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Fewer but better: Proportionate size of the group affects evaluation of transgressive leaders

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A group may be badly affected if its leader transgresses important rules. Nonetheless, an emerging body of evidence suggests that in intergroup contexts, group members apply a double standard when judging ingroup leaders – They respond less punitively to transgressions by their leader than by non-leaders. In this article, two experiments investigated how proportionate ingroup size affects reactions to transgressive ingroup leaders. We demonstrate that ingroup leaders from larger, but not smaller, groups benefit from the double standard. The experiments testing the effects of two different types of transgressions (nepotistic favouritism and corruption, respectively) show that transgressive leaders from larger groups are evaluated more positively than both comparable non-leaders and leaders from smaller groups. In contrast, transgressive leaders from smaller groups are evaluated similarly to comparable transgressive non-leaders. Experiment 2 investigated a potential explanation for this phenomenon. Faced with a transgressive leader, members of a smaller group report greater embarrassment than do members of larger groups in relation to the leaders' actions. Implications of these findings and directions for future research are discussed.

In virtually all realms of group life, we can find evidence of scandals involving large organizations in which leadership is at least complicit in dishonesty, corruption, or immorality (Hoyt, Price, & Poatsy, 2013; Kellerman, 2004; Ludwig & Longenecker, 1993). However, relatively little is known about how the salience of group membership may increase or decrease group members' tolerance of corrupt leadership. In this study, the concept of proportionate group size was used to investigate groups' evaluation of leaders and non-leaders under different degrees of membership salience.

Recent research on leadership and transgression has shown that under certain circumstances, followers apply a double standard in their evaluations of a transgressive leader. Specifically, they are more lenient towards a transgressive leader than a transgressive non-leader of their group (Abrams, Randsley de Moura, & Travaglino, 2013; Randsley de Moura & Abrams, 2013). This may in part explain why leadership is sometimes associated with misconduct (Bazerman & Tenbrunsel, 2011). However, because leaders are usually seen as highly prototypical of their groups (Hogg, 2001), a

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leader's behaviour is likely to have important repercussions on the group's image and reputation (Abrams, Travaglino, Randsley de Moura, & May, 2014).

Here, we contend that protecting the group's image may be particularly important for groups of proportionally smaller size, and therefore, smaller groups will be less tolerant of their leader's transgressions. Proportionate group size has been defined as the ratio of the number of individuals in a group to the total number of individuals across groups (Mullen, 1991). Although often neglected, this variable has important effects on how individuals perceive themselves and their group (Mullen, 1991; Simon, 2004).

Research on the effect of proportionate group size on the self has shown that members of smaller groups tend to self-stereotype more strongly compared to members of larger groups (Simon & Hamilton, 1994). Members of smaller groups also perceive their group membership as more central and salient (Lucken & Simon, 2005) and are thus more prone to self-focused attention (Mullen, 1991). In addition, in some circumstances, members of smaller groups seem more concerned with the impact of their actions on the group's success (Brewer & Kramer, 1986; cf. Olson, 1965). These findings all suggest that individuals in smaller groups may be more sensitive to variables that may affect the group's standing or esteem and hence may perceive a leader who engages in transgressive actions more negatively. This research investigated, for the first time, whether proportionate size of the group affects evaluations of transgressive leaders.

Social identity approach, leadership, and transgression

The social identity analysis of leadership holds that more prototypical group members are likely to emerge as leaders (Hogg, van Knippenberg, & Rast, 2012). Indeed, a greater degree of prototypicality is linked to greater social attractiveness (Hogg, 2001) and trust (van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003), which are important attributes for leadership (Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011; Hogg, 2001; Hogg *et al.*, 2012). Thus, according to this conceptualization, leadership *accrues* from prototypicality.

This analysis has been recently complemented by Abrams and colleagues (Abrams, Randsley de Moura, Marques, & Hutchison, 2008; Randsley de Moura, Abrams, Marques, & Hutchison, 2011). These authors argue that merely by virtue of occupying a leadership role, leaders may also have prototypicality *conferred* upon them. Often individuals have no direct contact with their leaders. For example, an employee within an organization may not directly know the CEO. However, if a person is known to be a group's leader, people may generally presume that the person is also prototypical of the group. Abrams *et al.* (2008) postulated that the prototypicality inherent in leadership is why people are less prone to criticize or derogate deviant ingroup leaders (cf. also Hogg *et al.*, 2012). To do so implies criticism of the group as a whole and hence signals disloyalty. As a consequence, ingroup leaders may sometimes enjoy greater opportunities to deviate from norms.

A growing body of evidence indicates that negative evaluations of individuals who oppose group opinions become more favourable if the individual is a leader rather than a regular group member. For instance, in seven studies Abrams *et al.* (2008) demonstrated that newly appointed leaders who deviated from the group's prototypical attitude were evaluated more positively than non-leaders who expressed similarly deviant opinions – Leaders were granted 'innovation credit'.

In a similar vein, leaders who transgress social norms may be conferred the right to deviate – A phenomenon Abrams *et al.* (2013) labelled 'transgression credit' (see also Abrams *et al.*, 2014; cf. also Karelaia & Keck, 2013; Shapiro, Boss, Salas, Tangirala, & Von

Glinow, 2011; Sutton & Jordan, 2013). For instance, two studies by Randsley de Moura and Abrams (2013) demonstrated that individuals tend to apply a double standard when they assessed transgressive leaders.

