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Who Do We Inform? The Role of Status and Target in Intergroup Whistle-blowing

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In two experiments (n = 87 and n = 90), we showed that strongly identifying members of a low status group are more likely to actively inform the ingroup rather than the outgroup about an outgroup transgression, and consider it as more loyal to the ingroup to do so. Moreover, strongly identifying members of a high status group are more likely to actively inform the outgroup rather than the ingroup about an outgroup transgression, and consider this to be more loyal to the ingroup. The results are in support of the notion that, depending on a group's existing status position, negative outgroup information can be used to enhance or confirm the ingroup's standing, affecting whether the ingroup or the outgroup will initially be informed about an outgroup transgression.

KEYWORDS   ingroup identification, intergroup whistle-blowing, relative status

NEGATIVE information about a single member of a relevant outgroup can affect the image of the outgroup as a whole (van Leeuwen, van den Bosch, Castano, & Hopman, in press), and may thereby enhance the ingroup's relative standing. Especially when the ingroup's relative standing is at stake, people may enjoy information that harms the outgroup's image. To illustrate, talking negatively about rivalling others often serves as a status-enhancing mechanism, and particularly focuses on high status others (McAndrew & Milenkovic, 2002). The aim of the research presented in this article is to test the assumption that ingroup status and ingroup identification together affect (1) the degree to which people consider it an act of loyalty to the ingroup to share exclusive and damaging outgroup information with the ingroup or with the outgroup (Study 1), and (2) the degree to which people actively engage in sharing this kind of information with their ingroup or the outgroup (Study 2). This article is one of the first to examine the phenomenon of whistle-blowing (i.e. informing others about an illicit activity) within an explicit intergroup context. Before reporting the two studies, we first summarize the relevant literature on social identity, threat, and whistle-blowing.

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Social identity theory and threat

According to Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986; Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Turner, 1999) and Self-Categorization Theory (SCT; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), people derive part of their self-concept from the groups to which they belong, and may differ in the extent to which membership of these groups is important to them, or to which they identify with these different groups. People are more likely to think and act in terms of a group membership, the more they identify with this group (Doosje, Ellemers, & Spears, 1999, p. 85). Generally, people want to be part of groups that are positively evaluated, since membership of these groups provides them with a positive social identity. The best way to realize such a positive social identity is through intergroup differentiation: standing out, as a group, as much as possible against a salient outgroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

One way of achieving this desired positive intergroup differentiation is to stress the importance of ingroup norms, which represent the behaviours or features that members should adopt and that maintain distinctiveness from the outgroup (Turner et al., 1987). The association of one's group with norm-violating behaviour is therefore particularly damaging, since it threatens the ingroup's image, and thereby its relative standing (Marques, Yzerbyt, & Leyens, 1988). For example, it was demonstrated that a group is readily perceived in terms of the negative characteristics of a transgressing group member (van Leeuwen et al., in press). One could argue that people who care highly for their group membership (i.e. members who strongly identify with this group) are most likely to experience negativity when confronted with these kinds of social identity threats (Dietz-Uhler, 1999), and therefore are most likely to react in defensive ways (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999). Strongly identifying members are thus likely to tackle fellow ingroup members who, by engaging in illicit or norm-violating behaviour, put the ingroup's standing at stake.

Reporting transgressions within groups

The act of exposing a transgressor is termed *whistle-blowing*. The *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (Soanes & Stevenson, 2004) defines whistle-blowing as the act of 'bringing (an illicit activity) to an end by informing on the person responsible'. People's inclination to blow the whistle on a transgression becomes stronger as they perceive that doing so will result in change to rectify it (Masser & Brown, 1996). By repairing a mistake, a group may be able to protect its integrity and maintain its standing vis-à-vis relevant outgroups. Whistle-blowing to the ingroup (i.e. reporting the misconduct to fellow group members) can be very constructive, since it offers the group the opportunity to restore the damage, while preventing relevant outgroups from benefiting from any negative ingroup information. Research has shown that ingroup criticism is likely to be evaluated as socially acceptable and conventional, as well as legitimate and constructive, so long as it can be perceived as a suggestion for improvement (Hornsey, Oppes, & Svensson, 2002; Hornsey & Imani, 2004). However, this constructive effect of criticism only occurs when the group is criticized to an exclusively ingroup audience, and not when the group is criticized in front of an outgroup audience (Elder, Sutton, & Douglas, 2005; Hornsey et al., 2005; Ariyanto, Hornsey, & Gallois, 2006). Reporting an ingroup misconduct to outside persons or authorities is a violation of the implicit rule that group members should never criticize their own group to outsiders. By doing so, the critic is seen to be doing unnecessary damage to the relative standing of the group (Hornsey et al., 2005).

