for reviews). The role of interest in the particular sport being studied also affirms the importance of domain relevance in studies of intergroup evaluation. A growing body of research shows that group evaluation is also sensitive to contextual and more established interest in particular domains (Mummendey & Otten, 1998). Specifying particular forms of ingroup evaluation as intergroup emotions extends our understanding of the way that particular intergroup relationships shape the (emotional)

experience of the parties (e.g., Iyer, Leach, & Crosby, 2003). This level of contextual and experiential specificity is an important extension of the social identity theory approach (E. R. Smith, 1993).

We believe that understanding the highly contextual nature of specific forms of intergroup experience like *schadenfreude* is the main advantage of the intergroup emotion approach. Terms like fear, anger, guilt, sympathy, or *schadenfreude* offer a more substantive description of intergroup experience and the context within which it exists than more general terms like group bias, or favoritism, or prejudice (E. R. Smith, 1993). This is because emotion terms capture the *meaning* attributed to intergroup experience. Knowing that the Dutch may be “prejudiced” against the Germans, for example, only suggests that they have a negative orientation. In fact, the Dutch may show little explicit malice toward Germans under most circumstances. Knowing that the Dutch are prone to *schadenfreude* toward the Germans, however, tells us that this insidious form of malice is likely under particular facilitating circumstances. Indeed, Dutch *schadenfreude* toward Germans tells us that they may use Germany’s misfortunes as a displacement-like opportunity to compensate for threats to their ingroup’s status. Without this more textured approach to intergroup experience, we might look only for the direct devaluation implied by prejudice and never see more nuanced forms such as *schadenfreude*.

### *Practical Applications*

Oddly, the sporting occasions in which we have demonstrated intergroup *schadenfreude* were designed, in part, to bring disparate peoples together in positive contact. The World Cup, for example, is often portrayed as an opportunity for increased camaraderie between nations. It is well known, however, that bringing competing groups into contact can also exacerbate conflict

between them (Pettigrew, 1998). Our results suggest that it is possible that close contact with a rival outgroup may encourage malicious reactions to the misfortunes they suffer. For example, the European Union was designed to increase contact and positive interdependence in Europe in an attempt to prevent another world war. Attempts at economic, political, and social integration have, however, the unintended consequence of offering countries greater opportunity to compare and compete for status. Thus, cooperative attempts at a common currency can highlight each country's level of economic success compared to others. This kind of narrow competition may make countries within the union prone to *schadenfreude* if offered the opportunity.

Intergroup *schadenfreude* is one way that groups that are expected to cooperate may show malice toward others without appearing to violate the norm of cooperation. Given that intergroup *schadenfreude* is highly opportunistic, it seems especially likely in the context of social proscriptions against explicit antipathy. When malice is frowned upon, groups may take special advantage of opportunities for *schadenfreude*. Thus, intergroup *schadenfreude* may constitute a covert or insidious form of prejudice that is used in the maintenance of group identity and self-worth.

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### Author Note

Colin Wayne Leach, Department of Psychology, University of California-Santa Cruz.  
Russell Spears, Department of Social Psychology, University of Amsterdam. Nyla R.  
Branscombe, Department of Psychology, University of Kansas. Bertjan Doosje, Department of  
Social Psychology, University of Amsterdam.

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Please address all correspondence to Colin Wayne Leach, Department of Psychology, University of California-Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz, CA 95064 (cwleach@ucsc.edu) or Russell Spears, Social Psychology Program, University of Amsterdam, Roetersstraat 15, 1018 WB Amsterdam, The Netherlands (sp\_spears@macmail.uva.nl).

## Endnotes

1. Sympathy also had quite a different association with the covariates and the experimental manipulations than did *schadenfreude*, further supporting the distinctiveness of *schadenfreude*. Opposite to *schadenfreude*, sympathy was associated with lower soccer interest and greater liking of Germans. Unlike *schadenfreude*, sympathy for Germany was unrelated to dispositional interpersonal *schadenfreude*. Also unlike *schadenfreude*, sympathy was not predicted by the acute inferiority threat although sympathy was reduced by the chronic inferiority threat.
2. To examine the role of social desirability concerns in the expression of intergroup *schadenfreude*, Paulhus' (1991) two component BIDR measure of socially desirable responding was included as a factor in a separate analysis. Inclusion of both measures of socially desirable responding as covariates did not alter the results reported. Neither were any of the reported results moderated by social desirability.

Table 1

## Attitudes Toward German and Italian Rival Outgroups, Pilot Studies 2 &amp; 3

*Pilot Study 2*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. See Germany as Soccer Rival	4.33	1.69	-			
2. German Soccer Team Stronger	3.75	1.22	.13	-		
3. Soccer Interest	4.03	2.10	.15	-.45**	-	
4. Group Identification	4.70	1.17	.04	-.12	.37**	-

*Pilot Study 3*

	Target				
	Germany		Italy		<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
General Rival	2.70	1.62	2.21	1.27	4.46**
Soccer Rival	4.31	1.69	4.23	1.59	.685
Stronger Team than Dutch	3.73	1.22	4.32	.99	5.02**
(Personal) Legitimacy of Success	4.12	1.55	4.31	1.44	1.81+
(Group) Legitimacy of Success	3.37	1.53	4.12	1.40	5.29**

+  $p < .10$ , \*\*  $p < .005$

Table 2

## Effects of Individual-level Explanations of Intergroup Schadenfreude (i.e. Covariates)

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	Dispositional <i>Schadenfreude</i>	Dislike Germans	Dislike Italians	National Identification
Study 1	9.26*	11.9*	n/a	.602
Study 2	2.87+	5.30*	2.75+	.913

+  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$

## Figure Captions

Figure 1: *Schadenfreude* Regarding the German World Cup Loss: Chronic Threat x Soccer Interest Interaction.

Figure 2a: *Schadenfreude* Regarding the Losses of European Championship Rivals Germany and Italy: Acute Threat x Norm x Rival Outgroup Interaction for Participants Higher in Soccer Interest.

Figure 2b: *Schadenfreude* Regarding the Losses of European Championship Rivals Germany and Italy: Acute Threat x Norm x Rival Outgroup Interaction for Participants Lower in Soccer Interest.



