

## **Collective Action in Modern Times: How Modern Expressions of Prejudice Prevent Collective Action**

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*This contribution addresses modern forms of group-based discrimination, and examines how these impact upon the likelihood that people engage in collective action. Based on a review of the relevant literature, we predict that modern expressions of prejudice are less likely to be perceived as indicating group-based disadvantage and hence elicit less anger, protest, and collective action than old-fashioned prejudice. We present three studies to offer empirical support for this prediction. In Study 1 (N = 116), female participants were led to believe that the general public endorses either old-fashioned or modern sexist views. In Study 2 (N = 44) and 3 (N = 37) female participants were exposed to a student supervisor who allegedly held either old-fashioned or modern sexist views. Results of all three studies indicate that modern sexism is less likely to be perceived as a form of discrimination, and as a result elicits less anger at the source and less support for collective action (Study 1), intentions to protest (Study 2), and collective protest behavior (Study 3) than old-fashioned sexism. In discussing the results of this research, we connect to current insights on antecedents of collective action, and identify conclusions from our analysis that are relevant for societal and organizational policy making.*

Even though people tend to think that group-based prejudice and discrimination is a thing of the past, statistics show that equality between members of different groups has not been achieved. Importantly, attempts to account for such differences by referring to differential individual ability, motivation, or life choices

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do not appear to be tenable. Instead, there is ample evidence that group-based discrimination adversely affects the treatment, evaluation, and opportunities offered for instance to women as compared to men (e.g., Bartol, 1999; Crosby, Williams, & Biernat, 2004; Graves, 1999; Heilman, 2001). Nevertheless, special provisions for members of particular social groups tend to be considered unnecessary, unfair, or even illegal (see also Nielsen & Nelson, 2005). Thus, the evidence that group-based prejudice and discrimination continues to exist apparently does not result in the endorsement of collective action aiming to redress this. As a result, measures that might help provide equal opportunities for members of disadvantaged groups (affirmative action policies) have been terminated. Why? This is what we examine in the present contribution.

Our central proposition is that the way in which prejudice against certain social groups is expressed nowadays prevents members of these groups from engaging in collective action. Specifically, we posit that modern sexism is less likely to be perceived as a form of prejudice than old-fashioned sexism, and that as a result group members are less likely to experience anger at those who express modern sexism, which in turn prevents them from engaging in protest or collective action. We present evidence for this prediction from three studies, in which we compare the effects of old-fashioned versus modern expressions of sexism on the likelihood that women will engage in protest or collective action. We also examine the psychological process underlying these effects, in terms of the resulting levels of perceived prejudice and anger at the source.

### *Old-Fashioned and Modern Expressions of Prejudice*

Our analysis builds on the notion that for people to engage in protest or collective action they first have to acknowledge that they and other members of their group are treated unjustly. Because prejudice is expressed nowadays in quite indirect and subtle ways (Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995; Tougas, Brown, Beaton, & Joly, 1995), it has become more difficult to recognize instances of discrimination. We therefore focus on recognition of prejudice and discrimination (or the failure to do so) as an important factor in the emergence of collective action. Our reasoning is based on the proposition that the unwillingness to believe that sexism continues to be a problem in contemporary Western societies constitutes a form of prejudice in itself.

The term *prejudice* is often used in a traditional sense to refer to the explicit belief that members of certain groups are inherently inferior (such as that women are not capable of taking on leadership responsibilities, see Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995). This is currently referred to as “old-fashioned” sexism. Nowadays, people tend to refrain from overtly expressing such blatantly prejudicial beliefs (Plant & Devine, 1998). Modern expressions of prejudice communicate these same beliefs but do so in more indirect ways

(Swim & Campbell, 2001; Swim et al., 1995), in which the failure to acknowledge group-based disadvantage is key. That is, “modern sexism” notes the systematic inequality in outcomes between members of different groups, while pointing out that this is not due to any form of systematic disadvantage (Swim et al., 1995). This then implicitly conveys that the inequality in outcomes must reflect some lack in deservingness among members of disadvantaged groups. Indeed, modern sexist views are further characterized by resentment of demands for equal treatment, and antagonism against special measures to ensure such treatment (Swim et al., 1995). Thus, denial of discrimination is a central aspect of modern sexism.

Previous research has shown that—compared to old-fashioned sexism—modern expressions of sexism make it more difficult to recognize that prejudicial beliefs are being conveyed (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005a, b). As a consequence, unfavorable individual outcomes as well as broader evidence of group disadvantage tend to be attributed to a lack of deservingness on the part of the individuals in question (see Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998 for a review). The failure to recognize prejudicial beliefs—and the resulting conclusion that unfavorable outcomes can only be due to personal inadequacies—sets in motion a self-fulfilling cycle. That is, research has shown that the failure to recognize gender-based discrimination when this occurs in subtle ways matches the conviction that women are generally less deserving or able than men. As a result, women feel more uncertain and insecure and actually perform less well on relevant tasks, in effect confirming gender stereotypes (see Barreto, Ellemers, Cihangir, & Stroebe, 2008, for an overview). By contrast, unfavorable outcomes are more easily discounted when these can be seen to result from old-fashioned and more blatant forms of prejudice (Barreto & Ellemers, 2009; see also Major, Kaiser, & McCoy, 2003; Major, Quinton, & Schmader, 2003). Importantly the perception of discrimination mediated these different responses—not the negativity of the rejection experience nor participants’ own agreement with different types of sexist views (Barreto et al., 2008).