Reporting transgressions between groups

In this article, we argue that if negative information about one's group *harms* the ingroup's relative standing, then negative information about a relevant outgroup may *enhance* the ingroup's positive standing. This notion is supported by

606

the finding that outgroup members who undermine the positive distinctiveness of the outgroup are evaluated more positively than outgroup members who promote this distinctiveness (Marques, Abrams, Paez, & Martinez-Taboada, 1998; Abrams, Marques, Bown, & Henson, 2000). Research on *Schadenfreude* (Leach, Spears, Branscombe, & Doosje, 2003; Spears & Leach, 2004) shows that people tend to enjoy the misfortune suffered by an outgroup—especially in domains important to group identity. Research on gossip furthermore teaches us that people tend to enjoy, and share, negative information about rival others (McAndrew, Bell, & Garcia, 2007), and even actively seek exploitable, damaging information about non-allies (McAndrew & Milenkovic, 2002). According to these authors, negative talk about others may serve both the interests of individuals and groups. In their striving for positive distinctiveness, groups can thus benefit from outgroups that are portrayed in an unfavourable way (Tajfel, 1982). Based on the previous, we propose that people consider it more loyal to the ingroup if a fellow ingroup member, who exclusively possesses negative information about an outgroup, exposes this useful information to the ingroup than to the outgroup. Put differently: an ingroup member informing the ingroup of an outgroup transgression may be perceived as being more loyal to the ingroup than an ingroup member informing the outgroup of this fact.

The tendency to enjoy negative information about a relevant outgroup is particularly pronounced among people whose social identity is at stake. Research has shown that when people feel that their group is threatened by another group in a domain relevant to its social identity, they are likely to enjoy possible misfortune suffered by that outgroup (Leach et al., 2003; Spears & Leach, 2004). When another group represents an esteem threat to an important identity, actively portraying that group in an unfavourable light may be a successful strategy by which group members repair their damaged self-esteem (Oakes & Turner, 1980; Lemyre & Smith, 1985; Branscombe & Wann, 1992, 1994). It was also shown that strongly identifying group members repair damage to their self-esteem by adopting

a negative attitude towards a relevant outgroup (Florack, Scarabis, & Gosejohann, 2005).

Sharing negative information about higher status outgroups may not only boost self-esteem, but also result in attempts to change the status difference. When the lower status position of one's group is perceived as illegitimate, people are inclined to encourage their peers to view this low status position as unwarranted and ultimately engage in collective action (Ellemers, Wilke, & van Knippenberg, 1993; Klandermans, 1997; van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004). Discussing a transgression within the ranks of a higher status outgroup might help to question the legitimacy of the existing status difference, and could thus be seized upon as a means of destabilizing and revising the status quo.

Members of low status groups have an additional reason for not informing the outgroup of its transgression directly, namely the fact that blowing the whistle to the outgroup would offer the outgroup the opportunity to take immediate reparative action. If the outgroup is informed about the transgressions of one of its members, it may have the opportunity to correct the problem, for example, by openly distancing itself from the transgressing member (van Leeuwen et al., in press). By not sharing the damaging information, members of low status effectively deny the higher status group the opportunity to restore their superior status which could put the low status groups at an even greater disadvantage.

Based on the previous, we expect that members of low status groups should be more likely to seize damaging outgroup information in order to talk negatively about this outgroup (i.e. sharing it with fellow members) than throw it into the outgroup's lap (i.e. whistle-blowing to the outgroup). Moreover, this tendency will become more pronounced as these members more strongly identify with their group.

In contrast to members of low status groups, members of higher status groups are less in need of damaging outgroup information in order to acquire and maintain a respected identity, and are therefore less likely to talk with each other about the lower status outgroup in a negative way. In fact, since higher status entities

607

(e.g. the police, parents, teachers) are generally more authorized to reprimand or correct lower status entities (e.g. civilians, children, pupils, respectively) than vice versa, a member of a higher status group who is aware of an outgroup transgression may seize the opportunity of directly policing this outgroup. Moreover, by actively reprimanding a lower status outgroup on its illicit activities, high status groups could further validate the legitimacy of the existing intergroup distinction in favour of the ingroup. High status group members can therefore be expected to behave in a way that reinforces their status by encouraging the lower status group to see its lowly position as warranted. We expect that members of high status groups are more likely to directly confront the outgroup with their misbehaviour (i.e. informing the outgroup), than share it with their fellow group members. Here too, we expect this tendency to become pronounced as people define themselves more strongly in terms of their group membership and care more highly for their group's standing.

The current studies

The existing research on whistle-blowing has mainly been conducted in organizational and intragroup settings (e.g. Near & Miceli, 1985, 1986, 1995; van der Lee, van Leeuwen, & Hopman, 2008). Since having the exclusive disposal of damaging information about rival others can be highly advantageous in settings where groups strive to boost or repair their relative standing, the current research will focus on *intergroup* whistle-blowing, i.e. on informing others about wrongs within a relevant outgroup. In the current research we will examine the combined effect of ingroup status, choice of target, and ingroup identification on the degree to which people perceive a whistle-blowing fellow group member as being loyal to the ingroup, and on their readiness to blow the whistle themselves. Within settings where the ingroup's status is *lower* than that of a relevant outgroup, we expect strongly identifying group members to consider whistle-blowing to the ingroup as more loyal to their group than whistle-blowing to the outgroup, and to engage more in whistle-blowing to the ingroup than to the outgroup. Within settings where the ingroup's status is *higher* than that of a relevant outgroup, we expect strongly identifying group members to consider whistle-blowing to the outgroup as more loyal to their group than whistle-blowing to the ingroup, and to engage more in whistle-blowing to the outgroup than to the ingroup. Since people are more affected by group-based information (i.e. ingroup status), and are more likely to engage in group-based responses the more they identify with this group (Doosje et al., 1999, p. 85), we expect ingroup status and target to affect perceived group member's loyalty and frequency of whistle-blowing primarily among strongly identifying group members.

