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Neoliberalism: An Ideological Barrier to Feminist Identification and Collective Action

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Abstract

Even though gender inequality is ubiquitous, not all women get involved in remedial collective action. We hypothesize that neoliberal ideology, which emphasizes individual responsibility, free choice, competition, and meritocracy, undermines women's feminist identification and collective action. In the first experimental study (n=159), and consistent with the hypotheses, women primed with meritocracy identified less as feminists, perceived remedial collective action as being less important, and were less likely to ask for information regarding these actions in comparison to women who were not primed with meritocracy. Importantly, feminist identification mediated the effect of meritocracy priming on both perceived importance of collective action and the choice to be exposed to information about feminist collective action. A second correlational study (n=232), relying on a multi-dimensional measure of neoliberal ideology and a behavioral measure of collective action, revealed that, as hypothesized, endorsing neoliberal beliefs was related to more gender system justification, less feminist identification, and less collective action in favor of women (i.e., sending a message to their elected member of Parliament asking them to denounce sexist advertisements). The mediation models of Study 1 were supported in Study 2.

Keywords: neoliberal ideology, meritocracy, system justification, feminist identification, collective action

Neoliberalism: An Ideological Barrier to Feminist Identification and Collective Action

Modern societies are facing issues of enduring gender inequality. Globally, women are still being paid less than men for the same work, they are less likely to work full-time, and face more barriers to progress in their careers resulting in a persistent gender wage gap and a greater likelihood of women living in poverty (OECD, 2018). In the past, collective action, commonly defined as a set of behaviors taken on behalf of a group and directed towards that group's interests (Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990), has allowed women to achieve important rights (e.g., voting rights; Radke, Hornsey, & Barlow, 2016). However, despite the effectiveness of feminist collective action, gender inequalities are not always accompanied by protests. Thus, it is necessary to explore further the barriers to engaging in the collective action necessary for social change. This is not to say that protests never, or no longer occur, but to clarify the factors that could help explain why collective action, does not occur systematically in the face of large-scale inequalities (e.g., Jost, Becker, Osborne, & Badaan, 2017). More specifically, we are particularly interested in looking at neoliberal ideology as an ideological barrier to feminist identification.

Van Zomeren, Postmes, and Spears (2008) have proposed the integrative Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA), describing three overarching antecedents to engagement in collective action: (1) identifying with the disadvantaged group (e.g., women), (2) perceiving injustices against the group, and (3) perceiving that the group can be efficient in acting collectively. Notably and going beyond identification with a disadvantaged group, the authors specify that politicized identity (e.g., feminist identity) appears to be the best predictor of collective action in the face of structural disadvantages such as gender inequalities (see also Stürmer & Simon, 2004; van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013).

Politicized identities are collective identities that are associated with the awareness of grievances common to the members of the group, the blaming of external agents for those grievances, and the will to ask those agents for compensation (van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013). Based on these elements, Gurin (1985) considers that a feminist identity is a politicized gender identity (see also Duncan, 1999; Zucker & Bay-Cheng, 2010). Indeed, endorsing a collective politicized identity leads people to explicitly engage in a power struggle on behalf of a group (e.g., women), recognizing that society and its institutions participate in the construction and maintenance of group inequalities (e.g., between men and women) and that those inequalities are illegitimate (Gurin, Miller, & Gurin, 1980; Simon & Klandermans, 2001).

Perceiving inequalities as illegitimate is not automatic. In fact, system justification theory posits that individuals may be motivated to defend, justify, and bolster the status quo, including social arrangements that are not in their best interests (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Osborne, Jost, Becker, Badaan, & Sibley, 2019; Yeung, Kay, & Peach, 2014). Moreover, this system-justification motivation can even result in an undermining of system-challenging collective action (Jost, et al., 2017; Osborne et al., 2019). Indeed, Osborne and colleagues' (2019) research demonstrate that the more members of a disadvantaged group (e.g., the Māori in New Zealand) justify the system, the less they identify with their social (non-politicized) group, and the less they engage in system-challenging collective action on behalf of their group.

System-justification theory also predicts that individuals may rely on certain ideologies to legitimize inequalities (e.g., Bonnot & Krauth-Gruber, 2016; Jost & Hunyady, 2005). For instance, in Nelson et al.'s (2008) model predicting collective action in favor of women, women who endorsed more conservative beliefs on gender issues were less likely to label themselves as feminists, which, in turn, negatively predicted their past self-reported engagement in collective

action. In fact, they show that feminist identity stands as a viable mediator of the effect of system-justifying ideologies on collective action.

Now, one of the prevailing ideologies in Western and capitalist societies is neoliberal ideology (Navarro, 2007). Interestingly, Azevedo, Jost, Rothmund, and Sterling (2019) have shown, in a correlational study with samples from the USA and the UK, that the endorsement of neoliberal ideology is associated with general, economic, as well as gender-specific, system justification. Therefore, neoliberal ideology seems to mobilize a system-justifying rationale which is likely to impede politicized identification and engagement in collective action even for members of disadvantaged groups (Osborne et al., 2019). Thus, through an experimental (Study 1) and a correlational study (Study 2), this research will test a mediation model in which neoliberal ideology negatively predicts collective action in favor of women, via the undermining of feminist identification.

Neoliberalism comprises certain political and economic orientations towards the deregulation of financial markets and labor practices and the liberation and mobility of capital or services by, in part, reducing state intervention in economic and social affairs (Navarro, 2007). It also translates into beliefs about the world and about oneself, as well as into the endorsement of specific values. Notably, those highlighted beliefs and values focus on individual freedom (Harvey, 2007), according to which individuals are free to overcome social constraints (Rich, 2005). Indeed, neoliberalism prioritizes liberty, including the freedom to compete, over equality or solidarity (Pulfrey & Butera, 2013; Teo, 2018). Despite this rhetoric of freedom, that implies personal responsibility and self-determination (e.g., Zucker & Bay-Cheng, 2010), neoliberalism entails an obligation for individuals, especially women, to self-invest and self-regulate to succeed (Gill, 2008). By situating change at an individual level, this ideology divests collective action of

any relevance (Baker, 2010; Brown, 2016; Teo, 2018). Through this focus on individual responsibility to the detriment of structural barriers to women's achievements, neoliberalism may also deter women from contesting gender biases in society (Bonnot, Redersdorff, & Verniers, 2019; Fitz, Zucker, & Bay-Cheng, 2012; Zucker & Bay-Cheng, 2010).

Thus, neoliberal ideology comprises a number of sub-components, such as the belief in the benefits of competition or the emphasis on resilience, choice, freedom (Baker, 2008; Harvey, 2007; Joseph, 2013; Teo, 2018), and meritocracy that stands out as an especially important component (Baker, 2008; Bay-Cheng, Fitz, Alizaga & Zucker, 2015; Zucker & Bay-Cheng, 2010). Meritocracy refers to the belief that resources are allocated based on individual merit, namely intelligence, personal efforts, and abilities (Son Hing et al., 2011) and includes the belief in individual mobility, positing that anyone can get ahead in society if they deploy enough effort to do so (Major, Kaiser, O'Brien, & McCoy, 2007). Consequently, in Study 1, we use meritocracy as a proxy for neoliberalism, notably because neoliberalism relies on the description of a meritocratic society where self-investment and personal change become integral to accessing valued positions and resources (e.g., Zucker & Bay-Cheng, 2010). Moreover, meritocracy appears critical in understanding why some women refuse to be labelled as "feminists" (Fitz et al., 2012; Zucker & Bay-Cheng, 2010; see also Liss, O'Connor, Morosky, & Crawford, 2001), which is central for this research. Indeed, building a bridge between system-justifying ideologies and feminist identity, two correlational studies indicate that women subscribing to neoliberal values may expect gender equality while at the same time refusing the feminist label (Fitz et al., 2012; Zucker & Bay-Cheng, 2010), attributing past advances of women to meritocracy, not feminists' struggles (Rich, 2005). In addition, those women seem to show more orientation towards social dominance and belief in meritocracy (Zucker & Bay-Cheng, 2010), wish for

gender equality only to the extent that it does not go against neoliberal principles (thus being opposed to remedial policies violating meritocratic principles, such as affirmative action), and display more sexist attitudes than their feminist counterparts (Fitz, et al., 2012). On the contrary, women identifying as feminists believe that systemic gender inequalities exist, show a greater engagement in collective action in favor of women (Zucker, 2004), and are more oriented toward the overall well-being of women, subscribing to self-transcendence values, which stress social justice and collectivism (Zucker & Bay-Cheng, 2010).

