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Barriers to Women Engaging in Collective Action to Overcome Sexism

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Over centuries women have fought hard to obtain increasing gender equality, but despite these successes absolute equality remains an elusive goal. Theoretically, women's numerical strength makes them well-placed to take effective collective action, and millions of women engage in feminist collective action every day. In this article, however, we argue that women also face barriers to engaging in feminist collective action; barriers that are associated with the social construction and experience of what it means to be a woman. Our review synthesizes sexism research under a contemporary collective action framework to clarify our current understanding of the literature and to offer novel theoretical explanations for why women might be discouraged from engaging in feminist collective action. Using the antecedents of collective action identified by van Zomeren, Postmes, and Spears' (2008) meta-analysis, we critically review the sexism literature to argue that women face challenges when it comes to (a) identifying with other women and feminists, (b) perceiving sexism and expressing group-based anger, and (c) recognizing the efficacy of collective action. We then outline a research agenda with a view to investigating ways of overcoming these barriers.

Keywords: collective action, sexism, gender inequality, feminism, gender

Women have made enormous strides toward achieving gender equality in the last century. In the West, women have more opportunity and freedom than ever before; legislative equality has mostly been achieved, and some women now hold powerful positions in government and business. However, these successes exist against a backdrop of ongoing gender *in*equality. Since the 1950s, over 160 million girls in Asia are estimated to be "missing" from the population due to female infanticide (Hvistendahl, 2011), and 40% of nations currently educate more boys than girls at a primary school level (UNESCO, 2014). It is estimated that a third of women will experience intimate partner violence and/or sexual assault in their lifetime (World Health Organization, 2013). In the West, women still earn 15% less than men, hold only 10% of board seats in companies listed on the stock market, and comprise only a quarter of parliamentary positions (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2012). Globally, women are more susceptible to falling into poverty than are men (United Nations International Conference of Population and Development, 2014) and 98% of sex trafficking victims are girls or women (International Labour Organization, 2005). These inequalities are particularly marked (and intersect with other forms of injustice) for women of color (National Partnership for Women and Families, 2013; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000), nonheterosexual (Diamant & Wold, 2003) and transgender women (Kenagy, 2005), as well as women from developing nations (United Nations International Conference of Population and Development, 2014).

One way in which gender inequality is reduced is through feminist collective action. Historically, it is difficult to think of progress that has been handed to women; women have fought for it through collective movements that draw attention to inequity and provide the political pressure to catalyze change. Transnationally, feminists have fought (and continue to fight) for their right to vote and own property, to win freedoms at work and in the home, and to protect themselves against gendered violence. Today campaigns are launched in person and online, and can involve coordinated action, or snowballing grassroots critiques of sexism and societal inequality. Among other things, many of these campaigns target everyday sexism, enlist male allies, and work to ensure that the voices of women of color, transgender and nonheterosexual women are not marginalized relative to the voices of heterosexual White women. Outside the West, such collective action is often undertaken at great personal risk. In some countries feminists risk social sanc-

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tion and even death to advocate for fundamental human freedoms.

Theoretically, women's numerical strength makes them well-placed to take effective collective action. In this article, however, we argue that while women are numerically strong, they also face specific barriers to engaging in collective action that are linked to their group membership. These barriers are associated with the social construction and experience of what it means to be a woman. In making this argument we join prominent theorists such as Mary Jackman (1994) who have written about gender inequality, the interdependent nature of men and women, and the often difficult prospect of identifying and challenging sexism (see also Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001; Kelly & Breinlinger, 1996). Our review synthesizes sexism research under a contemporary collective action framework to clarify our current understanding of the literature, to offer novel theoretical explanations for why women might be discouraged from engaging in feminist collective action, and to identify new avenues for future research. We also present potential solutions for overcoming the barriers we identify.

Before presenting our theoretical model, however, we would like to clarify what we are *not* arguing in this article. Although we aim to identify barriers to women's participation in collective action, we do not wish to imply that (a) few women are participating in collective action on behalf of their group, (b) women are somehow to blame for continuing gender inequality, (c) that we expect all women to participate in feminist collective action, or (d) that collective action is limited to demonstrations, marches and petitions. We do not believe any of these statements to be true. Rather, we make the case that women face certain sociostructural barriers to engaging in (multiple and varied types of) collective action to overcome sexism, and that these barriers are either unique to the feminist cause or affect this cause disproportionately. We suggest that these barriers present a problem for women who are generally in favor of gender equality, and might personally and collectively benefit from participation in feminist collective action. Note that, of course, irrespective of barriers, there will still be women who choose not to be involved in feminist collective action.