Five studies by Abrams *et al.* (2013) showed the application of the double standard, or 'transgression credit', to ingroup leaders in competitive sports contexts and minimal groups. Across these studies, individuals were asked to evaluate either a leader or a regular group member (targets) described as engaging in transgressions from general norms such as bribery, corruption, and cheating, or who departed from the rules of a sport game (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). The targets either shared the same category as the participant (i.e., belonged to the same university, had the same perceptual style in a minimal group, were part of the participants' self-selected favoured sport team) or were part of a competing outgroup (cf. McGarty, 1999; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Results showed that participants evaluated transgressors from either category negatively. Such negative evaluations were however attenuated when the transgressor was an ingroup leader. In sum, individuals applied a double standard, evaluating transgressive ingroup leaders more positively than outgroup leaders and more positively than both ingroup and outgroup non-leaders.

The concepts of innovation credit and transgression credit may appear to share aspects of Hollander's idea of idiosyncrasy credit (IC; Hollander, 1958, 2008). According to Hollander, leaders accumulate IC with followers by conforming to norms and showing competence. Once enough credits are accrued, leaders are granted latitude to implement new strategies, and behave counter-normatively. Rather than allowing latitude for idiosyncrasies, however, the idea of transgression credit is intended to apply to clear violations of rules and of standards of conduct widely shared across groups. Because transgression credit is the more extreme phenomenon and because Hollander's work does not extend to such extreme actions, it is particularly interesting to understand how and why it occurs.

Importantly, unlike IC, transgression credit depends on social identity and intergroup differences (Abrams *et al.*, 2013). Credit is specifically reserved for ingroup leaders not leaders in general, a distinction never specifically acknowledged in Hollander's work (Hollander, 2008). Moreover, and relatedly, transgression credit does not depend on interpersonal interdependence or leader–member exchange (Abrams *et al.*, 2013). When a leader shares the same category as participants, this can be sufficient for the leader to be awarded latitude to deviate, whereas that latitude is not granted to other ingroup members. This seems to suggest that prior contact or knowledge about the leader is not a necessary condition for transgression credit.

These studies are broadly consistent with subjective group dynamics (SGD) theory (Abrams *et al.*, 2008, 2013; Marques, Abrams, & Serôdio, 2001). SGD contends that individuals engage in fine-grained intracategory differentiation to sustain the subjective validity of the ingroup identity. As a consequence, individuals generally derogate ingroup deviants more harshly than outgroup deviants (the so-called black sheep effect; Marques & Páez, 1994). In the case of leaders, however, and when the transgressions concern non-group-defining norms (cf. Marques, Yzerbyt, & Leyens, 1988, experiment 2), sustaining a transgressive leader might become an acceptable way of expressing loyalty to the group, and confirming the group's subjective validity.

But will members of all types of groups react equally to a leader's transgression? Several characteristics at different levels of analysis are likely to play a role in the assessment of transgressive leaders. So far, research has focused on severity of the deviance (Karelaia & Keck, 2013), leaders' motivation for transgressing (i.e., self-favouring vs. group-favouring

transgressions; Abrams *et al.*, 2013), and types of transgression that may affect the group's reputation within the larger intergroup context (e.g., expressions of prejudicial attitudes; Abrams *et al.*, 2014). We now extend this body of research by investigating the effect of a potentially important aspect of the intergroup context, namely how group membership salience, as affected by proportionate size of the group, impacts on members' judgement of transgressive leaders and non-leaders.

Proportionate group size and group perception

Research has demonstrated that proportionate group size significantly affects the way individuals perceive themselves and their groups (Brewer, 2003; Mullen, 1983, 1991). Smaller groups are characterized by a higher degree of perceptual salience (Mullen, 1991; Mullen, Brown, & Smith, 1992; Mullen, Salas, & Driskell, 1989), and they attract more attention from members of both the smaller and larger category. Consequently, members of smaller groups show more accentuated self-attention. This, in turn, translates into stronger ingroup bias (Mullen *et al.*, 1992), more systematic self-regulation in terms of group norms (Abrams, 1994), greater conformity to situational standards of behaviour, and lower levels of antinormative actions such as social loafing and antisocial behaviour (Mullen, 1983). Furthermore, as the size of the group increases relative to an outgroup, the less satisfied individuals feel with their groups (Slater, 1958) and leaders (Foels, Driskell, Mullen, & Salas, 2000; Mullen, Symons, Hu, & Salas, 1989). In addition, people commit more resources to membership of groups that provide greater social distinctiveness (Abrams, 2009; Brewer, 2003).

Members of smaller categories perceive their ingroup to be relatively more homogeneous, while perceiving greater outgroup variability (Mullen & Hu, 1989; cf. Simon, 2004). Several explanations have been proposed for this phenomenon, including differential power (Guinote, 2004), cognitive salience and self-stereotyping (Mullen, 1991; Simon, 2004; Simon & Hamilton, 1994), and optimal distinctiveness (Brewer, 1991). What is relevant here is that empirical evidence points to the fact that relative group size impacts on the salience of group membership.

We further argue that proportionate group size may also impact perception of transgressions by leaders. Specifically, due to the perception of ingroup homogeneity and thereby stronger self-stereotyping, members of smaller groups endorse ingroup attributes more strongly than members of larger groups (Simon & Hamilton, 1994). As ingroup leaders are perceived as embodying those attributes more than other members (Hogg, 2001), members of smaller groups may be more sensitive to how leaders' actions reflect on them (Abrams *et al.*, 2014). This line of reasoning is also consistent with the idea that members of smaller groups are more prone to embarrassment (Buss, 1980), due to the fact that they are more self-attentive, and more likely to attract attention from other (larger) groups (Mullen, 1991).