Importantly, subscribing to system-justifying ideologies is not necessary to observe their influence: mere temporary exposure to these ideologies may be enough for individuals to demonstrate responses that are coherent with its tenets. For instance, in McCoy and Major's (2007) study, priming meritocracy was enough for female participants to show system justifying responses (e.g., self-blaming when facing an ambiguous rejection; see also Bonnot & Jost, 2014; Ledgerwood, Mandisodza, Jost, & Pohl, 2011). Therefore, relying on a meritocracy prime can activate people's knowledge about this ideology, that may influence their attitudes and behaviors independent of their personal opinions (see Ledgerwood et al., 2011). Thus, grounded in Zucker and colleagues' research, Study 1's objective is to manipulate the exposure to meritocracy and thus take a step further by demonstrating the causal effect of a central tenet of neoliberalism, namely meritocracy, on feminist identification, and, as a consequence, on feminist collective action (see Nelson et al., 2008). A secondary objective of Study 1 is to consider its influence on women's orientation towards individual strategies for personal mobility (as opposed to collective strategies for women's advancement).

Using a correlational design, Study 2 aims to extend the scope of Study 1 in incorporating a more inclusive, multi-dimensional measure of neoliberal ideology (Bay-Cheng et al., 2015).

Moreover, in Study 2 we rely on a behavioral measure of collective action, strengthening our argument that neoliberal ideology is associated with less system-challenging collective action. The objective is also to replicate the relationship between neoliberal ideology and system justification (Azevedo et al., 2019), as well as to investigate its link with values of self-enhancement and self-transcendence (see Beattie, Bettache, & Chong, 2019; Zucker & Bay-Cheng, 2010).

Our research is original in at least three respects. First, while many studies have demonstrated the importance of politicized identities in predicting engagement in collective action (e.g., Klandermans, 2014; Nelson et al., 2008; Stürmer & Simon, 2004; van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013), only a few has focused on the influence of neoliberal ideology on the expression of such identities (for an exception see work by Zucker and colleagues, 2010, 2012) and none has done so in a French context. Therefore, this research broadens the scope of inquiry concerning the influence of ideological factors on collective action (Jost et al., 2017; Osborne et al., 2019; van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013), notably in looking at a system-justifying ideology per se, and its effect on a politicized identity, namely the feminist label. Secondly, Study 1 relies on an experimental design to test the hypothesis that neoliberal ideology, operationalized through the priming of meritocratic principles, lowers women's feminist identification and collective action. As such, it goes beyond previous studies employing correlational designs (e.g., Fitz et al., 2012; see also Wiley, Deaux, & Hagelskamp, 2012). Finally, we extend common measures of self-reported past collective action or intention to engage in collective action. Indeed, we ask participants to choose whether to be exposed to information regarding feminist (i.e., system-challenging) actions (Study 1), and to choose whether to send a message asking their deputy (i.e., elected member of Parliament), to denounce

sexist advertisements (Study 2), thereby assessing present behavioral engagement in collective action. Because our focus lies in understanding potential barriers for members of a disadvantaged group (i.e., women) to engage in collective action in favor of their group, we focused on women in both studies.

Study 1

We predict that priming meritocracy will lower: women's feminist identification, the perceived importance of remedial collective action, and their choice to be exposed to information about feminist collective action. On the other hand, the priming of meritocracy should increase women's orientation towards individual strategies for individual mobility. Moreover, since politicized identity is central to collective action, as the SIMCA (van Zomeren et al., 2008) predicts, and as other studies have demonstrated (e.g., Nelson et al., 2008; Stürmer & Simon, 2004), then the effect of meritocracy priming on the perceived importance of feminist collective action and on willingness to be exposed to information concerning such actions should be mediated by women's feminist identification.

Exploratory measures concerning people's agreement with policies aimed at reducing gender inequalities in some domains and either challenging or upholding meritocratic principles were also added. More precisely, we predict that priming meritocracy should lower participants' agreement with policies that challenge meritocratic principles, but not with policies also addressing gender inequalities but upholding such principles. These questions were used to explore the extent to which neoliberalism may simultaneously allow for critical attitudes towards described inequalities, while not permitting them to be challenged in ways that would transgress the ideology's individualistic and meritocratic tenets, as suggested by Fitz et al. (2012).

Method

Participants

One hundred and sixty women recruited online (via social media websites, Facebook and Twitter and emails to personal networks) participated in the study.[1] Recruitment was determined by the time available for data collection and sample sizes of similar and recent studies (e.g., Ledgerwood et al., 2011). A sensitivity analysis was run with Gpower 3.1 (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009) and indicated that we could detect small-medium effect sizes (equivalent of Cohen's $f^2 = 0.05$) with 80% power and an alpha level at .05, for a multiple regression analysis with three predictors. One participant was taken out of the sample for not having completed three of the seven scales included in the study. The remaining 159 participants ranged in age from 18 to 91 years old ($M_{age} = 37.48$, $SD = 16.99$). One hundred and thirty-nine women reported being of French nationality, seven reported being of other nationalities and fourteen did not answer the question.[2]

Political orientation ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.69$, on a 10-rung scale; e.g., Bonnot & Krauth-Gruber, 2016), was significantly lower than the mid-point, $t(140) = -10.21$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .43$, 95% CI [-1.73, -1.17], indicating an average orientation towards the left side of the political spectrum. Participants' perceived social economic status (e.g., Darnon et al., 2017; $M = 5.18$, $SD = 1.73$, on a 10-rung scale), was also significantly lower than the mid-point, $t(157) = -2.34$, $p = .020$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, 95% CI [-0.59, -0.05], therefore closer to the less-advantaged end of the scale.

[1] We did not specify that the study was directed only at women not to raise suspicions nor activate gender identities. Therefore, 216 participants completed our measures but to test our hypotheses, only female participants (comprising 74 % of the total sample) were retained in the analysis.

[2] Including or withdrawing participants who did not originate from western cultures, who had not been living in France for at least seven years or who were part of feminist organizations did not change any of the conclusions, we therefore decided to include all participants in the analyses.

Materials and Procedure

Participants were directed towards the online study by clicking on a Qualtrics link and randomly assigned to the experimental condition. Apart from the meritocracy scale constituting the priming manipulation, measures were presented in the order in which they are described below.[3] Finally, they were debriefed and thanked for their participation. Unless otherwise specified, all items were assessed on 7-point Likert scales from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). All the measures that were adapted for this study can be found in the Appendix.

Manipulation of meritocracy priming. Participants had to complete a perception of meritocracy scale either before (priming condition) or after (non-priming condition) completing the other measures. This priming design had already been successfully used in other studies (e.g., Bonnot & Jost, 2014; Chatard, Guimond, & Selimbegovic, 2007). Six items were adapted from Wiederkehr, Bonnot, Krauth-Gruber, and Darnon's (2015) Belief in School Meritocracy scale in order to assess perceptions of meritocracy in several life domains. One item from Davey, Bobocel, Son Hing, and Zanna's (1999) Preference of Merit Principle scale (modified to measure perception rather than preference; see Son Hing, et al., 2011) was also used. Thus, life in general (three items), school (two items), and work domains (two items) were emphasized (e.g., "In life, most of the time people are rewarded for their efforts"; a = .84). Relying on such a manipulation allows not only to prime a set of beliefs, but also to measure participants' actual score on the perception of meritocracy scale and to statistically control for this score in our regression models. Therefore, it allows for isolation of the mere effect of the exposure to the ideological statements (i.e., our experimental manipulation).