Further to this, we would like to acknowledge two qualifications to our model. First, our theorizing is influenced by existing research and theoretical approaches that are often grounded within a Western context. As a result, some of the barriers identified in this article might not apply outside the Western context. Cultural differences, including differences in laws, gender roles, and norms, help determine women's experiences of inequality (and reactions to it). Where we see obvious points of discrepancy between our model and the experiences of non-Western women we make this explicit, but a full examination of the different barriers faced within and outside the West lies outside the scope of this article.

Second, we recognize that many women engage in social justice work that is feminist by nature without being explicitly labeled as such. Related to this, we acknowledge that for many women sexism is only one of many forms of discrimination faced. Combatting sexism is thus inseparable from combatting other sources of injustice related to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and sexual identity and so forth

In the next section we define collective action and examine the nature of sexism for newcomers to these fields. We then introduce the three broad antecedents of collective action that inform our model—identification, injustice and efficacy—at each step highlighting the barriers to engaging in collective action that we suggest disproportionately affect women. These barriers are summarized in Table 1. We conclude by outlining a research agenda aimed at identifying ways to overcome these barriers.

Defining Our Terms: Collective Action and Sexism

Collective action is usually construed as a tool of the disadvantaged, wielded to effect societal change. Collective action is commonly defined as a behavior taken on behalf of a group aimed at improving it (Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990). It incorporates both public, collective activity (e.g., participating in a demonstration) and private, solitary behavior (e.g., signing an online petition). While some may think of collective action as limited to picketing or protest-

Table 1
Overview of the Barriers to Women Engaging in Collective Action to Overcome Sexism

Antecedent of collective action	Barrier to women engaging in collective action
Identifying as a disadvantaged group member	The category "woman" is numerically large
	Women are typically in close, extended, and often positive contact with men
	Stigmatization of feminists
Perceiving the injustice	Postfeminist perceptions of gender equality
	Internalized sexism
	Feminine gender roles, stereotypes, and norms discourage the expression of group-based anger
Perceiving the efficacy of collective action	Relative paucity of concrete goals and targets in the Western world
	Essentialist arguments for women's and men's behavior

ing, it can involve an almost unlimited range of behaviors that are centered around achieving group-based aims.

Sexism is generally defined as a belief in the intrinsic superiority of one sex over the other—typically men over women—and is associated with prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping (Coleman, 2006). Glick and Fiske (1996, 2001) propose that hostile and benevolent sexism are two forms of prejudice toward women that work together to maintain women's lower status. Hostile sexism is an overt form of sexism usually directed toward women who embody non-traditional gender roles (such as feminists and career women; see Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001). For example, people high in hostile sexism are less likely to hire a woman for a managerial position because they perceive women to be incompetent (Good & Rudman, 2010; Masser & Abrams, 2004). Among men, this form of prejudice is also associated with sexual violence toward women (Abrams, Viki, Masser, & Bohner, 2003; Kelly, Dubbs, & Barlow, 2015; Masser, Viki, & Power, 2006).

Benevolent sexism, in contrast, is a "positive" form of prejudice that seeks to protect women on the condition that they engage in stereotypically traditional and restrictive gender roles (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001). Exposure to benevolent sexism can impair a woman's cognitive performance by constraining what she thinks she is capable of (Dardenne, Dumont, & Bollier, 2007), and people high in benevolent sexism devalue female job applicants' competence and hireability (Becker, Glick, Ilic, & Bohner, 2011; Good & Rudman, 2010). Hostile and benevolent sexism work in concert to punish women who challenge the status quo and reward women who embody their lower status position.

Finally, modern sexism is characterized by the denial that sexism exists, and subsequent resentment toward women's demands for equality. It is "modern" as it is articulated in such a way that it does not violate norms condemning the direct expression of prejudice (e.g., opposition to affirmative action; Devine, Plant, & Blair, 2001; Swim, Aiken, Hall, & Hunter, 1995). Although more subtle than hostile sexism, some argue that modern sexism is particularly insidious for women precisely *because* it is less likely to be perceived as discriminatory, less likely to elicit anger from women, and less likely to prompt collective action aimed at overcoming sexism (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005a; Ellemers & Barreto, 2009).