Study 1

In Study 1, participants learned that, on a number of relevant traits, their group scored lower (low status) or higher (high status) than an outgroup. People were then presented with a text describing a situation in which a fellow ingroup member exposed an outgroup transgression to either the ingroup or the outgroup. The main dependent variable was the extent to which the whistle-blower's action was considered an act of loyalty to the ingroup, which we will subsequently refer to as 'perceived loyalty'. We expected that among members of a *low status* group, whistle-blowing to the ingroup on an outgroup transgression would lead to higher levels of perceived loyalty than whistle-blowing to the outgroup. We further expected that, among members of a *high status* group, whistle-blowing to the outgroup would lead to higher levels of perceived loyalty than whistle-blowing to the ingroup. We expected this effect to be most pronounced among high identifiers.

Method

Participants and design Participants were 87 students from the VU University Amsterdam (hereafter referred to as 'VU'; 62 women, 25 men). Their mean age was 21.01 years (*SD* = 3.49). The design constituted a 2 (Status: low vs. high) × 2 (Target: ingroup vs. outgroup) between-subjects factorial design. Participants were paid for

their participation and were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions.

Materials and procedure The experiment was run on personal computers. First, participants' degree of identification with the ingroup (i.e. the VU) was measured with four items, e.g. 'I feel strong ties with VU students' (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree; α = .86). Participants were then presented with the outcome of a large-scale survey about the quality of the leading Dutch universities. People read how the VU and the University of Amsterdam (i.e. the outgroup, hereafter referred to as 'UvA')[1] were rated on seven points (e.g. facilities, teaching, and communication; all displayed on a 10-point scale). The VU's mean rating was either lower (6.7; low status condition) or higher (7.9; high status condition) than the mean rating of the UvA (7.9 and 6.7, respectively). Participants were then presented with a text describing a situation in which a fellow ingroup member (i.e. a VU student whom we will further refer to as 'X') accidentally discovered pornographic images of underage girls on the computer of an outgroup member (i.e. a UvA student whom we will further refer to as 'Y'). X subsequently reported this to his own mentor at the VU (ingroup condition) or to Y's mentor at the UvA (outgroup condition). Finally, a brief questionnaire was administered.

Unless reported otherwise, all questions were asked using a seven-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The effectiveness of the manipulation of status was checked by asking participants to answer the following three questions twice (i.e. once with respect to the VU and once with respect to the UvA): 'How do you consider the VU/UvA's standing?', 'How do you perceive the VU/UvA's qualities?', and 'How do you perceive the VU/UvA's status?' (1 = very low, 7 = very high for all). For each item, a difference-score was obtained by subtracting the outgroup rating from the ingroup rating, which added up to a reliable three-item scale (α = .82). The effectiveness of the target manipulation was assessed with the question: 'To whom did X direct himself with the

information about Y's computer files?' (1 = his own mentor at the VU, 2 = Y's mentor at the UvA). The degree to which people perceived the whistle-blower to be loyal to the ingroup was assessed by asking participants to indicate their agreement with the statements 'I think X wants the best for the VU', 'I think X has good intentions towards the VU', and 'I think X is loyal to the VU' (α = .92). Upon finishing, participants were thanked and debriefed.

Results

Manipulation checks A two-way ANOVA on perceived relative status of the ingroup over the full 2 (Status: low vs. high) × 2 (Target: ingroup vs. outgroup) design only yielded a main effect of Status: participants in the high status condition ($M = 0.81$, $SD = 1.36$) considered the relative status of their ingroup vis-à-vis the outgroup to be higher than participants in the low status condition ($M = 0.06$, $SD = 1.30$), $F(1,83) = 6.71$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 = .08$. Without exception, participants correctly recalled the target (i.e. ingroup or outgroup) to which X revealed the outgroup transgression. These data show that both manipulations were successful.

Perceived loyalty A regression analysis was conducted with Identification[2] (centred on M), Target, Status (both dummy coded), and all possible interaction terms as predictors. The degree to which people considered the whistle-blower to be loyal to the ingroup was inserted as the dependent variable. Cell means for weakly (-1 SD), averagely (M), and strongly ($+1$ SD) identifying people are presented in Figure 1. The analysis yielded a main effect of Identification: people more strongly considered the whistle-blower to be loyal to the ingroup the more they identified with the ingroup, $\beta = 0.25$, $t(83) = 2.47$, $p = .02$. Since harmful outgroup information serves the ingroup's social identity, strongly identifying group members in particular will recognize the act of blowing the whistle on this information as loyalty to the ingroup.