Note that relative group size refers to the proportion of members in a given group, relative to an outgroup. This should not be confused with the absolute number of individuals in a group (Mullen, 1991). Moreover, relative group size is not necessarily accompanied by variations in social status or prestige (Simon, 2004). In particular, while social status and prestige may sometime overlap with relative size (e.g., smaller groups have lower social status), their covariation is not a necessary condition (e.g., larger groups may have lower social status; Simon, 2004). In keeping with these observations, it has been demonstrated that proportionate group size may affect individual and group perceptions both in *ad hoc* groups (e.g., laboratories groups) and in larger scale

categories (e.g., Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland; for a thorough review, see Mullen, 1991). In this study, we investigated the effect of relative group size on perception of leadership transgression. Following previous research, we defined membership in smaller groups in terms of relative size of the ingroup compared to the outgroup.

Overview of the experiments

Both experiments investigated whether the proportionate size of the ingroup moderates individual assessment of transgressive leaders. We examined how group members evaluate transgressions that represent general departure from widely held ethical standards (Abrams *et al.*, 2013; Bazerman & Tenbrunsel, 2011; Randsley de Moura & Abrams, 2013). As in previous studies (Abrams *et al.*, 2013; see especially Randsley de Moura & Abrams, 2013), targets shared the same category as participants to the experiment (i.e., they were members of the same university).

Across experiments, and consistent with previous research (Mullen, 1991), the relative size of the ingroup was manipulated by varying the size of the outgroup. Specifically, participants were informed that their university (18,000 students) was competing either with the University of London (135,000 students) or with a (fictitious but plausible) college of the University of London (which we named 'St. Mary's College, University of London', and which purportedly had 2,000 students). Although some colleges within the University of London are highly prestigious, others are less so across a range of criteria that are relevant to students (e.g., satisfaction, student experience). By providing a fictitious college name, it was intended that participants would assume the college was typical of the University of London as a whole.

Experiment 1 used a nepotistic personal favour as an example of transgression. Nepotism in the hiring process has been shown to be related to lower degree of commitment to the workplace and a more negative view of subordinates (Padgett & Morris, 2005). We expect individuals to evaluate normative (non-transgressive) targets more favourably than transgressive targets. However, we hypothesize that a double standard in the evaluation of transgressive leaders will emerge only among members of a larger group. In keeping with research on relative group size and self-stereotyping (Mullen, 1991), we predict that transgressive leaders of smaller groups will be evaluated less positively than transgressive leaders of larger groups.

Experiment 2 tested whether results from Experiment 1 extend to a different form of transgression, namely corruption (cf. Randsley de Moura & Abrams, 2013). Experiment 2 also investigated a potential mechanism that may drive differential assessment of ingroup leaders in smaller or larger groups. Specifically, we consider the role played by perceived embarrassment about the transgressors' actions (cf. Buss, 1980; Edelmann, 1981; Mullen, 1983). As discussed above, members of smaller groups have a tendency to identify and self-stereotype more strongly compared to members of larger groups (Simon, 2004). Moreover, smaller categories are cognitively more salient compared to larger categories, and prompt a stronger self-focus in their memberships (Mullen, 1991). Thus, we might expect members of a smaller group to be more vigilant for failures to adhere to appropriate standards (Abrams, 1994) and thus to express more embarrassment about a transgression. In addition, due to the high relevance of a leader for the group's image (Platow, van Knippenberg, Haslam, van Knippenberg, & Spears, 2006), we might expect these reactions to be stronger towards leaders than towards regular members.

EXPERIMENT 1

Method

Participants and design

Sixty-six undergraduate psychology students (47 females; 1 unreported)[1] took part in this experiment in exchange for course credit (M_{age} = 19.66, SD = 2.73). Participants were assigned randomly to conditions in a 2 (Size: Smaller vs. Larger) × 2 (Role: Leader vs. Non-leader) × 2 (Target: Normative, Deviant) mixed factorial design, with repeated measures on the target factor.

Procedure and materials

The experiment was conducted using an online platform (Qualtrics). Participants sat in front of computers individually and followed the instructions on the screen. To check that participants valued their identity as students of the ingroup university, at the beginning of the experimental section the degree of identification with the university was measured using five items (Randsley de Moura, Abrams, Retter, Gunnarsdottir, & Ando, 2009). Following the identification measure, participants started the experiment. The experiment consisted of three phases. In the first phase, participants were presented with an introductory scenario describing the ingroup and an outgroup university, which were competing over the allocation of research funds. Participants' university was the relevant ingroup, whereas the outgroup university varied according to the manipulation of ingroup relative size. The cover story stated that the funds were offered by a Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP; for a similar paradigm, see Randsley de Moura & Abrams, 2013). To increase the salience of competition, participants read that the funds were very valuable to students and faculty members alike because they would allow the university to provide important services, including 'keeping student fees under control' (note that when the experiment was launched, students had just been subjected to a substantial increase in tuition fees). To enforce the normative context, participants were informed that due to economic constraints, it was important that LEP's allocation decisions should be based on transparent criteria of merit and excellence. Further, to introduce the manipulation of deviance, participants were informed that the LEP chairman had been profiled in a newspaper and that there was a rumour that his cousin, a young academic, had applied for positions in different universities, including those that were competing for LEP funds.

In the second phase of the experiment, the relative size of the ingroup university was manipulated by varying the size of the outgroup rival. In the smaller group condition, the participants' university (18,000 students) was described as competing with the University of London (135,000 students). In the larger group condition, the competitor was instead (the fictitious) St. Mary's College, University of London (2,000 students). In both conditions, participants were informed that despite their differences in size, the ingroup and outgroup universities were attended by students with comparable socio-economic status and the universities had similar league table positions in a recent Guardian University Guide.