Antecedents of Collective Action Behavior

Sexism presents a problem for women, and the psychological literature suggests that collective action is one of the most effective ways in which this problem can be addressed. We argue, however, that some women who might be otherwise sympathetic to the goals of feminism face specific barriers when engaging in collective action to overcome sexism. To make this case we draw on a meta-analysis conducted by van Zomeren and colleagues (2008). In this analysis, three primary antecedents of group-based activism were identified: (a) identifying with the disadvantaged group, (b) perceiving discrimination against the group *and* feeling that the discrimination is unjust, and (c) perceiving that change is possible and that it can be created through collective action (i.e., efficacy). The antecedents of collective action proposed by van Zomeren et al. (2008) form the social identity model of collective action (SIMCA).[1]

Barrier 1: Identifying With Other Women and Feminists

Drawing upon social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), van Zomeren and colleagues (2008) argue that identifying with a disadvantaged group is one factor that helps promote engagement in collective action. Further to this, it seems that there is something special about holding a politicized identity; that is, consciously identifying as a group member engaged in a power struggle to achieve that group's goals (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). In the current context, this type of identity aligns closely with being a feminist. Below we suggest that women face three psychological barriers to identifying with other women and forming this politicized identity. These are that (a) the category "woman" is numerically large; (b) women have close, extended, and often positive contact with men; and (c) feminists are a stigmatized group.

The Category "Woman" Is Numerically Large

Most groups that face oppression are also numerical minorities. This is not the case for women, of course, who represent a little over half the global population. Although it is not uncommon for marginalized groups to be numerical majorities (e.g., Black South Africans during apartheid) it is difficult to think of another disadvantaged group that has such numerical weight in all contexts, and in all parts of the globe.

According to optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991; Leonardelli, Pickett, & Brewer, 2010), people seek a balance between feeling included into a larger whole, and feeling distinct. One way that people resolve these duelling needs is to identify with numerically small groups; groups that help satisfy the need for inclusion, but simultaneously allow for a sense of distinctiveness. Lending support to this

[1] More recently, moral convictions have been added to the SIMCA. Moral convictions are strong and absolute stances on moral issues that have been shown to motivate collective action (van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2012). While moral convictions might vary among different groups and for different social causes, we cannot see as clear a case as to why it might present a particularly potent barrier for women as we can with the other three antecedents. We therefore do not elaborate on this antecedent of collective action in this article.

notion is evidence that people tend to gravitate toward and identify strongly with numerically small groups (Leonardelli et al., 2010; Pickett, Silver, & Brewer, 2002; Simon & Hamilton, 1994). Furthermore, being a member of a highly inclusive group can motivate individuals to seek distinctiveness at the subgroup level (Hornsey & Hogg, 1999).

From an optimal distinctiveness theory perspective, the numerical strength of the category "woman" would *not* automatically hearten women to engage in collective action, increasing feminist identification and participation. Instead, many women would be discouraged from participating in collective action *because* of (not despite) their numerical power. While smaller minority groups typically see other ingroup members as being similar to themselves (Simon, 1992), the inclusive nature of the category "woman" will often promote disidentification and/or division into distinct subgroups.

In line with such reasoning, the gender identity model (Becker & Wagner, 2009) posits that superordinate and subgroup categories can complement one another to facilitate *or* impede collective action. Becker and Wagner (2009) found that women need to identify as women *and* endorse progressive gender attitudes and beliefs for them to participate in collective action. This is different to other disadvantaged groups (i.e., Māori New Zealanders, Black Americans) for which group identification alone predicts increased collective action (Barlow, Sibley, & Hornsey, 2012; Berman & Wittig, 2004). Such research suggests that some minority identities are inherently politicized. For women, however, this is not the case.

Women Are Typically in Close, Extended, and Often Positive Contact With Men

Intergroup relations between disadvantaged and advantaged group members are often characterized by segregation, minimal contact, or contact that primarily centers around reinforcing the power discrepancy between group members (Allport, 1954). However, this conceptualization of intergroup relations is not applicable to the relationship between men and women. Most women have close, extended, and often positive contact with men, and many women have male partners, family members, friends, coworkers, and neighbors on whom they rely for social support and professional services.