There was also a main effect of Status: people in a high status group more strongly considered the whistle-blower to be loyal to the ingroup
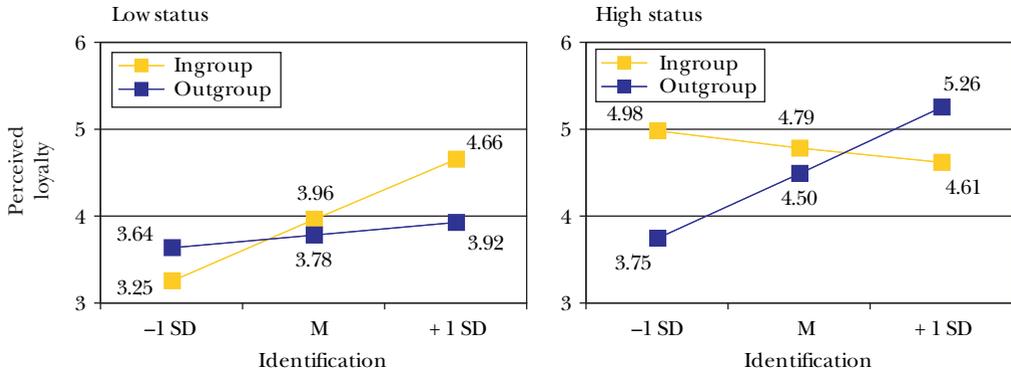
Figure 1. Perceived loyalty of whistle-blowing on an outgroup transgression as a function of ingroup status, target, and identification with the ingroup, Study 1.

than people in a low status group, $\beta = 0.24$, $t(83) = 2.30$, $p = .02$. As mentioned earlier, higher status entities are generally more authorized to reprimand lower status entities than vice versa. Informing a lower status outgroup about the fact that one of their members has committed a transgression may therefore further validate the legitimacy of the existing status difference.

A three-way interaction in the expected direction was found between Identification, Status, and Target, $\beta = 0.55$, $t(79) = 2.19$, $p = .03$. As they identified more strongly with their group, people in a low status group perceived whistle-blowing to the ingroup more as an act of loyalty to the ingroup than whistle-blowing to the outgroup, whereas people in a high status group perceived whistle-blowing to the outgroup more as an act of loyalty to the ingroup than whistle-blowing to the ingroup. Simple slope analyses of Identification within each combined level of Status and Target revealed that people in a low status group, as they identified more strongly with this group, perceived whistle-blowing to the ingroup ($\beta = 0.20$, $t[79] = 1.96$, $p = .05$), but not whistle-blowing to the outgroup ($\beta = 0.04$, $t[79] = 0.35$, $p = .73$), as an act of loyalty to the ingroup. People in a high status group, as they identified more strongly with their group, perceived whistle-blowing to the outgroup ($\beta = 0.28$, $t[79] = 2.72$, $p = .01$), but not whistle-blowing to the ingroup ($\beta = -0.06$, $t[79] = -0.54$, $p = .59$), as an act of loyalty to

the ingroup. These results are in line with the expectations.

In sum, we can conclude that the data of Study 1 support the hypothesis: as they identified more strongly with their group, members of a low status group perceived whistle-blowing to the ingroup as more loyal to the ingroup than whistle-blowing to the outgroup, and members of a high status group perceived whistle-blowing to the outgroup as more loyal to the group than whistle-blowing to the ingroup.

Study 2

If the degree to which strongly identifying group members consider whistle-blowing an act of loyalty to the ingroup depends on ingroup status and choice of target of the whistle-blower, then the same factors may well affect people's own tendency to engage in whistle-blowing themselves. In order to test whether people's tendency to blow the whistle on an outgroup transgression is also affected by group status, target, and degree of identification with the ingroup, Study 2 was conducted.

Participants learned that, on a number of relevant traits, their group scored lower (low status) or higher (high status) than an outgroup. They then learned that an outgroup member had cheated on a collective group task, and were offered the opportunity to reveal this to their own group or the outgroup. The main dependent

variable was whether people informed their own group or the outgroup about the outgroup transgressor. It was expected that ingroup status (low vs. high) would affect the choice of target (ingroup vs. outgroup) when people decide to blow the whistle on an outgroup transgressor. Since people are more likely to think and act in terms of their group membership the more they identify with this group (Doosje et al., 1999, p. 85), we expect ingroup status to affect choice of target primarily among strongly identifying group members. Specifically, we expected that strongly identifying members of a low status group would engage more in whistle-blowing to the ingroup than to the outgroup, and that strongly identifying members of a high status group would engage more in whistle-blowing to the outgroup than to the ingroup. We expected the relation of ingroup status and choice of target to decline as people identify less with their group (Hypothesis 2).