### *Adverse Consequences of Exposure to Modern Sexism*

More recently, research has elaborated on the diverging emotional consequences of different forms of sexism. So far this work has focused on the adverse consequences that subtle expressions of sexism can have for the self, for instance by examining how sexist beliefs or sexist treatment affect women’s self-views and self-confidence. Across different studies it was observed that exposure to modern and more subtle forms of sexism caused women to report negative self-directed emotions (anxiety, insecurity; Barreto & Ellemers, 2005a, b). Modern sexism also elicited stereotype-consistent self-presentation and induced suboptimal task behavior (Cihangir, Barreto, & Ellemers, in press), setting in motion a cycle of stereotype-confirming and self-defeating behavior. By contrast, those who were exposed to more old-fashioned and blatant expressions of sexism displayed less

evidence of self-defeating behavior. Our current aim is to elaborate on how modern versus old-fashioned expressions of sexism affect responses people direct toward others, and examine the behaviors they may show to challenge the prejudice they are exposed to. Specifically, we address the likelihood that modern versus old-fashioned expressions of sexism elicit anger toward those expressing such beliefs and raise intentions to protest or support for collective action.

### *Antecedents of Collective Action*

Previous work on the antecedents of collective action has emphasized the social nature of this type of response, in that it has explicitly addressed collective action as a form of group behavior. For instance, researchers have examined the likelihood that people will join existing interest groups (e.g., Simon et al., 1998), or participate in an ongoing activity or protest (e.g., Reicher, 1984; Veenstra & Haslam, 2000; see Kelly & Breinlinger, 1996, for an overview). Thus previous work tends to address people's willingness to become involved in some form of action in situations in which the collective injustice is relatively clear. That is, there is some preexisting organization (e.g., gay movement, trade union) or ongoing activity (political protest, union march) to support the group's cause, in which individual group members can choose whether or not to participate.

In the present research we address the phase preceding the one examined in previous research. That is, we focus on the emergence of the awareness that collective action is in order. In doing this, we build on the literature on relative deprivation, which points to the acknowledgment of "fraternal deprivation" as an essential element in this process (see also Pettigrew, 2002; Tyler & Lind, 2002). According to this reasoning, rather than the personal experience of being disadvantaged, the recognition that the group as a whole suffers unjust disadvantage motivates people to engage in protest and collective action (Ellemers, 2002; Smith & Ortiz, 2002; Tyler, Boeckmann, Smith, & Huo, 1997; Wright & Tropp, 2002). Importantly, it has been emphasized that the conviction that group-level treatment is unfair—not the mere awareness that the group's outcomes are unfavorable—is key to the experience of group-level deprivation (Tyler & Lind, 2002). Accordingly, we argue that the awareness of group-based disadvantage (recognition of discrimination) that gives rise to the emotional experience of injustice (anger at the source of discrimination) is crucial in motivating group members toward collective action (see also Van Zomeren, Spears, Fisher, & Leach, 2004).

### *The Present Research*

With the present research we connect current knowledge on relative deprivation and the antecedents of collective action to recent insights on the pernicious effects of modern expressions of prejudice. Based on previous research we

predict that the way in which sexism is expressed determines the likelihood that group-level disadvantage is perceived. We argue that the explicit awareness of group-based disadvantage is a necessary precondition to be able to address the prejudicial views of others, instead of focusing on potential shortcomings of the self. We thus predict that perceived discrimination induces anger at the perpetrators of such discrimination, which in turn makes it more likely that people engage in some form of protest or collective action.

We present three studies on how modern expressions of sexism—characterized by a denial of group-based disadvantage—impact on the emergence of collective action. Specifically, we test whether modern (compared to old-fashioned) expressions of sexism undermine support for collective action (Study 1), intentions to protest (Study 2), and behavioral engagement in collective protest (Study 3). Additionally, we examine the psychological process underlying these effects, by testing our prediction that the way in which sexism is expressed determines the likelihood that group-based disadvantage is perceived, which in turn elicits anger at those expressing sexism and facilitates the emergence of collective action attempts. In Study 1, participants are exposed to the alleged results of a public opinion poll, expressing endorsement of either old-fashioned or modern sexist views. In Studies 2 and 3, we examine responses of participants to the (modern or old-fashioned sexist) opinions of a prospective supervisor for their student internship. Study 1 examines support for collective action. Study 2 assesses participants' intentions to protest. Study 3 focuses on actual protest behavior, distinguishing explicitly between individual and collective forms of protest, and additionally examines the degree to which participants identify with their gender group as a result of the modern versus old-fashioned sexist views they are exposed to.