[3] Additional exploratory qualitative measures were also included at the end of the experiment but could not be exploited due to measurement errors (the majority of answers was too short or ambiguous to be analyzed).

Measure of feminist identification. Szymanski's (2004) four-item scale and three items from Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) Collective Self-esteem subscale were combined to elaborate a feminist identification scale (e.g., "I consider myself to be a feminist" and "Being a feminist is an important reflection of who I am"; *a* = .91).

Measure of perceived importance of collective action in favor of women. We selected six items from the collectivism subscale of the Gender Collectivity Scale (Liss et al., 2001), adapted to a French context and relevant for women's issues (e.g., "Women need to work together to create an equal society") (*a* = .86).

Measure of orientation towards individual responsibility for individual mobility. Participants completed two items adapted from the Self-Reliant Individualism subscale drawn from the Gender Collectivity scale (Liss et al., 2001). The two items measuring belief in individual responsibility for women's success were selected and adapted (e.g., "Women are the only responsible for acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary for their success"). Indeed, we suspect that feminists themselves may strive for self-empowerment, but without denying the influence of external barriers to their achievements and aiming for systemic changes. Thus, in mentioning women in general we hoped not to tap into that self-empowerment, but rather a generalized orientation for individual responsibility for personal mobility.

We added two new items assessing beliefs in individual responsibility and orientation towards individual rather than collective strategies for women's success ("Women's progress depends solely on their personal choices"). This individualism scale thus consisted of four items (*a* = .79).

Choice to be exposed to information about feminist collective action. Participants completed a behavioral measure in which they were asked to indicate whether they wanted to

receive information about feminist collective action. If they selected "yes" they were asked to contact us at a specific email address so that we could send them the information.[4] We calculated the proportion of participants who answered "yes" *vs.* "no" to this request, depending on the experimental condition.

Agreement with policies tackling gender inequalities while challenging (or not) meritocratic principles. We relied on two scales used in Garcia, Desmarais, Branscombe, and Gee (2005), that asked participants to give their level of agreement towards pay equity programs (upholding meritocratic norms; a = .66) and affirmative action (violating meritocratic norms; a = .88). After a short and adapted presentation of the pay equity program, and then affirmative action (cf. Garcia et al., 2005), participants were asked to give their level of agreement for the policies through five items, such as "All in all, do you favor the implementation of pay equity programs [affirmative action] for women in the workplace?"

Socio-demographic measures. Lastly**,** participants were asked to complete a series of socio-demographic questions, including sex, age, nationality, time lived in France (if their nationality was other than French), subjective socio-economic status, and political orientation.

Results

Table 1 presents a summary of variable statistics and correlations. We performed multiple linear regression analyses to test our main hypotheses (the priming meritocracy condition coded 0.5 *vs.* non-priming meritocracy condition coded -0.5), while controlling for participants' perception of meritocracy scores (mean-centered), thus isolating the mere effect of the priming of meritocracy. Thus, for each dependent variable, a multiple linear regression was

[4] We received three emails that could not be traced back to a specific experimental condition. Because participants had to write down the email address for later use, this measure may not have been effective, see Study 2 for an alternative measure.

run where the priming of meritocracy condition, the perception of meritocracy score and their interaction were entered as predictors.[5] Only reliable interactions will be discussed in the text (but see Table 2).[6] Perception of meritocracy scores did not differ depending on the condition (*M* = 3.91, *SE* = 0.12, for the priming meritocracy condition and *M* = 3.72, *SE* = 0.11, for the control condition), *p* = .245.

Feminist identification. The more participants perceived society to be meritocratic, the less they somewhat identified as feminists, *b* = -0.18, *SE* = .09, *t*(155) = -1.87, *p* = .064, η_p^2 = .02, 95% CI [-0.36, 0.01], but this was not statistically significant. More importantly and as predicted, we also found an independent effect of our manipulation, such as women in the priming meritocracy condition (*M* = 4.08, *SE* = 0.14) reported significantly less feminist identification than did their counterparts in the non-priming condition (*M* = 4.63, *SE* = 0.13), *b* = -0.55, *SE* = .189 *t*(155) = -2.92, *p* = .004, η_p^2 = .05, 95% CI [-0.92, -0.18].

Perceived importance of collective action in favor of women. Participants' perception of meritocracy did not affect their perception that remedial collective action was important, *b* = -0.12, *SE* = .08, *t*(155) = -1.46, *p* = .15. Yet, as hypothesized, women in the priming meritocracy condition (*M* = 4.58, *SE* = 0.12) perceived remedial collective action as being less important than women in the non-priming condition (*M* = 4.99, *SE* = 0.11), *b* = -0.40, *SE* = .17, *t*(155) = -2.43, *p* = .016, η_p^2 = .034, 95% CI [-0.73, -0.07].

Orientation towards individual responsibility for personal mobility. The more participants perceived society to be meritocratic, the more they reported self-reliant

[5] Entering age, perceived socio-economic status, and political orientation did not affect the presented patterns.
[6] Not controlling for participants' perception of meritocracy scores did not change any of the conclusions.

individualism, b = 0.64, SE = .07, t(155) = 8.40, p < .001, η_p^2 = .31, 95% CI [0.49, 0.80]. However, contrary to expectations, self-reliant individualism scores did not differ depending on the condition (M = 3.75, SE = 0.11 in the priming condition *vs.* M = 3.62, SE = 0.10 in the non-priming condition), b = 0.13, t(155) = 0.84, p = .402. Surprisingly, the priming of meritocracy was found to interact with participants' perception of meritocracy, so that the effect of perception of meritocracy on orientation towards individual responsibility for personal mobility was weaker in the priming condition, compared to the control condition, b = -0.31, SE = .15, t(155) = -2.04, p = .042, η_p^2 = .03, 95% CI [-0.62, -0.01]. Inspection of the simple effects revealed that in both conditions, the effect of perception of meritocracy was significant, b = 0.80, SE = .09, t(155) = -8.79, p < .001, η_p^2 = .33, 95% CI [0.62, 0.98], for the control condition, and b = 0.49, SE = .12, t(155) = 3.94, p =<.001, η_p^2 = .09, 95% CI [0.24, 0.73] for the priming condition, yet the effect size was much larger in the control condition.

Choice to be exposed to information about feminist collective action. Since the outcome variable was dichotomous, we performed a logistic regression analysis (answer "no" = 0, answer "yes" = 1) to test our hypothesis. In total, 23.42% of participants chose "yes" when asked if they wanted to receive information on feminist collective action. First, participants' perception of meritocracy did not predict their choice to be exposed to information about feminist collective action, b = -0.19, SE = .21, p = .380. However, as predicted, women were less likely to ask for such information in the priming meritocracy condition (13.51%), compared to the non-priming meritocracy condition (32.14%), b = -1.10, SE = .41, χ^2 (1, N = 158) = -6.97, p = .008, e^B = 0.33, 95% CI [0.15, 0.75].

Agreement with policies that challenge meritocratic principles or not. We performed two multiple regression analyses to test the two hypotheses that the priming of meritocracy

would lower agreement with affirmative action but not with pay equity, while controlling for participants' perception of meritocracy scores.