Method
Participants and design   Participants were 90 students from the VU University Amsterdam (50 women, 40 men). Their mean age was 20.81 years (SD = 2.29). The design constituted a between-subjects randomized two-group (Status: low vs. high) design. Participants were paid for their participation and were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions.

Materials and procedure   Upon entering the laboratory, participants were seated in separate cubicles equipped with a personal computer which was used to present instructions and register participants' responses. It was explained in the instructions that the purpose of the experiment was twofold—to acquire more insight into gender differences in performances on certain tasks, and to examine the effect of communication during online group tasks. Participants were told they were part of a virtual group of four same-sex others (i.e. the ingroup) that was, simultaneously with a team of four opposite-sex others (i.e. the outgroup), to perform a number of tasks. Since participants were seated in separate cubicles and would in reality never meet or interact with these in- or outgroup members, the study could be run without the actual presence of other group members (thereby keeping the data independent). It was further explained that, for the purpose of facilitating group communication, during the course of the experiment everyone (i.e. all in- and outgroup members) would be given a number of opportunities to send a group message via the computer to either their ingroup or their outgroup. Since in reality no other in- or outgroup members were present, participants' messages were never transmitted to others, and the messages they received during the course of the experiment were always pre-programmed (e.g. 'Hi y'all—I'm Chris. How are you guys doin'? I'm fine!' and 'I wonder what the next task will be about!'). At this point, participants' degree of identification with their same-sex gender team was measured with three items, e.g. 'I feel strong ties with other members of the (wo)men's team' (α = .80).

The first task was a test on academic mental capacity,[3] and was allegedly performed by the members of both teams. After completing the test, participants were presented with bogus feedback regarding their group's overall score on this task. Participants in the low status condition learned that their group had scored lower than the outgroup (i.e. 37 vs. 55 points, respectively), and participants in the high status condition learned that their group had scored higher than the outgroup (i.e. 55 vs. 37 points, respectively; the maximum amount of points that could be obtained was 80). The second task that was presented was a group brainstorm task. Participants were asked to generate as many solutions to a practical problem (i.e. 'How to promote travelling by means of the public transport system') as they possibly could, within five minutes. Each group member would brainstorm individually, after which the individual performances would be added to create a group productivity score. The goal was to generate more ideas within the ingroup than the outgroup. After five minutes, the participant's individual score appeared on the screen, together with those of the other ingroup and outgroup members. These other scores were only slightly lower or higher than that of

611

the participant, with the exception of one out-group member, whose score was extraordinarily higher than the rest of the people, thereby clearly boosting the outgroup's total score. In order to correct for brainstorm ideas that might have been mentioned more than once by the same person, it was explained that everyone would be presented with the brainstorm ideas of someone else, chosen randomly. To this end, participants were presented with the results of the extremely high scoring outgroup member and asked to count the amount of times this person had mentioned an idea more than once. In fact, this outgroup member's 'brainstorm ideas' consisted only of nonsense phrases, indicating that s/he had been cheating on the task. At this point, participants were given an opportunity to send a message via the computer to either the ingroup or the outgroup.[4] Participants thus had three behaviour options: (1) they could choose to send a message to the ingroup; (2) choose to send a message to the outgroup; or (3) choose not to send a message at all.

The main dependent variable was participants' choice to inform either the ingroup or the outgroup about the cheating outgroup member in the computer message. Participants who did *not* send a message were labelled 'non-whistle-blower'. The messages of the remaining participants were coded by two independent raters who judged whether or not the outgroup transgression was mentioned in their messages (resulting in an interrater reliability of $\alpha = .97$). In the single case where the two raters differently classified a message, they discussed it until agreement was reached. Participants who had sent a message were labelled 'non-whistle-blower' if they did not mention the outgroup transgression, 'whistle-blower to ingroup' if they exposed the transgression to the ingroup, and 'whistle-blower to outgroup' if they exposed it to the outgroup.

The effectiveness of the manipulation of status was assessed by measuring participants' perception of their group's (social) standing in relation to that of the outgroup. Participants were asked to answer five questions twice (i.e. once with respect to the same-sex team and once with respect to the other-sex team), e.g. 'How do you consider the (wo)men's team's standing?'

and 'How do you perceive the (wo)men's team's qualities?' (1 = very low, 7 = very high for all). For each item, a difference-score was obtained by subtracting the outgroup rating from the ingroup rating, which added up to a reliable five-item scale ($\alpha = .90$). Upon finishing, participants were thanked and shortly debriefed.

Results

Manipulation check In order to check the effectiveness of the manipulation of status, and to ensure that perceived relative standing was not affected by gender, we conducted a two-way ANOVA on perceived relative standing of the ingroup over the 2 (Status: low vs. high) × 2 (Gender: man vs. woman) design. The analysis only yielded a main effect of Status: participants in the high status condition ($M = 1.67$, $SD = 0.48$) considered the relative standing of their ingroup vis-à-vis the outgroup to be higher than participants in the *low* status condition ($M = 1.27$, $SD = 0.45$), $F(1,86) = 16.55$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .16$. Gender did not affect perceived relative group standing ($F[1,86] = 1.49$, $p = .23$). These data show that the manipulation was successful.