## Study 1

### *Method*

*Design and participants.* Participants read about the prevalence of either old-fashioned or modern sexism in Dutch public opinion. Participants were 113 Dutch female undergraduate students, recruited at the University campus. Their age was not registered. All participants took part in a lottery, as a result of which 10 participants received 25 Euros.

*Procedure.* Participants received a package which contained the experimental manipulation as well as the dependent variables. On the first page, participants read that a prior study had revealed opinions about work and the workplace among a sample of the Dutch population. Some of these opinions were allegedly shown in the next paragraph. Depending on experimental condition, these opinions either

consisted of old-fashioned sexist statements or of modern sexist statements. To manipulate old-fashioned sexism, we adapted five statements from the old-fashioned sexism scale by Swim et al. (1995). For instance, participants read that the men and women in the sample allegedly studied believe that women are less intelligent than men. For the modern sexist condition, we selected items from the subscale of denial of discrimination of the modern sexism scale by Swim et al. (1995). These communicate in more veiled ways that women are less worthy than men, for instance by stating that the fact that few women have high positions is not caused by discrimination. Participants were subsequently asked to indicate what they thought of these opinions and of the people who had allegedly expressed them.

*Dependent measures.* Perceived sexism was assessed by asking participants to indicate the extent to which they thought the people who had allegedly participated in the public opinion survey were prejudiced, sexist, and unfair (one factor explained 66% of variance,  $\alpha = .90$ ). Following previous work (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005a, b) anger at the source was assessed by asking participants to indicate to what extent they experienced four negative emotions directed at people holding these beliefs (angry, indignant, frustrated, and disappointed; one factor explained 74% of variance,  $\alpha = .88$ ). Support for collective action was assessed with two items (women should resist collectively, I am willing to join collective action in favor of equality between men and women,  $r = .71$ ,  $p < .001$ ). A principal components analysis confirmed that the items assessing these dependent variables loaded on three separate factors as intended, together explaining 79% of the variance in the individual items.

### *Results and Discussion*

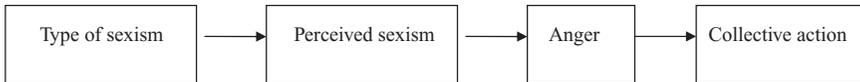
*Effects of the manipulation.* A MANOVA revealed a reliable multivariate main effect of type of sexism,  $F(3, 109) = 18.62$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\text{partial}\eta^2 = .34$ . At the univariate level this effect was reliable for perceived sexism,  $F(1, 111) = 53.43$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\text{partial}\eta^2 = .33$ , for anger,  $F(1, 111) = 18.25$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\text{partial}\eta^2 = .14$ , as well as for support for collective action,  $F(1, 111) = 6.64$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\text{partial}\eta^2 = .06$ . As expected, participants indicated that the source of old-fashioned sexism was more sexist than the source of modern sexism. Participants also expressed more anger at the source, and more support for collective action in favor of women, when exposed to old-fashioned sexism than when exposed to modern sexism (see Table 1 for all relevant means).

*Mediation analyses.* We predicted that the effect of type of sexism on support for collective action would be mediated by perceived sexism and anger, respectively (see Figure 1). We tested this prediction with a series of regression analyses (see also Taylor, MacKinnon, & Tein, 2008), following the steps

**Table 1.** Means and Standard Deviations for Perceived Sexism, Anger, and Support for Collective Action (Study 1), Intentions to Protest (Study 2), and Gender Identification (Study 3)

	Study 1		Study 2		Study 3	
	Type of Sexism		Type of Sexism		Type of Sexism	
	Old-Fashioned	Modern	Old-Fashioned	Modern	Old-Fashioned	Modern
Perceived sexism	5.16 <sup>a</sup> (1.03)	3.49 <sup>b</sup> (1.36)	6.14 <sup>a</sup> (.85)	3.93 <sup>b</sup> (1.40)	5.72 <sup>a</sup> (.79)	2.93 <sup>b</sup> (.89)
Anger	3.42 <sup>a</sup> (1.60)	2.27 <sup>b</sup> (1.25)	4.65 <sup>a</sup> (1.22)	2.80 <sup>b</sup> (1.11)	4.61 <sup>a</sup> (.78)	2.40 <sup>b</sup> (1.36)
Collective action	4.72 <sup>a</sup> (1.40)	3.96 <sup>b</sup> (1.68)				
Protest intentions			5.13 <sup>a</sup> (1.09)	2.65 <sup>b</sup> (1.28)		
Gender identification					5.44 <sup>a</sup> (.67)	4.67 <sup>b</sup> (1.26)

Note. Standard deviations are presented within parentheses. In each row, means in the same study with a different superscript differ at  $p < .05$ .