Interacting with people from different social groups typically reduces prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). However, the very contact that improves intergroup attitudes among advantaged group members also reduces group-based identification, perceptions of injustice, and by extension, collective action among the disadvantaged group (Dixon, Levine, Reicher, & Durrheim, 2012; Dixon, Tropp, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2010; Wright & Lubensky, 2008). In other words, positive contact can have a "sedative effect," dulling minorities' perceptions of intergroup injustice and urgency to act. Conversely, tension between groups motivates collective action. With comparatively equal numbers of men and women worldwide, and the often interdependent nature of the relationship between women and men, this "sedative effect" is likely to be particularly potent for women.

In addition, many women have romantic contact with men. We argue that romantic contact adds a new dimension to understanding the relationship between contact and collective action not previously accounted for by the psychological literature. Romantic contact might work the same way as positive contact (reducing the desire to take collective action), as well as presenting additional barriers to women identifying with other women and subsequently engaging in collective action. First, romantic contact may give rise to intrasexual competition between women, rather than intrasexual solidarity (Buss, 1988; Fisher, Tran, & Voracek, 2008). Historically, and still in many parts of the world, men control reproductively relevant resources (such as financial security, power, and status). Consequently, women are often forced to compete against one another for the favor of men, rather than forming alliances with one another. Second, a frequent consequence of romantic contact is procreation. Many women not only love men in a romantic sense, but also give birth to them. This means that while negative contact and adversarial intergroup relations may well drive other minority groups forward to collective action, on average women are likely to have to contend with the diluting impact of extended and intense positive contact with men when it comes to forming a strong female (and feminist) identity. We acknowledge that part of this theorizing is not applicable to women who do not have heterosexual romantic relationships with men, however note that for these women male friends and family members will still be present.

Although contact between women and men is theoretically a problem for women's participation in collective action, reducing such interaction is unfeasible (and undesirable). Fortunately, there is a growing body of research investigating when positive contact does *not* undermine collective action. For example, Becker, Wright, Lubensky, and Zhou (2013) found that positive contact did not undermine collective action among disadvantaged group members when they had positive contact with advantaged group members who acknowledged that the intergroup inequality was illegitimate (i.e., an advantaged group ally). Therefore, contact with men who are allies in the feminist cause may not discourage women's participation in collective action.

Stigmatization of Feminists

As previously discussed, identifying as someone who fights for the rights of a disadvantaged group predicts col-

lective action better than simply identifying as a disadvantaged group member (van Zomeren et al., 2008). Therefore, it is not surprising to learn that feminist identification strongly predicts participation in feminist activism (Nelson et al., 2008; Yoder, Tobias, & Snell, 2011). However, many women reject the feminist label even if they display feminist attitudes (Yoder et al., 2011; Zucker, 2004).

We argue that many women do not identify as feminists because they are aware of the social stigma attached to this label. A stereotypical feminist has historically been characterized as a confrontational and ugly "suffragette," who hates men despite looking like one (Goldberg, Gottesdiener, & Abramson, 1975). Both men and women rate feminists more negatively than typical women (Twenge & Zucker, 1999), perceiving them as being comparatively aggressive, opinionated, forceful, non-conformist, anti-male, stubborn, tense, and egotistical (Berryman-Fink & Verderber, 1985).

Women who do choose to identify as feminists may face material negative consequences. For example, Roy, Weibust, and Miller (2009) asked participants to evaluate a non-feminist or a feminist woman who attributed being passed over for a leadership role to gender discrimination. They found that the woman who was labeled a feminist was perceived to be a complainer, and unlikely to be a victim of discrimination, compared to the woman who was not labeled a feminist. Paradoxically, these findings suggest that although feminist women are more likely to identify and confront instances of discrimination, they are less likely to be taken seriously by others when they do. While all disadvantaged group members face social costs when they attribute an outcome to discrimination (Kaiser & Miller, 2001), and activists in general are negatively stereotyped (Bashir, Lockwood, Chasteen, Nadolny, & Noyes, 2013), the costs associated with confronting discrimination may be particularly marked for women. Feminists are perceived to pose a threat to social values in a way that other groups do not (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005), possibly because their attitudes and behaviors directly violate feminine social norms (Mahalik et al., 2005). Moreover, women have been shown to police one another, censuring other women who attribute an outcome to discrimination, and seeing them as avoiding personal responsibility for their treatment (Garcia, Reser, Amo, Redersdorff, & Branscombe, 2005; Swim & Hyers, 1999).