As a further test that participants would not have different *a priori* perceptions of the two outgroup universities, perception of the outgroup was measured asking participants

[1] *In the two experiments, gender did not affect the dependent variables either as a main effect or in interaction with other variables.*

to rate how unfavourable or favourable they felt towards the competing university (1 = *very unfavourable*, 7 = *very favourable*). Comprehension questions were included in this phase to check that participants understood and remembered information correctly. Participants who answered incorrectly were shown the relevant information again. A visual reminder of the relative size of the university was also included in the upright corner of the screen, where two squares of different sizes and colours were shown. The squares were labelled with the names of the ingroup and outgroup universities.

In the third phase of the experiment, the manipulation of deviance was introduced. Participants were asked to select two of the four members of the university delegation, indicated with alphabetical labels (e.g., Person *W*, *X*, *Y*, or *Z*). Regardless of their choices, participants were told they had selected a leader and a regular member (one of which was normative and the other a deviant target). Participants read: 'You have selected Person [e.g., *X*] and Person [e.g., *Y*]. Person *X* is a member of this delegation and has contributed diligently to the delegation work. Person *Y* was the leader of the University's delegation and has led the delegation through all the previous meetings, managing the work and planning the aims and the objectives of the delegation'. Thus, consistent with previous work on the double standard (Abrams *et al.*, 2013) and research in the SGD (Marques *et al.*, 2001), the participants and the targets shared the same category, but there was no direct interdependence between them. Next, participants read about the behaviour of the delegation members while they had been discussing the allocation of funding in a meeting with LEP's panel.

Both the normative and the deviant targets were described as approaching the LEP committee's chairman at two different times. The normative target was quoted as discussing the university's project and its strength. Specifically, the normative target stated: 'We recognize LEP's need to provide money to the best projects and we believe in the strength and in the relevance of our work and in the absolute dedication of our academic and technical staff!' In contrast, the transgressive target's statement was 'You know, part of the funds for the project will involve hiring new staff. I've heard that a cousin of yours has applied for a job at our university. Actually I'm part of the selection panel which will be making a decision in a couple of weeks time, and the competition is really very strong. But... you know... if we were successful in getting the LEP funds it would give me great pleasure to be able to say that a splendid career would be open to your cousin...'. After reading both the statements (randomized), participants completed the dependent measures, were debriefed on the scope of the experiment, and were thanked for their time.

Identification

Participants were asked to rate their degree of identification with the ingroup university (1 = *Not at All*, 7 = *Completely*) using five items (Randsley de Moura *et al.*, 2009). Sample items are 'I am pleased to think of myself as a [Ingroup University] member', 'Being a [Ingroup University] student is important to me', and 'I identify with [Ingroup University]'. The items formed a reliable scale (α = .92).

Evaluations

Participants were asked to reflect on the target's behaviour and to rate to what extent each target was likeable, competent, powerful, and charismatic (1 = *Not at All*, 7 =

Completely). These items were drawn from previous research on the black sheep effect and transgression credit (Abrams *et al.*, 2013) as well as characteristics typically associated with leaders (Haslam *et al.*, 2011; Hollander, 2008) and were designed to tap general evaluations that could apply to all targets. Because participants were only informed that they shared membership with these targets and targets were not individuated, the measure should reflect aspects of social attraction (Hogg & Abrams, 1988, p. 107). These items formed a reliable scale for both the leader (α = .82) and the non-leader (α = .82) so were averaged for each target.

Manipulation check

To test whether participants perceived the nepotistic proposal to be transgressive, we asked participants to rate to what extent each target was breaking the rules (1 = *Not at All*, 7 = *Completely*).

Results and discussion

To check that participants did not differ in their attitudes towards the two outgroups, we performed a *t*-test comparing effect of size on outgroup perception. The results confirmed that the two universities were rated similarly when the ingroup was smaller (outgroup is University of London; M = 4.28, SE = .21) and larger (outgroup is St. Mary's College, University of London; M = 3.94, SE = .16), $t(61) = 1.28$, p = .21, d = 0.33. To check the transgression manipulation, we performed a Size × Role × Target ANOVA on the manipulation check with repeated measures on the target factor. There was only a significant main effect of target, $F(1, 58) = 57.34$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .49$. Not surprisingly, normative targets (M = 2.19, SE = .22) were perceived as breaking the rule less than transgressive targets (M = 5.33, SE = .28). The absence of other main effects or interactions demonstrates that neither size nor role *per se* affected whether proposing a nepotistic favour was judged as transgressive. Finally, to check that participants valued their identity as students of the Ingroup University, we tested whether the mean level of identification (M = 5.67, SD = 0.96) was higher than the scale mid-point (4), $t(65) = 14.08$, $p < .001$, d = 3.49. Because identification was measured before manipulations of conditions, and because no effect of the identification was found in the subsequent analyses, this measure is not discussed further.

Evaluations

To test our hypotheses, we performed a Size × Role × Target ANOVA on evaluations, with repeated measures on the target factor. One participant's score was an outlier (2.5 standard deviations from the mean) and was removed from the analysis. There was a main effect of target, $F(1, 58) = 45.73$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .44$. Normative targets (M = 4.97, SE = .12) were evaluated more positively than transgressive targets (M = 3.75, SE = .13). The Target × Role two-way interaction was marginal, $F(1, 58) = 3.68$, p = .06, $\eta_p^2 = .06$. There was however a significant Size × Role × Target three-way interaction, $F(1, 58) = 6.63$, p = .013, $\eta_p^2 = .10$. Other main effects and two-way interactions were not significant, $Fs(1, 58) < 2.61$, $ps > .11$, $\eta_p^2 < .04$. Means are shown in Table 1.