Whistle-blowing Preliminary analyses showed that Status, while successfully manipulated, was not significantly related to Whistle-blowing. Since the focus is on participants' subjective impressions of the relative status of the group, it was considered more powerful to conduct further analyses with perceived relative standing as one of the predictors. A median split on the distribution of scores on perceived relative standing was performed so that participants who scored below the median (.20) were placed in the *low perceived relative standing* group ($M = -0.49$, $SD = 0.94$, $n = 48$), and participants who scored above the median were placed in the *high perceived relative standing* group ($M = 1.50$, $SD = 1.05$, $n = 42$). Results on the frequency of whistle-blowing (i.e. no whistle blowing, whistle blowing to ingroup, whistle blowing to outgroup) within each level of Perceived relative standing are presented in Table 1. Since this article focuses on the group (i.e. ingroup or outgroup) to which people decided to blow the whistle rather than on people's decision to engage in, or refrain

from, whistle-blowing altogether, the analyses only included those participants who had been categorized as whistle-blower. A chi-square analysis of the frequency data regarding the whistle-blowers in Table 1 showed a significant relation between Perceived relative standing (low, high) and Whistle-blowing (i.e. to ingroup, to outgroup), χ^2 (1) = 6.70, p = .01. More often than expected by the model, members of a *low* status group disclosed an outgroup transgression to the ingroup rather than the outgroup, whereas members of a *high* status group disclosed it to the outgroup rather than the ingroup. Participants' overall tendency to engage more in whistle-blowing to the outgroup than to the ingroup was pronounced among members of a high status group, and reversed among members of a low status group, who more often engaged in whistle-blowing to the ingroup than to the outgroup.

In order to examine whether the relation between perceived relative standing and choice of target becomes pronounced as people more strongly identify with the ingroup, we included ingroup identification as a second predictor of whistle-blowing. To this end, a median split on the distribution of scores on ingroup identification[5] was performed so that participants who scored below the median (4.67) were placed in the *weak identifiers* group (M = 3.80, SD = 0.73, n = 46), and participants who scored above the median were placed in the *strong identifiers* group (M = 5.58, SD = 0.65, n = 44). The frequency of whistle-blowing (i.e. no whistle blowing, whistle blowing to ingroup, whistle blowing to outgroup) within each combined level of Perceived relative standing and Identification is presented in Table 2. A log linear analysis was performed of the frequency data regarding the whistle-blowers in Table 2, which showed a marginally significant relation between Perceived relative standing (low, high), Whistle-blowing (i.e. to ingroup, to outgroup), and Identification (weak, strong), $L\chi^2$ (1) = 2.90, p = .089. More often than expected by the model, strongly identifying members of a low status group engaged in whistle-blowing to the ingroup rather than the outgroup, and strongly identifying members of a high status group engaged in whistle-blowing to the outgroup rather than the ingroup, whereas this pattern was absent among weakly identifying members.

In order to more accurately interpret the relation between perceived relative standing, choice of target, and identification, we tested the significance of the relation between perceived relative standing and choice of target for both weakly and strongly identifying group members. To this end, two separate Likelihood ratio tests were performed of the frequency data regarding the weakly and the strongly identifying whistle-blowers (Field, 2005, p. 716). A likelihood ratio test of the frequency data regarding the *weakly identifying* participants who blew the whistle showed no relation between Perceived relative standing (low, high) and Whistle-blowing (i.e. to ingroup, to outgroup), $L\chi^2$ (1) = 0.14, p = .71. A likelihood ratio test of the frequency data regarding the *strongly identifying* participants who blew the whistle, however, showed a significant relation between Perceived relative standing (low, high) and Whistle-blowing (i.e. to ingroup, to outgroup), $L\chi^2$ (1) = 10.65, p = .001. When disclosing an outgroup transgression, strongly identifying members from a low status group did this, more often than expected by the model,

Table 1. Frequency of whistle-blowing by Perceived relative standing, Study 2

Whistle-blowing	Perceived relative standing		
	Low	High	Total
None	29 (60.4 %)	17 (40.5 %)	46 (51.1 %)
To ingroup	11 (22.9 %)	5 (11.9 %)	16 (17.8 %)
To outgroup	8 (16.7 %)	20 (47.6 %)	28 (31.1 %)
Total	48 (100.0 %)	42 (100.0 %)	90 (100.0 %)

Note: Cell percentages of whistle-blowing for each level of Perceived relative standing in parentheses.