Barrier 2: Perceiving and Confronting Sexism

According to the SIMCA, the second predictor of collective action is recognizing intergroup injustice, and responding to it emotionally (van Zomeren et al., 2008). While emotions in response to injustice can be expressed as group-based dissatisfaction or resentment, this review will focus on group-based anger, given the theoretical importance and amount of research surrounding this predictor (Leonard, Moons, Mackie, & Smith, 2011; van Zomeren, Leach, & Spears, 2012; van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004). Both perceiving sexism and becoming angry about gender inequality are important prerequisites for women's engagement in feminist collective action. However, we argue that women face barriers to participating in feminist collective action because they have difficulty recognizing sexism and expressing group-based anger. This is because (a) some women hold postfeminist perceptions of gender equality, (b) some women themselves endorse sexist beliefs and attitudes, and (c) women are normatively discouraged from communicating anger about the treatment of their group.

Postfeminist Perceptions of Gender Equality

Substantive gains in women's fight for equality in the West (e.g., suffrage, women's representation within the workforce) mean that many people now believe that we live in a postfeminist world where sexism no longer exists (Swim et al., 1995). One possible reason for this is the prevalence of tokenism, whereby a disadvantaged group member is included as part of a high-status category to imply that discrimination does not exist (Wright & Lubensky, 2008). Tokenism is perhaps most common and detrimental in the workplace: women can perceive individual achievement as possible, and discrimination as irrelevant, if one woman can make it to the top of the ladder.

The irony of this is that women who are promoted to high profile positions are disproportionately likely to find themselves in a precarious and risky position. Companies who appoint women to their boards are more likely to have experienced consistently bad performance in the preceding months (the "glass cliff" phenomenon; Ryan & Haslam, 2005). Isolated female success can also have negative consequences for other women who are trying to climb the career ladder. Ellemers, van den Heuvel, de Gilder, Maass, and Bonvini (2004) found that female faculty members perceived female doctoral students to be less committed to their work than male doctoral students, despite there being no gender difference in actual work commitment. In the examples above, the appointment of women is taken as evidence that sexism does not exist, while the failure of women is seen as evidence that on the basis of merit alone women are unable to perform.

Along with increased female representation in the professional sphere, norms surrounding the expression of prejudice have changed such that it is no longer socially acceptable to express overt anti-female discrimination in the Western world (Devine et al., 2001). This shift away from more hostile forms of prejudice means that present-day sexism can be difficult to perceive. For example, in one study a group of participants were asked to judge beliefs and behaviors associated with sexism. Both male and female

participants perceived traditional gender roles and hostile sexism to be more "sexist" than modern and benevolent forms of sexism (Swim, Mallett, Russo-Devosa, & Stangor, 2005). Barreto and Ellemers (2005b) argue that this is because benevolent sexists do not match the mental prototype of a sexist perpetrator; they are more likable than overt, old-fashioned sexists. Furthermore, many women do not identify benevolent sexism as a form of prejudice because it can make them feel special and induce positive affect (Glick & Fiske, 1996). This is complicated by the fact that people find it much harder to identify sex discrimination on a case-by-case basis (as sexism usually occurs) compared to in aggregate form (Crosby, Clayton, Alksnis, & Hemker, 1986). For example, many women believe that they have avoided sex discrimination despite being aware of its existence in the workplace (Crosby, 1984). Unsurprisingly, this difficulty identifying subtle forms of sexism has implications for feminist collective action. Exposure to modern and benevolent sexism, as opposed to hostile sexism, is associated with lower intentions to participate in collective action aimed at overcoming sexism (Becker & Wright, 2011; Ellemers & Barreto, 2009).

Many disadvantaged groups are subject to subtle but positive expressions of prejudice, such as Black Americans being depicted as "happy-go-lucky," or overweight people as "jolly" (Katz & Braly, 1933; Puhl, Schwartz, & Brownell, 2005). However, we argue that women may experience more positive subtle prejudice than other disadvantaged group members. Due to the interdependent relationship between women and men, the patriarchal system must construct an ambivalently sexist narrative in which those women who adhere to traditional gender roles are celebrated and those who do not are derogated (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001). It is the celebration that is at once pleasant, omnipresent, restrictive, and difficult to identify as prejudice. That it is both liked and ambiguous means that the benevolent can mask the sexism, and consequently the perception that there is an injustice to be overcome.