We did find a main effect of participants' perception of meritocracy on agreement with affirmative action, indicating that the more women perceived society to be meritocratic, the less they agreed with such policies, b = -0.23, SE = .10, $t(155)$ = -2.38, p = .018, η_p^2 = .03, 95% CI [-0.43, -0.04]. More surprisingly, we found a similar effect on agreement with pay equity programs, b = -0.27, SE = .06, $t(155)$ = -4.23, p < .001, η_p^2 = .10, 95% CI [-0.40, -0.14]. Contrary to our expectations, the priming of meritocracy did not affect participants' agreement with affirmative action (M = 4.78, SE = 0.14 in the priming condition *vs.* M = 4.75, SE = 0.13 in the non-priming condition), b = 0.03, SE = .19, $t(155)$ = 0.14, p = .891, nor did it affect their agreement with pay equity programs (M = 5.49, SE = 0.09 in the priming condition *vs.* M = 5.58, SE = 0.09 in the non-priming condition), b = -0.09, SE = .13, $t(155)$ = -0.68, p = .499.

Mediation analyses. Two mediation models (see Figures 1 and 2) tested our hypotheses that feminist identification mediates the effect of the meritocracy priming condition on perceived importance of feminist collective action and on the choice to be exposed to information about feminist collective action. We used the "mediate" function from the R package "mediation" and bootstrapping with 5,000 samples to test the indirect effects (Tingley, Yamamoto, Hirose, Keele, & Imai, 2014).[7] The indirect effect for the first mediation model was statistically significant, indicating that feminist identification significantly mediates the priming meritocracy condition/perceived importance of remedial collective action relationship, b = -0.32, 95% CI [-0.56, -0.10]. In mediation 2, the indirect effect was also significant, indicating that feminist

[7] For both mediation models, we report results where participants' perception of meritocracy scores were controlled for. Not controlling for these scores gave similar results.

identification significantly mediates the effect of the priming meritocracy condition on participants' choice to be exposed to information about feminist collective action, b = -0.04, 95% CI [-0.09, -0.01].

Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to present empirical evidence that contextual activation of neoliberalism, through the priming of meritocratic principles, lowers politicized identification with feminists, and consequently women's willingness to be exposed to information about feminist collective action, as well as women's perceived importance of collective action in favor of women.

Consistent with our hypotheses, women in the priming meritocracy condition displayed significantly less identification with feminists, less interest in feminist collective action, and significantly minimized the importance of such action compared to women in the control condition. Moreover, feminist identification was found to mediate the effect of the priming of meritocracy on both participants' perceived importance of feminist collective action and willingness to get information on those actions. Additionally, women's perception that the French society is meritocratic was found to predict their sense of personal responsibility for women's individual mobility, as well as their agreement with both affirmative action and pay equity policies. Importantly, the results of the priming of meritocracy were independent of such perception that French society is meritocratic, and presumably of women's subscribing to meritocracy (Ledgerwood et al., 2011). Thus, despite the cognitive elaboration behind politicized identities and the motivations associated with it, these results demonstrate that they may not be immune to instability. Likewise, it means that the mere salience of neoliberal cues can, at least

momentarily, influence people's perception of the world and of themselves, therefore indicating that the effects of ideologies are sensitive to context.

The present results do not support our hypotheses concerning the measures of orientation towards personal responsibility for individual mobility and disagreement with merit-violating policies. The fact that the measure of orientation towards personal responsibility for individual mobility was modified by mentioning women as a group, in an attempt not to tap into self-empowerment from oppression, may have confused its intended meaning. While we did find an unexpected interaction between our priming manipulation and participants' perception of meritocracy on this measure, we may have faced a construct validity issue, which renders the interpretation of the observed interaction all the more difficult.

Interestingly, we did find significant relationships, between perception of meritocracy and measures of agreement with the two types of remedial policies. Thus, while we did not expect an effect of the priming manipulation on agreement with pay equity programs, the fact that it did not affect the scores of agreement with affirmative action could mean that these measures might not have been sensitive enough to the experimental priming of meritocracy. Additionally, while it may not be surprising that women who perceived that meritocracy prevails rejected policies that might go against this perception (i.e., affirmative action), they also seemed to disagree with remedial policies that do not violate meritocratic norms. It might be that, as suggested in the introduction, since meritocracy stands among the system-justifying ideologies, it serves to legitimize inequalities and downplay systemic disadvantages, thus leading women to disagree with any policy claiming to tackle gender inequality that they are resistant to acknowledge. It could also mean that women may be reluctant to uphold any collective solution to address gender inequality.

There are certain limits inherent to this study. First, we used participants' choice to be exposed to information concerning feminist collective action as a measure of openness to system-challenging collective action and as such, as a primary form of engagement (Foster & Matheson, 1995). Going beyond behavioral intentions measures commonly used in the literature, it does not, however, constitute a very engaging action, as they could only receive the information, not necessarily act on it. Second, although our reliance on meritocracy as a proxy for neoliberal ideology is pertinent considering past literature (e.g., Fitz et al., 2012), our research question focuses on neoliberal ideology more broadly defined. As a consequence, in Study 2 we rely on a multi-dimensional measure of neoliberal beliefs (i.e., a French translation of the Neoliberal Beliefs Inventory – NBI, from Bay-Cheng et al., 2015) and we introduce another, more engaging, behavioral measure of collective action. Moreover and as a secondary focus, measures of gender system justification, self-transcendence (e.g., social justice) as well as self-enhancement (e.g., achievement) values will be included in Study 2 in order to confirm their relationship with neoliberal ideology (Azevedo et al., 2019; Pulfrey & Butera, 2013; Zucker & Bay-Cheng, 2010).

Study 2

In support of Study 1's results, we hypothesize that neoliberal ideology will be negatively correlated with feminist identification, with the perceived importance of collective action in favor of women, and we also predict that the more women endorse neoliberal ideology (i.e., a system-justifying ideology) the less likely they are to engage in collective action in the defense of their group. Moreover, we also wish to test, as in Study 1 but using a correlational design, a first mediation model where the relationship between neoliberal ideology and perceived importance of collective action is mediated by feminist identification, and a second mediation

where the relationship between neoliberal ideology and engagement in collective action is mediated by feminist identification.

In line with Azevedo and colleagues' (2019) results, we also hypothesize that endorsement of neoliberal beliefs will be positively correlated with a measure of gender system justification. We also predict that endorsement of neoliberal ideology will be positively correlated with self-enhancement values, insofar as it prescribes values of personal success, and be negatively correlated with self-transcendence values (Zucker and Bay-Cheng, 2010).

Method

Participants

In total, 472 individuals participated in the online study (same recruitment means as in Study 1). The sample size was dependent upon the time we had for data collection. We excluded the 19 participants who did not declare a French nationality because the measure of endorsement of neoliberal beliefs (i.e., NBI) had never been used in a French sample and we were interested in the factor structure and validity of the scale for this particular population. We also excluded all participants who failed to complete all scales, or who did not complete more than half of the items of a given scale. As a consequence, our final sample was composed of 232 women ranging in age from 18 to 68 years old (M_{age} = 30.39, SD = 10.57).[8] A sensitivity analysis was run with GPower and indicated that we could detect small effects (equivalent to a Cohen's f^2 = 0.03 in the population, for a multiple regression analysis with two predictors, or to a r = .18) with 80% power and an alpha level at .05. Participants' perceived social economic status (see scale used in

[8] Similar to Study 1, men could also participate in the study, therefore 260 participants completed the measures but once again, only the female sample (comprising 89 % of the total sample) was used to test the hypotheses. However, men were included for the NBI structure analysis because at least ten responses per item were required to run the analysis (see also p. 23).

Study 1; *M* = 5.53, *SD* = 1.48, on a 10-rung scale), was not significantly different from the scale mid-point, $t(157) = 0.309$, $p = .757$, suggesting a more balanced sample on that dimension than in Study 1.