**Fig. 1.** Predicted model linking type of sexism to perceived sexism, anger, and collective action.

recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986). First, we established that the predictor (type of sexism; coded as  $-1 = old\text{-fashioned sexism}$  and  $+1 = modern sexism$ ) significantly predicts the first mediator (perceived sexism;  $\beta = -.56, p < .001$ ), as well as the outcome variable (support for collective action;  $\beta = -.24, p < .01$ ), and that the first mediator (perceived sexism) reliably predicts the outcome variable (support for collective action;  $\beta = .34, p < .001$ ). When the first mediator (perceived sexism) is entered in the equation together with the main effect of the predictor (type of sexism), the mediator (perceived sexism) is still reliably associated with support for collective action ( $\beta = .30, p < .01$ ), while the main effect of the predictor (type of sexism) is no longer reliable ( $\beta = -.08, p = .49$ , Sobel  $z = 2.56, p < .01$ ).

Second, we established that the predictor (type of sexism) significantly predicts the second mediator (anger;  $\beta = -.36, p < .001$ ), and that the second mediator (anger) reliably predicts the outcome variable (support for collective action;  $\beta = .38, p < .001$ ). When the second mediator (anger) is entered in the equation together with the main effect of type of sexism, anger is still reliably

associated with support for collective action ( $\beta = .34, p < .01$ ), while the main effect of type of sexism is no longer reliable ( $\beta = -.11, p = .24$ , Sobel  $z = -2.69, p < .01$ ).

Finally, we examined whether the effect of type of sexism on perceived sexism results in anger, and anger in turn induces support for collective action (see Figure 1) with a regression analysis predicting support for collective action in three steps. The main effect of type of sexism was entered on the first step, perceived sexism was entered on the second step, and anger was entered on the third step. The results of the first and second step show that the prediction of support for collective action from type of sexism is significantly improved by adding perceived sexism as a predictor in the equation,  $R^2\text{change} = .06, F(1, 110) = 7.65, p < .01$ , and confirm that the main effect of type of sexism on support for collective action is reliably mediated by perceived sexism, as indicated above (Sobel  $z = -2.59, p < .01$ ). When anger is entered as an additional predictor in the equation on the third step, neither the direct effect of type of sexism ( $\beta = -.02, ns$ ), nor the effect of the first mediator perceived sexism ( $\beta = .19, ns$ ) remain reliable, while the second mediator anger is reliably associated with support for collective action ( $\beta = .28, p < .01$ )  $R^2\text{adj} = .15, R^2\text{change} = .06, F(1, 109) = 7.57, p < .01$ . Sobel tests confirm that the relation between type of sexism and anger is reliably mediated by perceived sexism (Sobel  $z = -3.50, p < .001$ ), and the reduction in the effect of perceived sexism on support for collective action due to the inclusion of anger as an additional predictor is also reliable (Sobel  $z = 2.47, p < .05$ ). This is consistent with our reasoning that because modern sexism is less likely to be perceived as indicating prejudicial views, it raises less anger toward the source of sexism, which in turn results in less support for collective action.

## Study 2

### *Method*

*Design and participants.* The 44 Dutch female undergraduate student participants in this study were randomly allocated to one of two conditions: old-fashioned sexism or modern sexism. Participants were recruited on campus; their mean age was 20.61 (ranging from 18–27;  $SD = 1.74$ ). At the end of the experiment participants were fully debriefed and received 4 Euros for their participation.

*Procedure.* Participants were seated in separate cubicles. The experiment took place via a computer and was introduced as an investigation about the expectations students have regarding their practical training. To support this cover story, participants were asked to answer several filler questions about what they expected from their training. Then we stated that we were also examining what

students thought about the professionals from external institutions who frequently supervised students from this university. Participants read that they would be provided with some information about one of these supervisors, randomly chosen by the computer. In reality, all participants read about a Dr. Martin de Wit, who constituted the sexist source.

Subsequently, participants read some of the opinions that this supervisor held about work, five of which consisted the manipulation of sexism. To manipulate old-fashioned versus modern sexism, we used the same statements as in Study 1. This time, however, these statements were said to indicate the opinions of Dr. Martin de Wit. The focal statements were interspersed with additional information, representing 10 alleged opinions of Dr. Martin de Wit that were gender irrelevant (e.g., "He finds it important to reward a good performance in his workers"). As intended, no differences between experimental conditions were found in the time participants spent reading the opinions of the bogus supervisor (Overall  $M = 25$  seconds), excluding the possibility that old-fashioned sexism has a larger impact on participants' responses because they pay more attention to this type of information. Participants were then led to anticipate that at the end of their studies they might be supervised by this particular supervisor. The dependent measures assessed how they would feel in that situation.