Internalized Sexism

It is perhaps obvious from the previous section that some women, who often see the value in benevolence directed toward them, internalize sexism. In an empirical investigation of this issue, Glick and colleagues (2000) asked over 15,000 men and women from 19 different nations to complete the ambivalent sexism inventory. Compared to measures of hostile sexism, on which men reported universally higher levels than women, gender differences in benevolent sexism scores were low. In fact, in some nations women reported higher levels of benevolent sexism than did men.

It has been argued that some women display benevolent sexism because (a) it affords them protection from hostile sexism and its detrimental consequences (e.g., derogation, sexual assault; Glick et al., 2000); (b) they perceive that they deserve caring, reverent treatment (Hammond, Sibley, & Overall, 2014); and/or (c) high levels of sexism are normative (Sibley et al., 2009). Additionally, while women may primarily display benevolent sexism, some women exhibit more overt expressions of sexism (e.g., the "Queen Bee" phenomenon; Ellemers et al., 2004). The fact that some women internalize sexism presents a problem, as it is substantially more difficult to identify and confront prejudice when the perpetrator is themselves a member of the group facing discrimination (Baron, Burgess, & Kao, 1991).

Nice Girls Don't Get Angry

Even if women can identify sexism, they may not engage in collective action because they are socialized into roles that prohibit the expression of group-based anger. According to social role theory (Eagly, 1987), historical divisions of labor have led to gender-specific role expectations. For example, women have traditionally held the role of the caregiver and so are perceived to be more communal than men (Wood & Eagly, 2002). Over time, these social roles have developed into gender roles that prescribe behavioral expectations. Although gender roles are more fluid today, feminine social norms about what women do and how they should act are still prevalent. Feminine social norms include being nice, communal, thin, modest, and domestic (Mahalik et al., 2005). The gender roles women are expected to embody are maintained because they are reinforced when adhered to, and met with social disapproval when violated. For instance, Rudman and Glick (1999) found that agentic women are less likely to be hired because they violate the prescriptive norm of feminine niceness (the "backlash effect").

When it comes to anger, women are derogated when they experience anger because this emotion violates feminine social norms of being nice and nurturing (Mahalik et al., 2005). Moreover, women are often perceived as having "lost control" (control being another feminine social norm expected of women; Chrisler, 2008) when they experience anger. As a result, women who express anger are frequently characterized as being crazy and overly emotional, unreasonable and suffering from premenstrual tension (King, Ussher, & Perz, 2014; Thornton, 2013). It is therefore not surprising that many North American women fear losing control, particularly during certain reproductive and hormone phases (Chrisler, 2008).

The prohibition of women's anger is particularly insidious because it seeps into other obstacles that discourage women from fighting for their rights. For example, the politicized identity of being a feminist is considered undesirable, in part, because a feminist woman is seen as an angry woman (Berryman-Fink & Verderber, 1985). Consequently, even when women do recognize and confront sex-

ism, they disproportionately choose polite (and possibly less efficacious) responses, such as ignoring the sexist comment (Swim & Hyers, 1999).

Barrier 3: Perceiving the Efficacy of Collective Action

The third foundational predictor of engaging in collective action is perceiving the efficacy of advocating for the rights of the disadvantaged group (van Zomeren et al., 2008). A substantial amount of research has found that people are more likely to participate in collective action when they believe it will help them achieve the group's goals (Hornsey et al., 2006; Kelly & Breinlinger, 1996). In the final section on barriers to collective action we argue that women have difficulty believing that feminist collective action will be effective, partly because the modern-day cause of gender equality in the West is largely not centered around concrete legal change, and partly because essentialist arguments about women's and men's behavior reduce the perception that gender inequality is malleable.

Who Are We Fighting and What Are We Fighting For?

It is evident when we examine previous and current collective action—for example, the civil rights and marriage equality movements—that collective action is galvanizing when a specific target and goal has been identified. This target and goal often takes the form of specific legislative change (e.g., the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in the United States; the recent legalization of same-sex marriage in many countries across the world). Throughout history, legislative change has been the benchmark of successful collective action. Many non-Western women (e.g., in India, Afghanistan, and Saudi Arabia) are still fighting to overcome gender inequality that is inscribed in their nation's legislation. But in the West, the legislative battles for women's rights have largely been fought and won.