We hypothesized that the double standard would emerge only in the larger group condition. Confirming this prediction, and in line with previous findings (Randsley de

Table 1. Experiment 1: Means and standard deviations (in parentheses) for the effects of size, role, and target on evaluations of transgressive and normative targets

	Smaller ingroup		Larger ingroup	
Target	Leader (*SD*)	Non-leader (*SD*)	Leader (*SD*)	Non-leader (*SD*)
Normative	5.13 (0.90)	5.05 (1.01)	5.17 (0.87)	4.53 (1.01)
Transgressor	3.43 (0.77)	3.74 (1.08)	4.41 (1.03)	3.44 (0.99)

Note. Evaluations were measured on 7-point scale (1 = *Not at All*, 7 = *Completely*).

Moura & Abrams, 2013), the simple effects of role within size and target confirmed that the transgressive leader from the larger group was evaluated more positively than the transgressive non-leader from the larger group, $F(1, 58) = 8.10$, $p = .006$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$. Importantly, this comparison was not significant in the smaller group condition, $F(1, 58) = 0.72$, $p = .40$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. Thus, although the actual size of the ingroup was the same in both cases, the transgressive leader was only evaluated more favourably than a transgressive non-leader if the ingroup was larger than the outgroup.

We also predicted that a transgressive leader from a larger group would be evaluated more positively than a leader from smaller group. The simple effects of size within role and target showed that the transgressive leader from the larger group was evaluated more positively than the transgressive leader from a smaller group, $F(1, 58) = 7.69$, $p = .007$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$. The other simple effects of size were not significant, $Fs(1, 58) < 2.36$, $ps > .13$, $\eta_p^2 < .04$.

These results show that transgressive leaders from larger groups that propose a nepotistic favour were evaluated more positively than non-leaders. In contrast, leaders of smaller groups were evaluated similar to non-leaders (i.e., they did not receive transgression credit). Moreover, transgressive leaders from a larger group were evaluated more positively than transgressive leaders from a smaller group. Thus, the relative size of the ingroup appears to affect the application of the double standard to ingroup leaders.

An alternative explanation for these findings is that because we used different outgroups to manipulate ingroup relative size, participants held different expectations about the status of the outgroups. An initial check on participants' attitudes towards the outgroups revealed no differences across conditions. As a further test of whether variation in the size of the outgroup was related to variation in perception of relative ingroup or outgroup status, we conducted a follow-up study using Qualtrics. Forty-eight psychology undergraduate students (25 females, $M_{age} = 19$, $SD = 6.13$) were assigned randomly to conditions in a 2 (Size: Smaller vs. Larger) × 2 (Group: Ingroup vs. Outgroup) mixed factorial design, with repeated measures on the group factor.

Participants were asked to read a brief scenario as above, describing a competition over the allocation of funds for the construction of an Olympic-size swimming pool. Depending on the condition, the competing outgroup was either the University of London, or St. Mary's College, University of London. No participants expressed any suspicions regarding the existence of St. Mary's College. In both conditions, participants were informed that the ingroup and outgroup universities were attended by students with comparable socio-economic status and the universities had similar league table positions in a recent Guardian University Guide. After reading the scenario, participants completed

the dependent measures. They were then entered in a prize draw to win a £20 Amazon's voucher.

To assess whether perception of ingroup or outgroup status varied according to the ingroup relative size, we used three items. Participants were asked how, compared with most other UK universities, would they rate the Ingroup [Outgroup] University in terms of *Status*, *Quality of Student Experience*, and *Ability of Students* on a 7-point scale (1 = *lowest*, 7 = *highest*). The items formed a reliable scale both for the ingroup (α = .74) and the outgroup (α = .76). Items were analysed using ANOVA, with repeated measures on the group factor. Results showed a main effect of group, $F(1, 41) = 11.72$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .22$. Regardless of size, participants perceived the Ingroup University ($M = 5.08$, $SE = .11$) to be higher in status than the Outgroup University ($M = 4.79$, $SE = .13$).

The results are consistent with the assumption that participants inferred that 'St. Mary's College' was representative of the University of London as a whole. Specifically, there was no main effect of size, $F(1, 41) = 0.56$, $p = .46$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$. The interaction between group and size was not significant, $F(1, 41) = 0.25$, $p = .62$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$. These results therefore indicated that the relative size of the outgroup did not affect perceptions of outgroup status.

In the next experiment, we extended results from Experiment 1 using a different manipulation of transgression, namely corruption. Because no significant differences emerged among normative targets in Experiment 1, Experiment 2 did not manipulate the target factor.

EXPERIMENT 2

Experiment 1 revealed that leaders from smaller groups do not benefit from the same leniency granted to leaders from larger groups when they act transgressively. Experiment 2 extended the research in a number of ways. First, we tested whether the effect of relative group size on leader evaluations would replicate using a different transgression, namely corruption (cf. Randsley de Moura & Abrams, 2013). Second, we addressed a potential confound of Experiment 1. In Experiment 1, the transgression was enacted during a meeting with LEP's representative. That is, the transgression took place in front of individuals who did not belong to the ingroup. As groups of different relative sizes may be influenced differently by the intergroup context, and to avoid this confound, Experiment 2 presented a transgression that occurred during a private meeting with other ingroup members.