*Dependent measures.* As in Study 1 we examined perceived sexism, anger at the source, and support for collective action. However, this time we assessed participants' own intentions to protest with questions tailored to the experimental situation. Participants indicated their answer to all questions on 7-point Likert-type scales (from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much*). Perceived sexism was assessed with two items (i.e., to what extent do you think Dr. Martin de Wit is prejudiced, to what extent do you find Dr. Martin de Wit sexist?), which formed a reliable scale ( $r = .51, p < .001$ ). Four negative emotions focusing on the behavior of Dr. de Wit were included to assess anger at the source, as in Study 1 (see also Barreto & Ellemers, 2005a, b). Participants were asked to indicate the degree to which they felt angry, irritated, disappointed, and hostile at Dr de Wit ( $\alpha = .89$ ). Intentions to protest were assessed with three items capturing the preconditions for the emergence of protest (see also Wright & Tropp, 2002), namely refusal to accept the situation (I would prefer not to work with Dr. de Wit), identification of the required change (I would not want to have Dr. de Wit as a supervisor), and action intention (I would object to having Dr. Martin de Wit as a supervisor), which together formed a reliable scale ( $\alpha = .96$ ).

### *Results and Discussion*

*Effects of the manipulation.* A MANOVA on perceived sexism, anger, and intentions to protest revealed a reliable multivariate main effect of type of sexism,

$F(3, 40) = 20.40, p < .001, \text{partial}\eta^2 = .61$ , as well as reliable univariate main effects for all dependent measures. As expected, when exposed to old-fashioned sexism participants perceived the source as more sexist,  $F(1, 42) = 38.94, p < .001, \text{partial}\eta^2 = .48$ , reported more anger  $F(1, 42) = 27.91, p < .001, \text{partial}\eta^2 = .40$ , and indicated stronger intentions to protest,  $F(1, 42) = 48.46, p < .001, \text{partial}\eta^2 = .54$ , than when they were exposed to modern sexism (see Table 1).

*Mediation analyses.* We examined support for our prediction with the same analytical procedure as in Study 1, in which type of sexism was again coded as  $-1 = \text{old-fashioned sexism}$  and  $+1 = \text{modern sexism}$ . First, we established that type of sexism reliably predicted the first mediator, perceived sexism ( $\beta = -.69, p < .001$ ), as well as the outcome variable, intentions to protest ( $\beta = -.73, p < .001$ ), that perceived sexism also reliably predicted intentions to protest ( $\beta = .69, p < .001$ ). The direct effect of type of sexism on intentions to protest reliably decreases when perceived sexism is entered in the equation (Sobel  $t = -2.35, p < .05$ ).

Subsequently, we established that type of sexism reliably predicted the second mediator, anger ( $\beta = -.63, p < .001$ ), and that anger also reliably predicted intentions to protest ( $\beta = .87, p < .001$ ). The direct effect of type of sexism on intentions to protest reliably decreases when anger is entered in the equation (Sobel  $t = -4.37, p < .001$ ).

Finally, we examined support for the hypothesized process (see Figure 1) in a three-step hierarchical regression, in which type of sexism was entered in the first step, perceived sexism was entered in the second step, and anger was entered in the third step. The results of the first two steps again show that the prediction of protest intentions from type of sexism is significantly improved when perceived sexism is entered in the equation together with the main effect of type of sexism (Sobel  $t = -2.35, p < .05$ ),  $R^2\text{adj} = .58, R^2\text{change} = .06, F(1, 41) = 6.45, p < .05$ ). Additionally, when anger is also entered in the equation, the direct effect of type of sexism on protest intentions is further reduced ( $\beta = -.24, p < .05$ ; Sobel  $t = -4.37, p < .001$ ). The relation between type of sexism and anger is reliably mediated by perceived sexism (Sobel  $t = 2.09, p < .05$ ), and the effect of perceived sexism on protest intentions drops to non-significance when anger is included in the equation ( $\beta = .12, ns$ ; Sobel  $t = 4.32, p < .001$ ), while anger is reliably associated with intentions to protest ( $\beta = .64, p < .001$ )  $R^2\text{adj} = .81, R^2\text{change} = .22, F(1, 40) = 48.60, p < .001$ . These results are in line with predictions and converge with our reasoning that modern expressions of sexism are less likely to be recognized as sexist, and hence raise less anger and intentions to protest than old-fashioned sexism. However, with the present protest measure it is unclear whether participants would prefer collective action, or might also engage in more individual forms of protest. This is why we conducted a third study.

### Study 3

#### *Method*

*Design and participants.* The 37 Dutch female undergraduate student participants in this study were randomly allocated to one of two conditions: old-fashioned sexism and modern sexism. Participants were recruited on campus; their mean age was 20.26 (ranging from 18–51,  $SD = 4.60$ ). At the end of the experiment participants were fully debriefed and received 4 Euros for their participation.