This is not to say that the battles that are being fought today are less important than those in the past, or that the only measure for successful collective action is legislative change. But it does mean that feminist activists in the West are less able to rally around single, headline-grabbing, landmark issues: the changes are more glacial. Such changes include a reduction in sexist comments and jokes, reduced objectification of women, a reduction in intimate partner violence, social justice work that is implicitly feminist, and changes in representation of women in traditionally male-dominated professions. Although successes have concrete and tangible benefits for individuals, they may be more difficult to perceive from a distance, and less likely to mobilize and command attention.

Essentialist Arguments for Women's and Men's Behaviors

A final reason women might not engage in collective action is because essentialist arguments for men's and women's behaviors create a perception that gender differences are fundamental, and hence cannot be overcome. Essentialist arguments propose that gender differences are due to stable and biologically fixed differences, rather than environmental factors or a combination of the two (Prentice & Miller, 2007). An example of an essentialist gender argument is that women are genetically engineered to be better at caring for children than men, or that women are biologically determined to become housewives.

Essentialist arguments are problematic because they can be used by the advantaged group to justify social inequalities (Gould, 1981), and make the disadvantaged group believe that there is nothing that they can do to improve the situation of their group. For example, women who are exposed to research that supports rather than questions essentialist arguments about gender differences are more accepting of male dominance, and less likely to see societal gender equality as possible (Morton, Postmes, Haslam, & Hornsey, 2009).

Essentialist gender arguments present a particularly hardy barrier to women perceiving the efficacy of engaging in feminist collective action. Although it is no longer permissible to express essentialist (and inaccurate) arguments about other disadvantaged groups, it is still socially acceptable to argue that differences between women and men are biologically hardwired. For example, Tony Abbott was elected to the office of Australian Prime Minister shortly after his comment was made public that "it would be folly to expect that women will ever dominate or even approach equal representation in a large number of areas simply because their aptitudes, abilities and interests are different for physiological reasons" (Abbott, cited in Jackson, 2010). The potency of this barrier is also compounded by the popularity of evolutionary explanations for gender differences. For example, relationship self-help books accentuate essentialized gender differences in romantic relationships (i.e., "men are from Mars, women are from Venus"; Gray, 1992). Research on essentialist arguments about gender differences has direct implications for overcoming sexism—women may see no reason for them to challenge sexism if they believe their lower status position in society is heritable and fixed.

It is important to highlight that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with investigating, or finding, biologically based gender differences. Rather, it is their interpretation and impact that can be problematic. For example, it has been argued that there is an overrepresentation of gender differences reported in the scientific literature (Stewart-Williams & Thomas, 2013), and that in reality many of

these assumed differences are small or trivial (including those on mathematical ability and leadership effectiveness; see Hyde, 2014). A meta-analysis conducted by Hyde (2005) found that women and men are similar on most psychological variables, and that there is more within than between gender differences. Small gender differences can be exaggerated and distorted by media and interest groups, with overtly sexist consequences. This is in part because people tend to fall prey to the naturalistic fallacy (the incorrect assumption that anything natural is good), leading to the sensationalization, misinterpretation, and misuse of the results.

Overcoming Barriers to Women Engaging in Collective Action

Thus far, we have synthesized the sexism and collective action literature to argue that women face barriers to engaging in feminist collective action. It is, however, frustrating to identify barriers to women engaging in collective action without considering ways in which these barriers can be overcome. It must first be acknowledged that many millions of women overcome some or all of these barriers every day, to fight for women's rights. As a first step it may be beneficial to interview feminist activists about how they overcame barriers, to the end of identifying techniques and qualities that allow the barriers to simply become surmountable obstacles. In addition, we briefly outline a research agenda with a view to investigating ways of overcoming these barriers below. Word constraints prevent us from addressing all of the barriers identified in the manuscript, but we do touch on the three broad themes that frame our review: identification, injustice, and efficacy.