Finally, Experiment 2 tested a possible explanation of why individuals are less lenient towards an ingroup leader from a smaller group. Members of proportionally smaller groups show more concern for the group image, relative to members of larger groups (Simon, 2004). Moreover, members from smaller groups are generally more self-attentive, due to the greater cognitive salience of smaller groups. Indeed, belonging to smaller groups has been related to lower levels of antinormative behaviour (Mullen, 1983), and higher levels of embarrassment when situational standards are not met (Buss, 1980). Thus, we predicted that members from smaller groups should perceive transgressions to be more embarrassing for the group. We expect this to be particularly true for leaders due to the centrality of their position within the group (Hogg, 2001). We therefore predict that the indirect effect of group size through embarrassment on evaluations of transgressive targets should be moderated by role, such that it will be stronger if the ingroup transgressor is a leader than if the transgressor is a non-leader.

Method

Participants and design

Fifty-three psychology undergraduates (40 females) participated in an experiment ostensibly to assess 'impressions generated by individuals' arguments in a work-related scenario' (M_{age} = 20.08, SD = 1.75), in exchange for course credits. Participants were assigned randomly to conditions in a 2 (Size = Minority vs. Majority) × 2 (Role = Leader vs. Non-leader) between participants design.

Procedure and materials

Participants took part in this experiment via Qualtrics in a classroom as a requirement for the course. The experiment was embedded in a practical class session and constructed so that it could be completed in a 15-min window. Specifically, the scenario was introduced as a filler task within a pre-measure versus post-measure demonstration of social projection effects involving attitudes about a completely unrelated topic. Materials were similar to those in Experiment 1 except for the differences described below. At the start of the experiment, participants measured their level of identification with the ingroup university as in Experiment 1. Then, they were informed that a recently formed LEP was allocating funding for the construction of an Olympic-size swimming pool. The ingroup university was described as competing against an outgroup university for these funds. As in the previous experiment, relative size of the ingroup was manipulating by varying the size of the competing outgroup university (i.e., University of London vs. St. Mary's College, University of London). As in Experiment 1, perception of the outgroup was measured by asking participants to rate how unfavourable or favourable they felt towards the competing university (1 = *very unfavourable*, 7 = *very favourable*). To introduce the manipulation of deviance, participants read that the LEP's chief executive had recently been profiled in the Business Section of a newspaper. They read that the spouse of a member of the ingroup university's Senate and the LEP president's wife belonged to the same art appreciation group.

Next, participants were informed that a delegation from the ingroup university had been preparing to meet the LEP's panel. As in Experiment 1, participants selected a member of the delegation allegedly to read and consider a random extract of his conversation with the rest of the delegation. Regardless of their choice, participants were told they had selected either a regular member or the leader of the delegation. The extract contained a transgressive statement implying that the delegation should take advantage of the connection between the Senate and the LEP panel President's wife to obtain the funding. Specifically, participants read: 'Ok, now a bit off the record please, I know it is against the rule, but I think what we should do is to send a convincing 'gift' to the president of the LEP panel. You know, just to help to make his mind up. To facilitate things. We all know that we have this connection between the Senate member and the panel president. Why shouldn't we take advantage of it?' After reading the extract, participants completed the dependent measures and were thanked and debriefed.

Likeability

To measure likeability of the target, participants were asked to what extent they liked the target (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*).

Embarrassment

Participants were asked to what extent they felt the target's behaviour was embarrassing for the group (1 = *Not at all*, 7 = *Very Much*).

Manipulation check

Participants rated to what extent the target was breaking the rules of the situation (1 = *Not at All*, 7 = *Completely*).

Results and discussion

As in the previous experiment, we checked that participants did not hold different attitudes towards the outgroups. The results again confirmed that the two universities were rated similarly both in the smaller (M = 5.11, SE = .27) and in the larger (M = 5.00, SE = .13) group conditions, $t(51) = 0.371$, $p = .71$, $d = 0.10$. A t-test against the scale mid-point (4) on the manipulation check showed that the act was perceived as transgressive (M = 5.10, SE = .34), $t(51) = 3.21$, $p = .002$, $d = 0.90$. A 2 (Size) × 2 (Role) ANOVA did not yield significant main effects or interactions, $Fs(1, 48) < 3.29$, confirming that these variables did not affect perception of deviance. Finally, a t-test against the scale mid-point (4) on the identification measure confirmed that participants valued their identity as members of the ingroup university (M = 6.15, SD = 0.58), $t(52) = 26.98$, $p < .001$, $d = 7.48$. Because identification was measured prior to manipulations, and because no main effects or interactions were detected involving identification, this measure is not discussed further.

Likeability

To test our hypotheses, we performed a Size × Role ANOVA on likeability. There were no significant main effects of size or role, $Fs(1, 46) < 0.23$, $p > .64$, $\eta_p^2 < .005$. There was however a significant Size × Role interaction, $F(1, 46) = 5.54$, $p = .023$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$. Replicating previous studies, an inspection of the simple effects of role within size showed that the transgressive leader (M = 4.31, SE = .37) was evaluated more positively than the transgressive non-leader (M = 3.23, SE = .37) in the larger group, $F(1, 46) = 4.23$, $p = .045$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$. The difference was not significant within the smaller group condition (M = 3.29, SE = .40 vs. M = 4.00, SE = .42, respectively), $F(1, 46) = 1.67$, $p = .20$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$.

In addition, replicating the findings of the previous experiment, the transgressive leader of a larger group was liked more than the transgressive leader of a smaller group, $F(1, 46) = 3.95$, $p = .053$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$. Because this comparison was .003 beyond the conventional threshold of significance, we conducted an additional bootstrap test using 5,000 bootstraps. The 95% CI ranged from −2.048 to −0.064. The difference was not significant for non-leaders, $F(1, 46) = 1.88$, $p = .18$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$ (Figure 1).