*Procedure and dependent measures.* The procedure followed in this experiment was very similar to that followed in Study 2. Only the dependent measures were different. Participants indicated their answer to all questions on 7-point Likert-type scales (from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much*). Perceived sexism was assessed with three items (I think that Dr. de Wit respects women, I think that Dr. de Wit is likely to discriminate against women, and I think that Dr. De Wit is fair; the first and last items were recoded,  $\alpha = .89$ ). Anger at the source was assessed with five items (I feel angry, hostile, upset, frustrated, and disappointed at Dr. de Wit,  $\alpha = .92$ ). Gender identification was measured with three items (being a woman is an important part of my self-concept, I identify with other women, I feel that people talk about me when they talk about women), to check whether old-fashioned sexism is more likely to make participants define themselves and think of their situation in group terms, which is thought to be an important precondition for collective action. Although reliability of this scale was relatively low ( $\alpha = .56$ ), it is important to note that the scale only consisted of three items. Furthermore, analysis of the separate items showed parallel effects, so that there is no loss of information by presenting them together. Protest behavior was assessed by providing participants with the opportunity to write a protest message about Dr. de Wit. Participants were first asked to indicate whether or not they wished to write a message indicating any sort of dissatisfaction regarding Dr. de Wit. To explicitly distinguish between individual and collective protest, participants were told that they could choose to write a message on behalf of their individual interest (e.g., not wanting to have this training supervisor in the future). Alternatively, they could write a message on behalf of the collective interest (e.g., to indicate that other students should also not have this supervisor in the future). They could also choose to write two messages, one to voice an individual complaint, and one to voice a collective complaint. To measure collective protest we coded the behavior of participants who chose not to protest and of participants who protested only individually as 0, and the behavior of participants who chose to protest collectively or who chose to protest both individually and collectively as 1. To measure individual protest, we coded the behavior of participants who chose not to protest or to

**Table 2.** Protest Behavior: Number (and percentage) of Participants in Each Condition that Engaged in No Protest, Individual Protest, or Collective Protest (Study 3)

	Type of Sexism			
	Old-Fashioned		Modern	
No protest	1	(6%)	15	(79%)
Individual protest	6	(33%)	1	(5%)
Collective protest	11	(61%)	3	(16%)
Total	18	(100%)	19	(100%)

*Note.* Percentages of participants in each condition opting for a particular course of behavior are presented within parentheses.

protest only collectively as 0, and the behavior of participants who chose to protest solely individually, or who chose to protest both individually and collectively as 1. This is a less hypothetical and more publicly visible and effortful behavioral measure than was the case in the prior two studies—participants actually engaged in protest behavior.

### *Results and Discussion*

*Effects of the manipulation.* A MANOVA on perceived sexism, anger, and gender identification revealed a multivariate main effect of type of sexism,  $F(3, 33) = 32.73, p < .001, \text{partial}\eta^2 = .75$ . At the univariate level this effect was reliable for perceived sexism,  $F(1, 35) = 99.73, p < .001, \text{partial}\eta^2 = .74$ , for anger,  $F(1, 35) = 45.19, p < .001, \text{partial}\eta^2 = .51$ , as well as for gender identification,  $F(1, 35) = 5.40, p < .05, \text{partial}\eta^2 = .13$  (see Table 1). Replicating results of the two previous studies, participants perceived the source as more sexist and reported more anger at a source who expressed old-fashioned sexism than when it expressed modern sexism. Additionally, participants who were exposed to old-fashioned sexism reported stronger gender identification than when they had been exposed to modern sexism. This is in line with our reasoning and supports the notion that the denial of discrimination and the individual meritocracy ideology this implies makes it more likely that people think of themselves as a separate individual, instead of as a group member.

As predicted, our experimental manipulations also affected participants' displays of protest behavior. Of the 18 participants in the old-fashioned sexism condition 11 (61%) engaged in collective protest, while 6 (33%) protested individually. By contrast, in the modern sexism condition 15 of the 19 participants (79%) did not engage in any form of protest, and only 3 (16%) opted for collective protest (see Table 2). We performed logistic regression analyses in which

collective protest was the dependent variable (coded as 0 = *no collective protest* and 1 = *collective protest*), the old-fashioned sexism condition was coded as  $-1$  and the modern sexism condition was coded as  $+1$ . Consistent with predictions, these analyses revealed a reliable main effect of type of sexism indicating that more collective protest was chosen in the old-fashioned sexism condition than in the modern sexism condition ( $\beta = -1.06$ ), Wald's chi-square (1,  $N = 37$ ) = 7.18,  $p < .01$ . Thus, people were more likely to engage in actual protest behavior after exposure to old-fashioned sexism than modern sexism. Furthermore, this can be seen as indicating the propensity to engage in collective action, as the majority of these protest actions intended to address the treatment of the group as a whole, instead of focusing on individual outcomes.