Encouraging a Feminist Identity

We have argued that women face barriers to engaging in feminist collective action because they have difficulty identifying as a feminist. One way in which this barrier can be overcome is by using a two-pronged approach that simultaneously encourages a diverse feminist identity while removing the associated social stigma attached to this label. First, it may be beneficial to acknowledge that women will not be able to (and should not be made to) speak with "one voice." The category "woman" is broad and diffuse, as are the needs of women. What it means to be a woman changes depending on race, ethnicity, religion, political orientation, sexual orientation, age, body size, (dis)ability, and role (e.g., feminist) and so forth. An intersectional identity (Cole, 2009; Crenshaw, 1991)—one that recognizes the meaning and consequences of multiple group memberships—can nourish and inform the self (Cole, 2009). Further, intersectional identities are often diagnostic of important real-world differences (see Ostrove, Cole, & Oliva, 2009), and are a lens through which women experience the world around them (for an example in psychotherapy, see Comas-Díaz & Greene, 1994). Intersectionality means that the same broad goal (gender equality) will be articulated and fought for in multiple ways, and on multiple fronts.

Empirically, the challenge is to understand how this is best achieved. It is possible that the goal (gender equality) and label (feminist) might be most useful as a common ingroup identity for women when this identity explicitly allows for, and embraces, multiple subgroup identities. We suggest that flexibility in terms of the primacy of this identity might also be helpful. For example, there will be times when it is appropriate (and important) for women of color to act first as people of color (e.g., when challenging racialized police brutality), and times when transgender women must first consider transgender issues (e.g., when protesting widespread violence against transgender women). We note that while neither example of collective action here might explicitly be labeled as feminist, each is feminist in nature (see our earlier comments about the inseparability of feminist and other social justice work and collective action). A feminist identity that recognizes and respects identity intersectionality may be attractive to women who have felt unwelcomed or unsuited to participation in feminist collective action. We also need to ensure that we do not fall victim to intersectional invisibility—the idea that people who possess intersecting subordinate-group identities are ignored because they are perceived to be a non-prototypical member of their identity groups (i.e., women, ethnic minorities; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008).

With regard to reducing the stigmatization of feminists, we suggest that the feminist identity could be normalized by highlighting the intersection of other compatible roles feminists embody, such as being mothers, daughters, and career women. Previous research has already found some support for this strategy: when women and men interacted with a diverse panel of feminists they felt less threatened by the group and were subsequently more likely to identify as a feminist than those participants who did not interact with such a panel (Moradi, Martin, & Brewster, 2012).

Encouraging Women to Perceive Sexism

Recent research has already begun to examine ways in which we can encourage women to identify benevolent and modern sexism. Becker and Swim (2012), for example, found that providing participants with information about the prevalence and harmful consequences associated with benevolent and modern sexism reduced the extent to which they reported these attitudes. Feminist collective action could therefore be encouraged by implementing intervention programs that assist women in

identifying sexism, and the negative consequences associated with subtle manifestations of this prejudice.

Encouraging the Expression of Group-Based Anger

Earlier we summarized the case that women face barriers when engaging in collective action to overcome sexism because stereotypes and social norms associated with being a woman do not align with communicating anger. An intergroup emotions approach could be used to facilitate group-based anger. Past research has found that women's beliefs about how much anger other women experience predicts group-based anger, which in turn encourages collective action (Leonard et al., 2011). We could also redefine the expression of anger so that it is not perceived to violate feminine gender roles, stereotypes, and norms. Designed as an intervention, these approaches could have far-reaching implications for encouraging women to engage in feminist collective action.

Reducing Essentialist Arguments

Finally, future research should examine ways in which we can shift away from essentialist arguments for women's and men's behavior, or how we can negate the negative consequences associated with such arguments. With regard to essentialist arguments within scientific reporting, we suggest that researchers should continue to be mindful about sensationalizing their results, highlight effect sizes, and acknowledge other factors that influence human behavior to avoid the inappropriate use of this information. Policies dictating how these results are disseminated in the media could also be formulated, with journalists being held accountable when they sensationalize or misrepresent results. Further strategies may involve the creation of a journalistic norm whereby credible commentary is sought after when interpreting scientific research, as well as increased open-access journals that allow media consumers to "fact check" articles. Finally we would encourage researchers to speak up and defend their research when they are aware that their findings are being misinterpreted.

Conclusion

Our review contributes to the psychological literature by synthesizing the most recent sexism research under a contemporary collective action framework. While we celebrate the important work currently being undertaken for women's rights, it is also evident that women are affected by a number of specific barriers when considering participating in collective action. Throughout our review we aimed to offer novel theoretical explanations for why women might be discouraged from engaging in feminist collective action. We encourage researchers to take up the challenge of filling the empirical gaps our review exposes, particularly how the barriers work together to discourage women from engaging in feminist collective action and how these barriers can be overcome.

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