Materials and Procedure

Participants were directed towards the online study by clicking on a Qualtrics link. The measures were presented into two blocks (a "self-perception" block and a "perception of society" block, see below), whose order was counterbalanced across participants. At the end of the study, participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation. Unless otherwise specified, all items were assessed on 7-point Likert scales from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Measures were presented in the order in which they are described below and those that were adapted for this study can be found in the Appendix.

Self-perception block

Value Questionnaire. We relied on an adapted French version (Pulfrey & Butera, 2013) of Schwartz et al.'s (2001) Portrait Values Questionnaire, comprising of 34 items. Participants had to rate each item on a 7-point scale going from 1 "not important to me at all" to 7 "very important to me." Ten sets of values are assessed in this scale but we were only interested in self-enhancement values (α = .85), including values of power and achievement (e.g., "It's important for me to be rich") and self-transcendence values (α = .75),[9] including values of benevolence and universalism (e.g., "It's important for me to be loyal to my friends").[10]

[9] Besides, the other sets of values had poor alphas: stimulation (α = .65), security (α = .61), tradition (α = .31), conformism (α = .49), hedonism (r = .46) and autonomy (α = .55).

[10] Other measures were included in this block (4 items scales of independent and interdependent self-construals, Singelis, 1994) but could not be used due to poor Cronbach's alphas (α = .55 and α = .48 respectively). We hypothesized that endorsement of neoliberal ideology would be correlated positively with an independent self-construal, and negatively with an interdependent

Perception of society block

Measure of feminist identification. We used the same scale as in Study 1 (α = .88).

Measure of feminist attitudes. This scale consisted of 7 items taken from the Global Goals subscale of Morgan's (1996) Goals of Feminism scale. Those items assess participants' agreement with various goals concerning gender equality (e.g., "Women should have the right to make their own decisions concerning their body"; α = .88).

Measure of perceived importance of collective action in favor of women. The same scale as Study 1 was used, except that we removed one of the items ("Women should share their professional and financial strategies with other women") because we suspected the term 'strategies' was unclear in this context, resulting in a 5-item scale (α = .88).

Measure of gender system justification. A gender system justification scale (6 items, α = .75) was built using items from Kay and Jost (2003), Jost and Thompson (2000), and Verniers and Martinot's (2015) scales (e.g., "Differences between men and women reflect differences in the natural order of things", α = .75; see Appendix).

Measure of endorsement of neoliberal ideology. We assessed participants' endorsement of neoliberal ideology with a translated version of the 23-item Neoliberal Beliefs Inventory (NBI; Bay-Cheng et al., 2015; e.g., "Being competitive is part of human nature"; α = .92; see Table 3 for the full list of items)[11]. This scale consists of four dimensions: system

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self-construal. In an exploratory vein, we also measured social comparison orientation (Gibbons and Buunk (1999), and we predicted that endorsing neoliberal beliefs would be positively correlated with social comparison orientation. However, the correlations between this variable and the others ranged from -.02 and .04, and was only significant with self-enhancement values (.23; $p < .001$).

[11] The two authors compared their respective French translations of the items to arrive at an agreement.

inequality (α = .74), competition (α = .73), personal wherewithal (i.e., meritocracy; α = .89), as well as government interference (α = .77).[12]

Measure of collective action. After the presentation of the two blocks, participants were given the choice to send a message to their deputy (i.e., elected member of Parliament), and we asked for their zip code to make it more realistic that we would actually target the deputy of their precinct. The message asked the deputy to systematically denounce sexist advertisements.[13]

Socio-demographic measures. At the end**,** participants were asked to complete the socio-demographic questions, including sex, age, nationality, mother tongue, and subjective socio-economic status.

Results

Preliminary analysis: Factor structure of the Neoliberal Beliefs Inventory in a French sample

We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on a translation of the Neoliberal Beliefs Inventory (NBI) with the lavaan package in R, in order to verify its factor structure with a French sample. In order to maximize the accuracy of our fit indices and loadings, and because we had no reason to expect a difference between women and men on the factor structure, we included the entire sample (i.e., men and women; N=260) in this analysis to reach an acceptable ratio of 10 participants per item (Costello & Osborne, 2005). We specified which items were

[12] Other measures were included in this block but could not be used either due to a very poor Cronbach's alpha (preference for equal opportunity, 5 items with α = .17), or due to measurement error (25-items scale of Foster & Matheson (1995) assessing past participation in collective action with a Likert-type scale instead of a frequency scale).

[13] A measure of environmental collective active action was also included and we hypothesized that endorsement of neoliberal ideology would negatively predict engagement in environmental (i.e., another system-challenging) collective action. But because this was not the main focus of the paper, it is not mentioned further. Still, results from a logistic regression do support this hypothesis, b = -0.30, SE = .13, χ^2 (1, N = 216) = -5.44, p = .019, e^B = 0.74, 95% CI [0.57, 0.95].

expected to load onto the four factors as described in Bay-Cheng et al. (2015), and we allowed the factors to correlate, as in the original paper. Our sample had a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (MSA) of .91, indicating a very satisfactory level of shared variance between the items. Bartlett's test of sphericity was also significant at $p < .001$, indicating that the correlation matrix for the NBI items was indeed significantly different from a correlation matrix with null correlations.

Following the standards used by Bay-Cheng et al., 2015, we looked at three fit indices: the RMSEA, the SRMR, the CFI and we added the chi-square. The chi-square, X^2 (269) = 799.31, was significant at $p < .001$. The RMSEA (.09) and SRMR (.07) were below the standard of .10 suggesting acceptable fit, but the CFI (.82) failed to meet the acceptable threshold of .90 and the threshold of .97 obtained by Bay-Cheng et al. (2015). Moreover, out of the 25 items, five had loadings lower than .50 on their respective factor, including the three items concerning affirmative actions on the perception of inequalities factor (see Table 3 for all factor loadings and fit indices). This is not particularly surprising because French people may be less familiar with that term than people from the United States, and unlike in Study 1, a description of affirmation action was not proposed to participants before they completed the scale.

Together, these results indicate that this measure could benefit from being adapted to a French context, following Bay-Cheng et al. (2015) and Beattie et al. (2019)'s suggestions to adapt this measure to countries-specific variables. For the present study, we removed the five problematic items, which gave acceptable fit indices, RMSEA (.07) and SRMR (.05) and CFI (.92) for this new scale ($\alpha = .93$). However, the chi-square, X^2 (164) = 358.29, was still significant at $p < .001$.

Hypotheses testing

Table 4 presents a summary of variables statistics and correlations among our main variables of interest. We ran regression analyses to check for order effects, and although we found order effects on some measures (i.e., feminist identification, importance of collective action and collective action), controlling for those effects did not change the relationships between neoliberal ideology and those outcomes. Thus, we only report the correlations and their *p* values, except for our dichotomous collective action measure.

First, it is interesting to note that we found a ceiling effect (M = 6.82, SD = 0.39) on our measure of feminist attitudes, which indicates that the women from our sample largely agreed with several objectives concerning equality between men and women. Despite this apparent support for gender equality and consistent with our hypothesis and Study 1's results, the more women endorsed neoliberal beliefs the less they identified with feminists, (r= -.39, p< .001), and the less they perceived collective action in favor of women as important, (r= -.16, p= .014; see Table 4). Results also show that the more participants endorsed neoliberal beliefs, the more they justified the gender system (r= .57, p< .001), the more they held self-enhancement values (r= .47, p< .001), but the less they endorsed self-transcendence values (r= -.30, p< .001; see Table 4).