*Mediation analyses.* We argued that the effect of type of sexism on collective protest emerges because people differ in the extent to which they perceive the source as sexist, and in the anger they experience as a result. To test this predicted mediation, we first established that the effect of type of sexism on collective protest ( $\beta = -1.06$ ), Wald's chi-square (1,  $N = 37$ ) = 7.18,  $p < .01$ , drops to non-significance ( $\beta = .24$ , Wald's chi-square (1,  $N = 37$ ) = .11, *ns*), when the effect of perceived sexism ( $\beta = 1.05$ ), Wald's chi-square (1,  $N = 37$ ) = 4.11,  $p < .05$ , is entered into the equation. Likewise, when anger is entered in the equation together with the main effect of type of sexism, anger remains reliably associated with collective protest ( $\beta = 1.58$ ) Wald's chi-square (1,  $N = 37$ ) = 6.41,  $p < .05$ , whereas the effect of type of sexism on collective protest becomes nonsignificant ( $\beta = .10$ ), Wald's chi-square (1,  $N = 37$ ) = .03, *ns*. Then we conducted a logistic regression analysis in three steps, in which the main effect of type of sexism was entered in the first step, perceived sexism was entered in the second step, and anger was entered in the third step. Again, the main effect of type of sexism on collective protest is mediated by perceived sexism, as indicated above. When anger is also entered in the equation, neither the main effect of type of sexism ( $\beta = .94$ ), Wald's chi-square (1,  $N = 37$ ) = .93, *ns*, nor the effect of perceived sexism ( $\beta = .81$ ), Wald's chi-square (1,  $N = 37$ ) = 1.46,  $p = .23$  remain reliable, while anger is reliably associated with support for collective action ( $\beta = 1.44$ ), Wald's chi-square (1,  $N = 37$ ) = 5.35,  $p < .05$ . This is consistent with our reasoning that the effect of type of sexism on collective protest through perceived sexism is further mediated by the anger invoked by the perception of sexism. Thus, our results support the notion that because modern sexism is less likely to be perceived as being sexist, people experience less anger at the source, and as a result are less likely to engage in collective protest. No such relation was observed between perceived sexism or anger and individual protest.

### General Discussion

With the present work, we build on previous research suggesting that modern sexism elicits self-defeating responses (see also Barreto & Ellemers, 2009; Barreto

et al., 2008) and connect to existing insights on relative deprivation and collective action. We have argued and shown across three studies that the failure to perceive group-based prejudice and discrimination in modern expressions of sexism impairs other-directed affective responses (anger at the source) and actions that might help redress systematic injustice (endorsement of collective action and collective protest behavior). The key factor in these findings is that whereas old-fashioned sexism is relatively easy to recognize, this is more difficult in the case of modern sexism. As a result, people who are exposed to modern sexism are less likely to address the possibility that the group as a whole is treated unjustly, and are less inclined to engage in any action that may counter or redress unjust treatment of the group. In this way then, modern sexism can render the social system more stable and resilient to change (Crosby, Pufall, Snyder, O'Connell, & Whalen, 1989; Major, 1994; Schmitt, Ellemers, & Branscombe, 2003; Wright, 2001).

With this research we extend existing models of collective action in that we focus on the emergence of the perceived need for collective action, instead of examining the willingness to become involved in existing interest groups or participate in ongoing protest activities. In doing this, we draw upon insights on relative deprivation indicating that the perception of group-level injustice is key to the emergence of collective action. We have argued that modern expressions of prejudice make it less easy to recognize the continued existence of group-based discrimination and reduce the emergence of collective action initiatives compared to more blatant expressions of prejudice. Thus, we have examined modern expressions of prejudice as an antecedent condition that has not been addressed before in this literature.

We think the connection between these different literatures is productive for further theory development and future research. That is, in their work on relative deprivation, Walker, Wong, and Kretzschmar (2002) have noted that the attributions people make for their current outcomes are relevant, as these will determine which course of action seems most appropriate in the future. Previous research examining the impact of exposure to modern prejudice on the self, has focused on attributions to discrimination as a focal variable of interest. The present research suggests that perceptions of discrimination, and the way these are affected by different expressions of prejudicial views, offer a concrete way to further current insights on how attributions relate to relative deprivation and collective action. Likewise, Tyler and Lind (2002) have argued that group-level procedural injustice, not group-level outcomes, is key in the experience of relative deprivation that is likely to lead to collective action. While in their analysis the distinction between outcomes and procedures may seem somewhat analytical, the current research suggests that perceptions of group-based prejudice and discrimination may offer a concrete example of how group-level procedural justice judgments may be expressed. Here too, we think the introduction of insights on modern prejudice and discrimination into the literature on relative deprivation and collective action may open up avenues for future research.

*Limitations and Future Directions*

Despite the convergence in the results we obtained, and the consistency between our findings and the theoretical analysis we developed, there are some limitations that might be addressed in future research. First, in theory our analysis should hold for all forms of modern prejudice. That is, the denial of any type of group-based discrimination should make it more difficult for those exposed to such views to realize that these represent prejudicial beliefs. Nevertheless, in the present research we only addressed modern sexism as a relevant example of modern prejudice. Further work is needed to establish whether similar effects are obtained with other types of prejudice, or whether other considerations come into play, for instance because people are more keenly aware of group-level differences in treatment (e.g., in the case of physically disabled people), because others are expected to hold stereotypical views of the ingroup, or are seen as having an obvious interest in downplaying and perpetuating existing intergroup differences.