613

Table 2. Frequency of whistle-blowing by Perceived relative standing and Identification, Study 2

| Whistle-blowing | Perceived relative standing | | |
	Low	High	Total
Weak identification			
None	18 (66.7 %)	11 (57.9 %)	29 (63.0 %)
To ingroup	3 (11.1 %)	2 (10.5 %)	5 (10.9 %)
To outgroup	6 (22.2 %)	6 (31.6 %)	12 (26.1 %)
Total	27 (100.0 %)	19 (100.0 %)	46 (100.0 %)
Strong identification			
None	11 (52.4 %)	6 (26.1 %)	17 (38.6 %)
To ingroup	8 (38.1 %)	3 (13.0 %)	11 (25.0 %)
To outgroup	2 (9.5 %)	14 (60.9 %)	16 (36.4 %)
Total	21 (100.0 %)	23 (100.0 %)	44 (100.0 %)

Note: Cell percentages of whistle-blowing for each combined level of Perceived relative standing and Identification in parentheses.

to the ingroup rather than the outgroup, and strongly identifying members from a high status group did this, more often than expected by the model, to the outgroup rather than the ingroup.

The findings of Study 2 support Hypothesis 2: members of a low status group engaged more in whistle-blowing to the ingroup than to the outgroup, whereas members of a high status group engaged more in whistle-blowing to the outgroup than to the ingroup. This pattern was pronounced among people who identified strongly with the ingroup, but absent among people who identified weakly with the ingroup.

General discussion

In Study 1, we showed that the more people identify with a low status group, the more they consider whistle-blowing to the ingroup on an outgroup transgression to be more loyal to the ingroup than whistle-blowing to the outgroup. We also showed that the more people identify with a high status group, the more they consider whistle-blowing to the outgroup to be more loyal to the ingroup than whistle-blowing to the ingroup. In Study 2 we demonstrated that the same pattern emerges when people themselves have the chance to share exclusive negative information about the outgroup with their own group or with the outgroup: members

of low status groups are more likely to engage in whistle-blowing to the ingroup than to the outgroup, whereas members of high status groups are more likely to engage in whistle-blowing to the outgroup than to the ingroup. Again, this pattern became more pronounced the more people identify with the ingroup. These results are in line with our reasoning that the communication of damaging outgroup information can be used strategically to enhance or confirm the ingroup's relative standing.

Research on gossip teaches us that talking negatively about high status others serves as a status-enhancing mechanism in social competition, and that low(er) status people or groups are motivated to obtain harmful, exploitable information about high(er) status rivals (McAndrew & Milenkovic, 2002; McAndrew et al., 2007). Moreover, a transgression within the ranks of a higher status outgroup may give cause to question the legitimacy of the existing status difference, and can easily be seized upon in order to destabilize and revise the status quo. Discussing the outgroup transgression within the ingroup may encourage fellow ingroup members to see the lower status position as unwarranted as well. Blowing the whistle to one's peers may thus sow the seeds for collective action, without directly offering the outgroup the opportunity to defend this status difference. Particularly people who care highly for their ingroup's

614

standing engage in internal deliberation upon information that questions the legitimacy of their group's lower status position.

Members of high status groups who experience their group's status as secure do not need to internally discuss transgressions committed by low status outgroups to boost their morale. Instead, they profit mostly from confronting the lower status outgroup with their offensive behaviour. This confrontation further underlines the existing status difference as it highlights a weakness on the part of the low status group, but also because the high status group is adopting the role of 'moral agent' by behaving as if it has the right to police norm-violation. By actively reprimanding a lower status outgroup on its illicit activities, the high status group asserts its superior position and reinforces the status quo by encouraging the lower status group to view its inferior position as warranted. Particularly people who care highly for their ingroup's standing engage in reprimanding behaviour towards a lower status outgroup, thereby underlining the legitimacy of their group's superior standing.

One factor that might affect the occurrence of intergroup whistle-blowing is the perceived locus of the wrongdoing, which may entail the disposition of a member (i.e. internal attribution) or a situational factor (i.e. external attribution; Weiner, 1995). Particularly in the case of an internally attributed wrongdoing the group as a whole is easily perceived in the light of this transgression (van Leeuwen et al., in press), implying that internally attributed wrongdoings are potentially much more damaging to a group's image than externally attributed wrongdoings. The preference of strongly identifying members of a low status group, to initially share exclusive, damaging outgroup information with fellow members instead of outgroup members, might therefore be pronounced if the information refers to a disposition within this outgroup rather than an accidental occurrence. Future research might provide more insight into the role of attribution of illicit behaviour within explicit intergroup settings.