Concerning the measure of collective action, 40.17% of the participants chose to send the sexist advertisements message, while 59.82% chose not to. Consistent with the hypotheses, and using a logistic regression analysis, we found that the more participants endorsed neoliberal ideology, the less likely they were to engage in collective action in favor of women, b = -0.46, SE = .12, χ^2 (1, N = 219) = -13.39, p = < .001, e^B = 0.63, 95% CI [0.49, 0.80].

We ran mediation analyses with the "mediate" function from R package "mediation" to test the two models of Study 1, displayed in Figure 3 and 4. In mediation 3, we tested the

hypothesis that the more participants endorse neoliberal ideology, the less they consider collective action for women to be important, and that this link would be mediated by feminist identification. In mediation 4, we hypothesized that endorsement of neoliberal beliefs would predict a lesser engagement in actual collective action in favor of women, via a lower feminist identification. We followed the same procedure as in Study 1 and used bootstrapping with 5,000 samples (Tingley et al., 2014) to test the indirect effects. We controlled for the block order when testing both indirect effects. In mediation 3, the test of the indirect effect revealed statistically significant, b = -0.18, 95% CI [-0.26, -0.11], for the indirect effect. In mediation 4, the indirect effect was also statistically significant, b = -0.04, 95% CI [-0.06, -0.02], for the indirect effect. [14]

Discussion

The purpose of Study 2 was to reassert the relationships highlighted in Study 1 between neoliberal ideology (including its meritocratic component), feminist identification, and engagement in collective action, while reasserting the relationships that have been found in previous studies between neoliberal ideology and gender system justification as well as self-enhancement values (see Azevedo et al., 2019).

Results show that, consistent with our hypotheses, women's endorsement of neoliberal ideology is indeed associated with a lower feminist identification, a lower perception of the importance of collective action for women, less engagement in system-challenging collective action. Moreover, the mediations tested in Study 1 were largely supported in Study 2, and feminist identification appears again as an important mediator of the effect of neoliberal ideology

[14] We still tested an alternative model with feminist identification as the X variable and endorsement of neoliberal ideology as the M variable. The indirect effect for this model was also significant, b = 0.01, 95% CI [0.00, 0.02]. However, the proportion of the effect that is mediated in this alternative model is smaller (19.06%), than it is in mediation 4 (40.19%).

on collective action in favor of women. Finally and as predicted, endorsement of neoliberal ideology was found to be associated with a higher level of gender system justification, a greater endorsement of self-enhancement values, but less endorsement of self-transcendence values. While a limit of Study 2 concerns its reliance on a correlational design, precluding conclusions on causations, its results are still largely consistent with the results of Study 1.

General Discussion

Across these two studies, we have shown that exposure to neoliberal ideology, through the priming of meritocratic principles (Study 1) lowers women's feminist identification and collective action, and that endorsement of neoliberal beliefs (Study 2), is associated with more gender system justification and predicts less engagement in feminist, system-challenging, collective action via lower feminist identification. These two studies highlight the necessity to consider the personal endorsement of system-justifying ideologies (Study 2), and the mere exposure to these ideologies (Study 1), when studying the ideological barriers to engagement in collective action.

The results of Study 1, supporting Fitz et al. (2012)'s correlational results, indicate that meritocratic cues, prevalent in the neoliberal discourse, have the power to undermine feminist identity, a politicized identity, and collective strategies to solve women's issues. In doing so, neoliberal claims may have an effect on the maintenance of the status quo by drawing people away from a system-challenging posture and discrediting collective action. Instead, neoliberal ideology might invite everyone to find their own way upward within the system, not around or against it. These results experimentally support system-justification theory and its assumption that meritocracy and other ideologies play a role as system-justifying tools (Jost & Hunyady, 2005), likely to undermine collective action (e.g., Jost et al., 2017).

In line with van Zomeren et al.'s (2008) model and other research on politicized identities (e.g., Stürmer & Simon, 2004), this research also reaffirms the necessity to highlight politicized identity as a central antecedent of engagement in collective action (see also Nelson et al., 2008, on feminist identity). Indeed, we found that women came to minimize the importance to act collectively to solve women's issues (Study 1 & Study 2) and engaged in collective action less, via the undermining of feminist identification resulting from the priming of meritocracy (Study 1) or from their endorsement of neoliberal ideology (Study 2). As demonstrated by Osborne et al. (2019), those results also confirm the necessity to integrate ideological factors, and system justification motivation, within the SIMCA to better account for the resistance to engagement on the part of members of disadvantaged groups. Moreover, the present research adds to Osborne et al.'s (2019) study in demonstrating that system-justifying ideologies, such as neoliberal ideology, can undermine engagement in collective action through their effect, not only on non-politicized social identification to the disadvantaged group but also on politicized identification.

Importantly, our results hold true for women who explicitly share egalitarian views on gender issues (Study 2), or who tend to be on the left side of the political spectrum (Study 1) therefore also more likely to agree with gender equality (Cowan, Mestlin, & Masek, 1992). Consistent with Fitz et al.'s (2012) statement, this indicates that neoliberal ideology may well allow women to agree with certain expectations concerning gender equality while refusing the feminist label and any collective orientation to achieve group-level change. Indeed, in Study 2, the correlation between egalitarian views on gender issues and engagement in collective action was positive but small.

This research adds to past research (e.g., Azevedo et al., 2019; Fitz et al., 2012) in showing that neoliberal ideology does indeed have behavioral consequences. Thus, and

consistent with Pulfrey and Butera's (2013) results that neoliberal values of self-enhancement are likely to promote antisocial norms and behaviors such as cheating, our research demonstrates that besides influencing people's psychology, neoliberal ideology also has the power to influence their social behaviors. If the democratic process relies on a sense of solidarity and a shared collective orientation towards the well-functioning of society at large, neoliberal ideology, in promoting individualistic and anti-social behaviors such as cheating (Pulfrey & Butera, 2013) and in disengaging people from collective issues, might well undermine this democratic process.

We think that future research could investigate in more details the processes by which neoliberal ideology impacts politicized identities, and therefore collective action. Indeed, more research is needed to pin down the sequence of mechanisms that are involved in this process, from the values it promotes to more refined cognitive elaborations and rationalizations. For instance, settling the issue of determining if neoliberal ideology more strongly influences the disadvantaged's perception, or justification, of inequality, and/or rather more strongly leads to disavow collective solutions is undoubtedly an interesting focus for future research. This understanding may appear pivotal in identifying the psychological foundations for this ideological process and the levels at which it operates.

There are two main limitations to the present studies. First, and related to the preceding point, while the Neoliberal Beliefs Inventory appears as a useful and most needed tool, it understandably leads us to delimit neoliberal ideology in a specific way. For instance, the question of whether values should be considered as part of the ideology or as its consequences is to be answered. Indeed, the issues surrounding the operationalization of neoliberal ideology seems to be a complex but inevitable one if we want to better understand ideological processes. Another limit of this research is that while our mediation models are consistent across the two

studies and are promising, we acknowledge that an experimental approach for mediation testing is the best approach (Pirlott & MacKinnon, 2016) and should be envisioned in future research.

Finally, we think that France is an interesting context to explore insofar as neoliberalism has to coexist with a relatively strong public support for the welfare state/public services (e.g., Le Figaro, 2018). Interestingly, according to a World Public Opinion Survey conducted in 2005, the French people are the most skeptical about the idea that a free market economy is best (Jost, Gaucher, & Stern, 2015), compared to the other 19 nations surveyed. On the other hand, neoliberal policies have been increasingly set in motion across the succeeding governments of the past fifteen years, including from the left (Amable, 2016). They have come a step further since the last presidential elections in 2017, with the assumption of power of a new political party (i.e., La République en Marche, LREM). Indeed, this party defends both cultural openness and pro-globalization and other neoliberal stances (Gougou & Persico, 2017), policies (e.g., drastic reduction of the wealth tax), and discourses (Ross, 2019), which could suggest a possible mutation in French public opinion. The present results seem to support the idea that neoliberal ideology is relevant to a French context. Moreover, while we did obtain very interesting results with a translation of the NBI, results of Study 2, as well as past research (Bay-Cheng et al., 2015; Beattie et al., 2019) suggest that a measure of endorsement of neoliberal ideology should be adapted to country-level specificities. We propose that other culturally-located facets of neoliberalism could be questioned and relied upon (e.g., power, self-enhancement, see Pulfrey & Butera, 2013). Indeed, large-scale ideologies such as neoliberalism still have specificities depending on smaller-scale historical, social, political, and economic factors (Arfken, 2018). Determining which tenets hold the greatest relevance in the French context could open new

enquiries in this domain and could help contextualize the system-justifying power of neoliberal ideology.