Embarrassment

The main effect of size was marginal, $F(1, 48) = 3.73$, $p = .06$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$. Overall, transgressive targets of a smaller group (M = 5.45, SE = .43) were perceived as embarrassing the group more than transgressive targets of a larger group (M = 4.27,

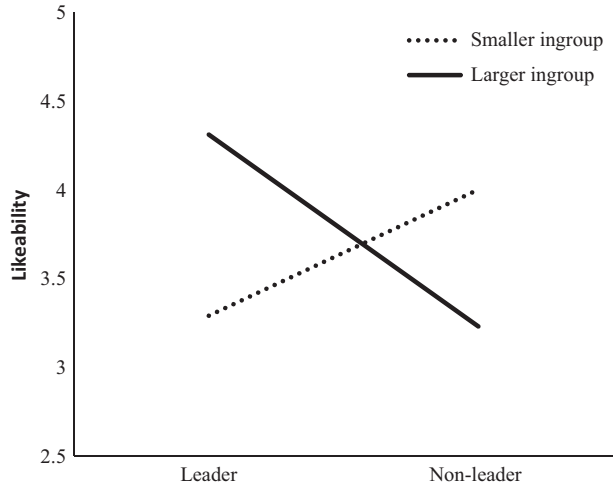

Figure 1. Experiment 2: Transgressor likeability as a function of proportionate group size and role.

SE = .43), suggesting that members of smaller groups are more concerned with the group image. There was no main effect of role, $F(1, 48) = 0.03$, $p = .86$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$. However, the main effects were qualified by a significant Size × Role interaction, $F(1, 48) = 4.85$, $p = .033$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$. The transgressive leader of the larger group ($M = 3.54$, $SE = .61$) was perceived as being less embarrassing for the group compared to the transgressive leader of a smaller group ($M = 6.07$, $SE = .59$), $F(1, 48) = 8.87$, $p = .005$, $\eta_p^2 = .16$. The difference was not significant for transgressive non-leaders ($M = 5.00$, $SE = .61$ vs. $M = 4.83$, $SE = .64$), $F(1, 48) = 0.04$, $p = .85$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$.

Moreover, the simple effects of role within size revealed no difference within the smaller group. The transgressive leader and transgressive non-leader were perceived as equally embarrassing, $F(1, 48) = 2.03$, $p = .16$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. In the larger group condition, the difference between transgressive leader and non-leader was marginal, $F(1, 48) = 2.85$, $p = .098$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$, but in a direction consistent with the double standard.

Moderated mediation analysis

To investigate the role played by perception of embarrassment on likeability of transgressive leaders, we conducted a test of the indirect effect, using the procedure and SPSS PROCESS macro for moderated mediation (Hayes, 2012) with 5,000 bootstraps, in which embarrassment transmitted the interactive effect of size and role on perceived favourability of the transgressors. The model was significant, $F(3, 46) = 3.09$, $p = .04$, and explained 17% of the variance in the outcome.

Embarrassment (the mediator) was significantly affected by size, $b = -4.97$, $t = -2.60$, $p = .012$. Transgressive targets were perceived as more embarrassing in the smaller group condition. Role marginally affected embarrassment, $b = -3.40$, $t = -1.71$, $p = .09$. In addition, there was a significant Size × Role interaction, $b = 2.43$, $t = 1.96$, $p = .05$.

The effect of embarrassment on favourability was significant, $b = -0.44$, $SE = .07$, $t = -6.75$, $p < .001$, whereas the direct effect of size, $b = -0.43$, $SE = .30$, $t = -1.43$, $p = .16$, was not, suggesting the possibility of full mediation.

We predicted that the indirect effect of size on transgressor favourability through embarrassment would be especially strong for the leader compared to the non-leader. To test this hypothesis, we investigated the conditional indirect effect of size within each level of role. As predicted, the conditional indirect effect of size was significant for leaders, $b = 1.11$, $SE = .42$, 95% CI 0.38–2.02, but not for non-leaders, $b = 0.05$, $SE = .45$, 95% CI −0.83 to 0.98. Thus, ingroup leaders from a larger group receive transgression credit compared to ingroup leaders from a smaller ingroup, in part, because members regard their actions as less embarrassing.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

These experiments investigated how relative group size affects members' evaluation of transgressive leaders. Building on previous literature on leadership and transgression (Randsley de Moura & Abrams, 2013), and proportionate group size and group perception (Mullen, 1991; Simon, 2004), we predicted that while members of a larger group would apply a double standard when judging transgressive leaders, members of a smaller group would be less lenient in their evaluations. In addition, we predicted that transgressive leaders of a smaller group would be evaluated less positively than transgressive leaders of a larger group. Results from both experiments confirmed these hypotheses.

Across two experiments using different transgressions, we demonstrated that transgressive leaders are evaluated less positively when the group is smaller compared to when the group is larger. Furthermore, while transgressive leaders are evaluated more positively than transgressive non-leaders in the larger group condition (i.e., they benefit from a double standard), transgressive leaders are not differentiated from non-leaders in the smaller group condition. Thus, these results suggest that those who are part of a smaller group are less prone to apply a double standard in their evaluation of transgressive leaders. Interestingly, these findings emerged in large-scale organizations (universities) and in the context of shared categories, where no personal interdependence or leader–member exchange may account for the patterns of results.