The current research mainly focuses on the question of whether people decide to blow the whistle on an outgroup transgression to either the ingroup or the outgroup. However, the more basic question whether or not people decide to blow the whistle might be of particular interest, since various motivations may underlie this consideration. To start with, the act of blowing the whistle on something or someone requires an active response. People who are, for example, insufficiently motivated, lack commitment, or are otherwise unable to adequately relate to a situation where they are confronted with exclusive information on an offence, might refrain from blowing the whistle without a clear underlying consideration. Not blowing the whistle may, however, also be a well-considered choice. To illustrate, previous research within the field of intragroup whistle-blowing has demonstrated that 'bringers of bad news' not infrequently encounter retaliation or some form of social rejection (Near & Miceli, 1985, 1986; Williams, Forgas, & von Hippel, 2005; van der Lee et al., 2008). Since informing others about an illicit activity can be costly for the informant, which will especially be the case in intragroup settings, people may choose to refrain from blowing the whistle (Masser & Brown, 1996; Jetten, Hornsey, Spears, Haslam, & Cowell, in press). Other arguments may lead people to deliberately engage in whistle-blowing. Research within the domain of justice demonstrated that offences or offenders violate people's normative sense of justice, resulting in strong negative moral emotions towards the offender. As a consequence, people generally want to see the injustice that has been done to be undone, or at least to be requited for by some form of corrective action (van Prooijen, in press). The employment of corrective action works both ways, since it may not only show its effectiveness by punishing the transgressor (thereby repairing people's feelings of injustice), but also by stopping the transgression (thereby restricting any damage, Near & Miceli, 1995; Masser & Brown, 1996). This might motivate people to expose wrongdoings.

Whichever arguments may underlie people's decision to inform others about an outgroup transgression, the current article conclusively

615

identified someone's degree of identification with his/her ingroup (combined with this ingroup's relative status) as a strong predictor of this person's tendency to inform either the ingroup or the outgroup about an outgroup transgression. Literature on ingroup identification demonstrates that the more people identify with their ingroup, the more they will engage in defending their ingroup's social identity. Also, the more people identify with their ingroup, the more their thoughts and behaviours will be guided by what is in the best interest of the ingroup as a whole (Doosje et al., 1999, p. 85). On the other hand, the thoughts and behaviours of people who do not strongly identify with their ingroup are generally much more driven by personal considerations (Branscombe, Wann, Noel, & Coleman, 1993; Branscombe & Wann, 1994; Branscombe et al., 1999). In the current research, effects were stronger for high identifiers, suggesting the phenomenon of intergroup whistle-blowing to be strongly driven by group-based considerations.

The present research is interesting for it is one of the first to examine the phenomenon of whistle-blowing within an explicit intergroup context (i.e. an *ingroup* member observing an *outgroup* transgression). This endorses the importance of research after the phenomenon of intergroup whistle-blowing. The current research, however, is only a first step in this field and more research will be needed to more fully investigate the phenomenon of intergroup whistle-blowing. Interesting directions for future research might be to examine the effect of the severity of the transgression and the perceived legitimacy and/or stability of the intergroup status difference. Moreover, research that not only focuses on the question of which group individuals *initially* inform about harmful outgroup information, but also examines whether or not this (in- or out-)group subsequently informs the other group, would be interesting. More specifically, under what circumstances will members of low status groups, after thoughtful internal consideration, decide to jointly inform the outgroup? Research that would aim at gaining more insight into people's evaluation of intergroup whistle-blowers would be interesting: Do we like fellow members who

share useful information about a relevant higher status outgroup with us? And if so, do we like this member more as we more strongly identify with our group? Furthermore, research that would more thoroughly examine the (direct) link between the occurrence of whistle-blowing to the ingroup and/or outgroup on an outgroup transgression, and the increase/decrease in perceived relative standing of an ingroup, would further validate the notion that has been presented in this article.

Notes

1. The VU and the UvA are the only two universities in Amsterdam and can be considered rivals—this categorization has been successfully employed in earlier research (e.g. Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 2001).
2. A two-way ANOVA over the full 2 (Status: low vs. high) × 2 (Target: ingroup vs. outgroup) design with ingroup identification as dependent variable yielded neither a main effect of Status ($F[1, 83] = .02$, $p = .90$), nor a main effect of Target ($F[1, 83] = .02$, $p = .89$), or an interaction effect ($F[1, 83] = 2.82$, $p = .10$), from which could be deduced that the mean level of identification ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.29$) did not coincidentally vary across the four experimental conditions.
3. The test consisted of 20 assignments (i.e. multiple choice questions) regarding spatial aptitude and mathematics (on which men are generally considered to outperform women), as well as language (on which women are generally considered to outperform men). An Independent-Samples *t*-test showed that altogether, men ($M_{#CorrectAnswers} = 13.35$, $SD = 2.56$) and women ($M_{#CorrectAnswers} = 13.30$, $SD = 2.22$) performed equally well, $t(88) = .10$, $p = .22$.
4. The participant and the other (fictitious) in- and outgroup members were offered the opportunity to send an online message at the same moment. Since in reality no other in- or outgroup members were present, participants' messages were not transmitted to others, and the messages the participants received were pre-programmed. All messages were shown simultaneously after the last one was posted. Thus, any reference by the participant to the outgroup transgression could not have been affected by a communication of another in- or outgroup member.

5. A one-way ANOVA over perceived relative standing (low vs. high), with ingroup identification as dependent variable, yielded no effect of perceived relative standing (F [1,88] = 2.70, *ns*), from which could be deduced that the mean level of identification (M = 4.67, SD = 1.13) did not coincidentally vary across the two levels of perceived relative standing.

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617

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