To conclude, neoliberalism seems to have practical implications that go beyond the implementation of specific governmental policies. Indeed, these results lead us to call into question the growing resort to a neoliberal discourse claiming that individual emancipation leads to success, where in fact, it may well take away people's chances to collectively emancipate from structural forms of oppression.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethical approval: All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

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Table 1

Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations between the main variables of Study 1

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Choice information	-	-						
2. Perception of meritocracy	3.81	1.04	-.10					
3. Feminist identification	4.39	1.24	.35***	-.20**				
4. Importance of CA	4.81	1.06	.29***	-.17*	.67***			
5. Individual responsibility	3.66	1.20	-.10	.50***	-.28***	-.14		
6. Pay equity	5.54	0.84	.14	-.32***	.33***	.33***	-.25**	
7. Affirmative action	4.76	1.23	.14	-.15	.40***	.50***	-.19*	.44***

Note. N's range from 158 to 159 due to occasional missing data. Choice information= Choice to receive information about feminist collective action. CA = collective action. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 2

Regression results for Study 1

	Feminist Identification	Importance of CA	Individual responsibility	Choice to receive information about feminists	Agreement with affirmation action	Agreement with pay equity
Priming	-0.55**	-0.40*	0.13	-1.10**	0.03	-0.09
Perception of meritocracy	-0.18	-0.12	0.64***	-0.19	-0.23*	-0.27***
Priming X Perception of meritocracy	0.33	0.11	-0.31*	-0.23	-0.17	-0.07
N	159	159	159	158	159	159
F	6.32***	3.381*	31,86***	*AIC*=171.33	1,90	6,55***
Adjusted R^2	0.09	0.04	0.37	.05	0.02	0.09

Note. The reported b_s coefficients are unstandardized. CA = Collective Action. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 3.

Factor loadings for the NBI items on the CFA analysis and fit indices

Items	CFA loadings
Factor 1: System Inequality	
*Affirmative action is an outdated policy now that people are generally treated as equals.	.35
Discrimination does not exist today to such a degree that affirmative action policies are necessary.	.62
*Affirmative action does not help eradicate discrimination. Instead it exacerbates it by promoting people on the basis of minority status instead of merit.	.22
*Affirmative action is a problem because it treats people unequally.	.11
People who complain about discrimination are often just blaming other people for their own problems.	.74
I think people imagine more barriers, such as discrimination, than actually exist.	.80
Based on my own experience and the people around me, it's hard for me to feel sorry for people who complain about discrimination.	.76
Factor 2: Competition	
People should be allowed to compete to ensure that the best person wins.	.62
Being competitive is part of human nature.	.72
Competition is a good way to discover and motivate the best people.	.83
Shielding children from competition does not prepare them for adulthood.	.65
*Fairness means letting people have equal opportunity, not guaranteeing equal outcome.	.22
Factor 3: Personal Wherewithal	
Anybody can get ahead in the world if they learn to play the game.	.70
Any goal can be achieved with enough hard work and talent.	.71
Right now, pretty much all French people are free to live any kind of life they want.	.53

When it comes to challenges like discrimination, individuals just have to be tough enough to overcome them.	.66
I've benefited from working hard, so there's no reason others can't.	.80
If you're smart and strong enough, discrimination won't hold you back.	.77
A person's success in life is determined more by his or her personal efforts than by society.	.70
Anyone who is willing to work hard can be successful in France	.79
Factor 4: Governement Interference	
A problem with government social programs is that they get in the way of personal freedom.	.61
*The government is inefficient, and therefore should not interfere in the private sector.	.48
The government often hurts individual ambition when it interferes.	.55
The government does not have a right to take what I earn and give it to someone else.	.75
Social programs sponsored by the government provide false incentives and unearned rewards.	.76

Model fit indices	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI
	.09	.07	.82

Note. The items preceded by * were dropped in further analyses due to poor loadings.

Table 4

Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations between the main variables of Study 2

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. CA	-	-							
2. NBI	3.27	1.23	-.26***						
3. Feminist identification	4.20	1.24	.34***	-.39***					
4. Feminist attitudes	6.83	0.39	.17*	-.28***	.29***				
5. Importance of CA	4.81	1.19	.28***	-.16*	.46***	.27***			
6. GSJ	2.30	0.93	-.27***	.57***	-.36***	-.33***	-.24***		
7. Transcendence	6.10	0.64	.20**	-.30***	.29***	.36***	.27***	-.25***	
8. Enhancement	4.17	1.17	-.10	.47***	-.18**	-.10	-.15*	.23***	-.15*

Note. N's range from 219 to 232 due to occasional missing data. CA = collective action. NBI = Neoliberal Beliefs Inventory. GSJ=Gender System Justification. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

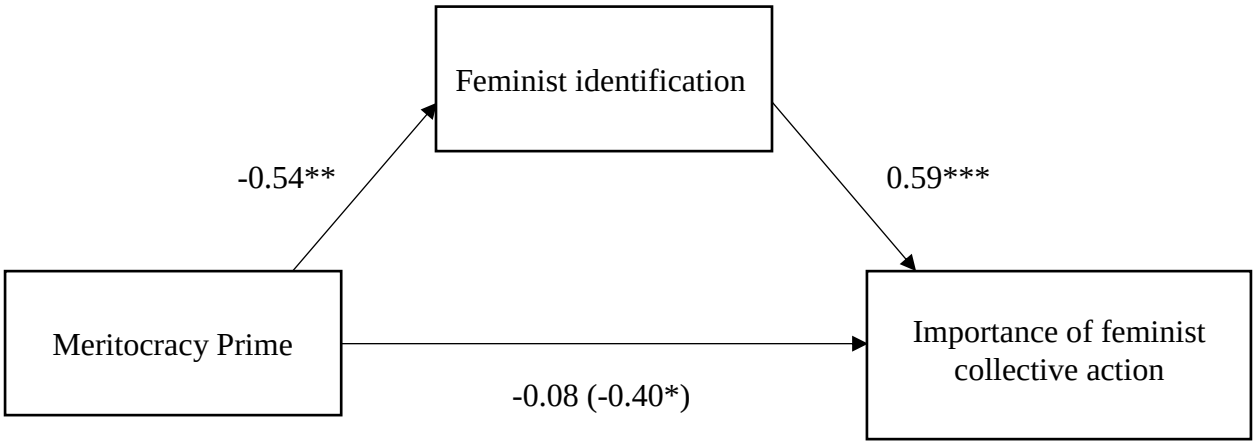

Figure 1. Mediation model for the relation between the priming of meritocracy condition and perceived importance of feminist collective action, while controlling for the perception of meritocracy scores (Study 1). * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