Experiment 2 also demonstrated that the effect of proportionate group size on transgressor evaluations may be explained by perception of how the target's actions reflect on the rest of the group. Specifically, the indirect effect of group size on transgressor evaluations was attributable to how embarrassing the target's actions were perceived to be for the rest of the group. Furthermore, the role of the transgressor moderated this linkage, so that it was significant only for leaders but not for non-leaders. This is consistent with propositions from the literature on group size and self (Mullen, 1983; Simon, 2004), which suggests that members of smaller group perceive the group as more homogenous and they self-stereotype more strongly. This is also consistent with the literature on social identity and leadership (Haslam *et al.*, 2011), which shows that leaders have a prominent role in defining group identity.

Limitations, future directions, and conclusions

These experiments extend and qualify the recent body of evidence suggesting that transgressive leaders are evaluated more positively when they transgress from relevant social norms or behave unethically (Abrams *et al.*, 2013, 2014; Hoyt *et al.*, 2013; Karelaia & Keck, 2013). Specifically, these experiments demonstrated that a socio-contextual variable – group size – affects members' perceptions of transgressive leaders. Members of

smaller groups show less leniency than do members of larger groups when judging transgressive leaders.

There are some potential limitations of the present research. In Experiment 2 – due to time constraints – likeability was assessed with a single item (Abrams *et al.*, 2008). While this may increase vulnerability to measurement error, this is less of a concern given that the construct is concrete and unambiguous, and the sample homogenous (cf. Fuchs & Diamantopoulus, 2009). We also reviewed data from Experiment 1 and confirmed that this item had the highest item–total correlation in the favourability measures for both the non-leader and the leader. Moreover, the effect sizes for the smaller/larger group transgressive leader comparison did not differ between studies (r = .34 and .28, respectively, Z = 1.29, ns) and the combined effect size ($\bar{r}$ = .32) was highly significant (Z = 3.30, p < .0005).

It is also important to consider whether the particular method used to manipulate proportionate group size was appropriate. This was done by altering the relative size of the competing outgroups (cf. Mullen, 1983, 1991). This method has the advantage of keeping a meaningful ingroup constant, while at the same time varying the perception of size. It is not uncommon that a group's size remains stable even though its status as 'majority' or 'minority' varies depending on which groups it is compared with. For instance, a political party may have a stable base of supporters, but its main competitor may gain or lose support, varying its relative status from 'minority' to 'majority' or vice versa.

Because the absolute size of the ingroup was held constant in the present experiments, it is unknown whether absolute size has any bearing on the effects. However, the double standard has already been demonstrated across a wide range of intergroup contexts, with groups that ranged from small or minimal groups to large-scale social categories, but where the ingroup and outgroup were always of equal size (Abrams *et al.*, 2013; Randsley de Moura & Abrams, 2013). Therefore, we have no reason to believe that absolute, rather than relative, size of the ingroup is a moderating variable (cf. Mullen, 1991). Nonetheless, an open question for future research is whether actual size of the ingroup influences evaluations of transgressive leaders.

In addition, because relative group size was manipulated by presenting participants with different outgroups, it is possible that participants held different, *a priori* expectations about the outgroups. We took several precautions to minimize this possibility. First, we used two related outgroups (i.e., the University of London, and a college within the University of London). Second, a follow-up study to Study 1 showed no differences in the perceived status of the two outgroup universities. Third, we attempted to equate information about outgroup status in the scenarios presented to participants. Finally, we used additional checks in the experiments to assess individuals' perception of the outgroup. Future research should test the impact of relative group size using a different set of ingroups and outgroups.

Other avenues for future research include testing the impact of group size on group members' reactions to different forms of deviance (e.g., disloyalty; see Levine & Moreland, 2002; Travaglino, Abrams, Randsley de Moura, Marques, & Pinto, 2014) and in different contexts (e.g., political or multicultural contexts; Verkuyten, 2005). Future research may also consider the impact of group size when the ingroup and the outgroup are part of a larger shared ingroup, such as two teams within the same organization (cf. Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2007).

A further important question is the role of power and status in the perception of transgressive leaders. Status seems to have a stronger impact on smaller compared to

larger groups. For example, members of high-status smaller groups (elites) display even higher identification and self-stereotyping than members of low-status smaller groups (Lucken & Simon, 2005). This may in turn deepen smaller groups' members dislike for transgressive leaders. On the other hand, relative to larger groups, differential power impacts more strongly on members' identification, leaving open the question of how low-power larger groups would evaluate their transgressive leaders.

There are interesting and potentially important implications for organizations from this research. Specifically, larger companies interested in maintaining corporate ethics and responsibility among their leadership (cf. Quinn, 1997) may wish to devise systems for subdividing their workforce into smaller units, or emphasizing comparisons with larger groups. In turn, this should increase the likelihood that employees will be vigilant for leaders' transgressions. Furthermore, political leaders of smaller parties or movements should be aware that their public image and their actions may be subject to harsher scrutiny compared to their counterparts of larger groups.

To conclude, this research is the first to demonstrate that proportionate group size affects individuals' evaluations of transgressive leaders. Members of proportionally larger groups are more tolerant towards their transgressive leaders, whereas members of smaller sized groups seem to apply consistent criteria when judging either a non-leader or a leader who transgresses. This is consistent with the idea that reductions in social identity salience due to relative group size lessen the degree that members respond negatively to leadership transgressions. The findings may shed light on how it is that some of the world's largest organizations such as multinational banks or oil companies suffer from major transgressions by leadership. Given the potentially wide-ranging and catastrophic effects of such transgressions, it may be all the more important for those groups to find ways to mitigate that risk.

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