Second, we have incorporated endorsement of collective action, protest intentions, and actual engagement in protest behavior as relevant dependent variables in the present research. Nevertheless, one may argue that these all refer to precursors of collective action in that they assess individual willingness to engage in some form of (collective) protest, rather than examining the actual emergence of collective action. Future research might address a broader range of behaviors, such as raising support for a joint protest, making public one's complaints, or undertaking legal action. We know from previous research that complaining about discrimination or confronting someone who expresses prejudicial views is seen as undesirable behavior, even if the complaint is justified (Kaiser & Miller, 2001; Major & Kaiser, 2005), and may cause the individual to be rejected by other members of their group. Therefore it would be important to assess which types of collective action would be most likely to emerge when people perceive discrimination, or be most quickly suppressed when perceptions are less clear.

Third, whereas Study 1 was a relatively larger questionnaire study, the number of participants in Studies 2 and 3 was limited, due to the more time-consuming nature of data collection using an experimental setup and the use of paid participants for these studies. While this would seem to call for a further examination of the robustness of these effects with other and broader samples, it is important to note that the smaller sample size also implies that there was lesser statistical power in these studies, making it all the more meaningful that we did find statistically reliable effects.

The fact that the present research—on the emergence of collective action—complements previous work on participation in existing forms of collective action, also offers interesting avenues for further research. For instance, the distinction between these two forms of collective action participation might be used to more

explicitly compare the conditions under which people are likely to initiate some form of collective action with those under which they are willing to follow, or to engage in ongoing activities. Presumably, the threshold is highest when collective action needs to be initiated, so that modern expressions of prejudice might be most discouraging to undertake such action at this stage. As a result, the distinction between modern and old-fashioned prejudice may be less important in determining the engagement in activities or interest groups that already have been established.

### *Practical Consequences*

The work presented here is not only interesting from a theoretical point of view, but also has important implications for societal and organizational policy. Despite the fact that systematic differences in level of education, career success and economic outcomes continue to exist between members of different social groups, there is a general belief that position improvement depends on individual merit only. The present research shows that modern expressions of prejudice affect the likelihood that people perceive discrimination or engage in some form of protest against their treatment. Denial of discrimination fosters the conviction that the achievement of desirable outcomes primarily depends on one's own abilities, motivation and life choices. Thus, the very notion that society offers equal opportunities to all individuals is an important factor in the suppression of collective action.

Thus, the problem of inequality in opportunities at least to some extent resides in the fact that "modern," more subtle expressions of prejudice have developed to replace more blatant and explicit group-based prejudice and discrimination, which has come to be regarded as "politically incorrect" behavior, due to social and legal sanctions. This raises the question of whether measures aiming to suppress blatant discrimination actually have the desired effect, if they only affect the way people express their views, without changing the content of their prejudicial beliefs. Aside from the thorny issue of whether such measures then do more harm than good in the end, the present research offers a clear reminder that simply prohibiting group-based discrimination is not sufficient to achieve the desired effect.

Indeed, the legal rights and equal opportunities provisions people can draw upon generally assume that those who suffer from discrimination are able to see that this is the case and will come forward to indicate this (Albiston, 2005). Thus, the responsibility for undertaking action and the burden of proof is on the victim of discrimination, instead of the perpetrator. At the same time, the present research reminds us that it is not always easy to recognize prejudicial views. This is why a proactive policy is needed, to put the responsibility for identifying and addressing group-based discrimination in the hands of work organizations and policy makers,

instead of relying on potentially disadvantaged individuals to do this (see also Crosby, Iyer, Clayton, & Downing, 2003).

What might such a proactive policy look like? First, an organization or political institution can compile and examine comparative statistics on access to education, employment rates, career progress, or work compensation as a matter of course and actively search for evidence of group-based injustice. Second, it is possible to install preexisting interest groups that have the explicit responsibility to search for, identify, and collect instances of discrimination against members of particular groups. Third, members of potentially disadvantaged groups can explicitly be informed of their rights, and of the (legal) procedures available to exercise their rights, and they can be offered (free) legal support in case these rights are violated. Fourth, management of the institution can develop a climate in which discrimination complaints (even erroneous ones!) are seen as a source of institutional learning and improvement, instead of being covered up as a cause for embarrassment and shame. Fifth, in complaint procedures, the burden of proof can be put on the side of the perpetrator instead of the target in the case of suspected discrimination, with the target receiving explicit support and professional advice from the organization.

All these measures have in common that they intend to actively search for and draw out information about potential discrimination, in order to be able to more formally examine whether or not this has been the case, instead of relying on the spontaneous emergence of complaints or assuming that there is no discrimination when there are no such complaints. Furthermore, these measures take into account that prejudice can occur automatically and unintentionally (see also Ellemers & Barreto, 2008). In other words, people may discriminate without realizing that they do, and despite their best efforts not to do so. An institution that enables them to recognize and redress this, instead of disapproving of and sanctioning discrimination complaints, can then be seen as constructive and helpful and this seems to offer the most viable road toward achieving more equal opportunities for all individuals.

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