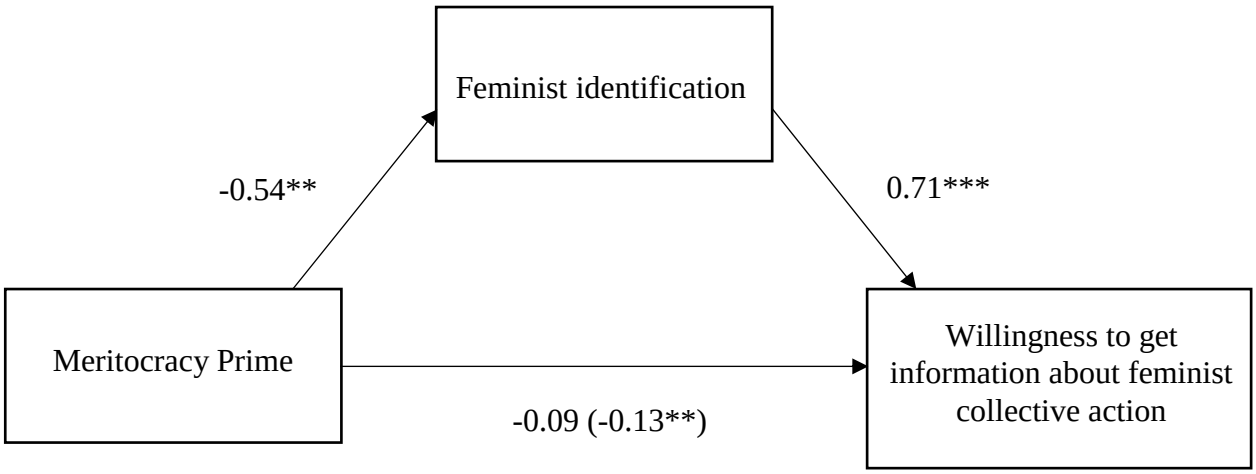

Figure 2. Mediation model for the relation between the priming of meritocracy condition and willingness to get information about feminist collective action, while controlling for the perception of meritocracy scores (Study 1). * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

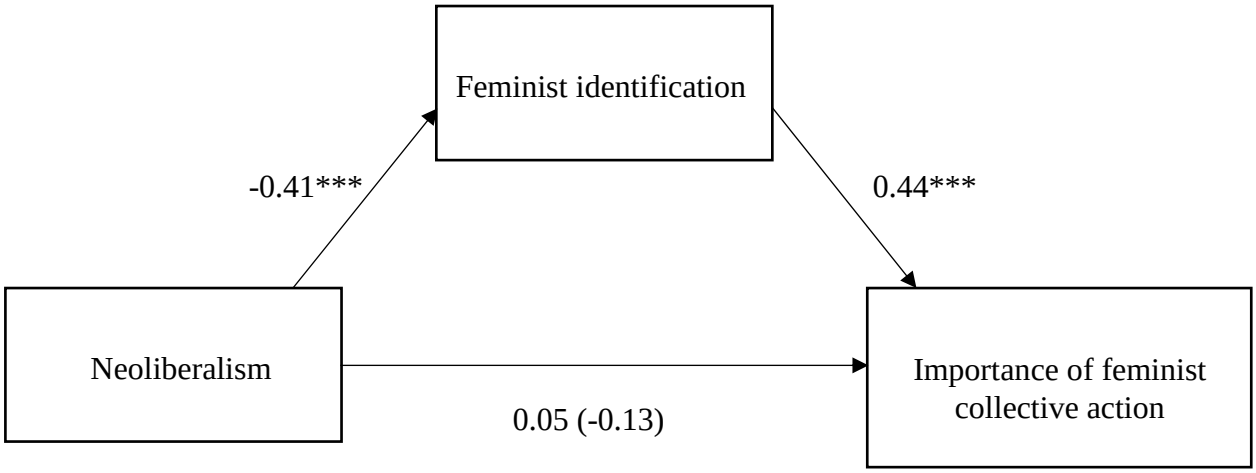

Figure 3. Mediation model for the relation between endorsement of neoliberal ideology and perceived importance of feminist collective action, while controlling for the block order (Study 2); * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

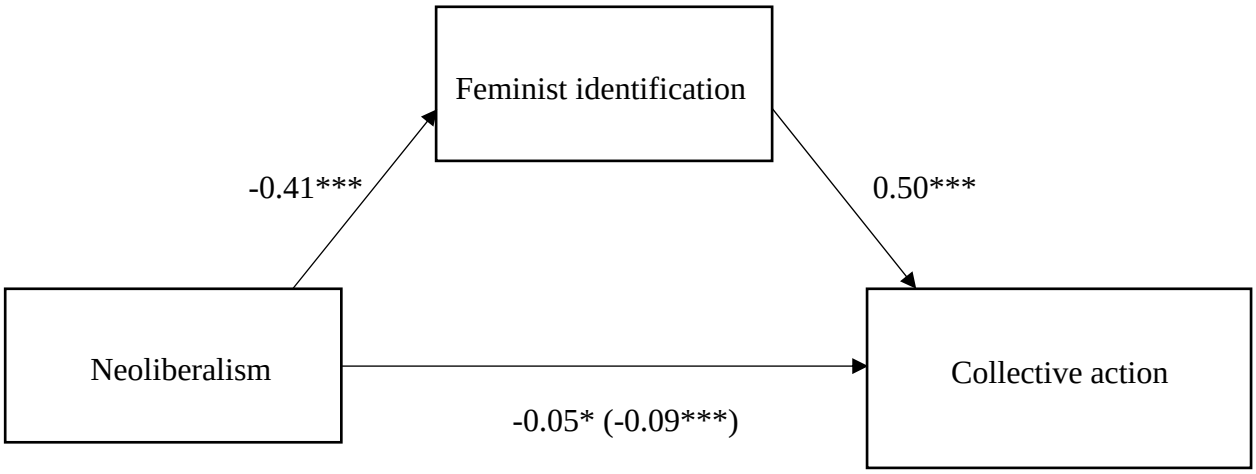

Figure 4. Mediation model for the relation between endorsement of neoliberal ideology and collective action in favor of women, while controlling for the block order (Study 2); * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Appendix

Adapted Scales Used in Study 1 and Study 2

Meritocracy scale used for priming (Study 1)

1. At school, most of the time, when there is a will, there is a way.
2. Everyone has more or less the same chances to succeed at school.
3. To succeed professionally, often one only has to work hard.
4. In life, most of the time, people are rewarded for their efforts.
5. Students who obtain poor grades are most often those who have not worked enough.
6. Employees who get promoted are generally those who put in the most effort.
7. In life, sometimes people get what they deserve.

Feminist identification (Study 1 and Study 2)

1. I consider myself to be a feminist.
2. I identify myself as a feminist to other people.
3. Feminist values and principles are important to me.
4. I support the goals of the feminist movement.
5. Overall, being feminist is unimportant to my sense of what kind of a person I am.
6. Being feminist is an important reflection of who I am.
7. Generally speaking, being a feminist is an important part of my self-image.

Perceived importance of collective action (Study 1 and Study 2, except for the 6th item)

1. Women need to work together in order to create an equal society.
2. It is important for me to speak up to support other women.

3. An important part of my feeling successful in my career will be the knowledge that I have advanced the position of women.
4. It is important for women to participate in group activities such as women's marches in order to defend their rights.
5. Building cooperative relationships with other women should be a priority in every woman life.
6. Women should share career and financial strategies with other women.

Orientation towards individual responsibility for personal mobility (Study 1 and Study 2)

1. Women are the only responsible for acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary for their success.
2. The only way for women to get ahead is to study and work hard.
3. Women's progress depends solely on their personal choices.
4. Women are the only responsible for their upward social mobility.

Adapted gender system justification scale (Study 2)

1. In general, relations between men and women are fair.
2. In general, men's and women's salaries match their competences.
3. Laws of nature are responsible for differences between men and women in society.
4. Most women who don't get ahead in our society should not blame the system; they have only themselves to blame.
5. Differences between men and women reflect differences in the natural order of things.
6. Women's economic positions are legitimate reflections of their achievements.