

**“We for She”: Mobilising Men and Women to Act in Solidarity for Gender Equality**

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**In press:** *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations*, Special Issue: “Addressing Gender Inequality”

**Keywords:** gender equality, collective action, social change, solidarity, social identity, feminist identity, leadership, legitimacy

RUNNING HEAD/SHORT TITLE: Solidarity for gender equality

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**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:** This research was supported by funding from the Australian Research Council (DP1095319).

### **Abstract**

Gender (in)equality is typically studied as a women's issue to be addressed via systemic measures (e.g., government policy). As such, research focusing on mobilising men (and women) towards achieving gender equality is rare. In contrast, this paper examines the mobilisation of both men and women towards gender equality as common cause. Experiment 1 shows that men's collective action intentions increase after reading messages that position men as agents of change towards gender equality, compared to messages that frame this issue as stemming from inadequate government policy. Experiments 2 and 3 demonstrate that messages framing gender equality as an issue for both men and women increase men's collective action intentions, compared to when gender inequality is framed as primarily concerning women. However, this effect emerges primarily under conditions where the source of message is male (Experiment 3). Practical and theoretical implications for mobilising political solidarity in gender equality contexts are discussed.

## **“We for She”: Mobilising Men and Women to Act in Solidarity for Gender Equality**

“Men have got to be involved in the conversation... We shouldn't be afraid of the word feminist, men and women should use it to describe themselves anytime they want... That role we have as men in supporting and demanding equality and demanding a shift is really, really important.”

Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada

Traditionally, gender equality interventions have tended to focus on either women (e.g., leadership training, mentoring programs), organisations (e.g., recruitment and promotion policies), or government policy (e.g., gender equality legislation). Recently this trend has begun to shift towards engaging men and male leaders as ‘champions of change’. Examples include the United Nations “He for She” campaign and the Australian Sex Discrimination Commission’s “Male Champions of Change” initiative (Australian Sex Discrimination Commission, 2013; Dinolfo, Prime, & Foust-Cummings, 2013). Following this lead, the Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau appointed a gender-balanced cabinet in 2015, and made headlines in 2016 when he urged both men and women to think of themselves as feminists (Treanor & Wearden, 2016). Yet psychological research has directed little attention towards understanding how both men and women can be encouraged to champion change towards gender equality, a key point we address in this paper.

### **Addressing Gender Inequality: A Matter of Prejudice Reduction or Social Change?**

When it comes to understanding the reasons why gender *inequality* persists, the contribution of social psychology is extensive. Approaches range from work on implicit bias, stereotype threat, and benevolent (vs. hostile) sexism, to research examining gender differences in workplace attitudes and behaviours, and phenomena such as the queen bee and

the glass cliff (see Ryan & Branscombe, 2013, for an overview). In much of this work, processes surrounding gender inequality dynamics are typically studied from a prejudice perspective, where the focus is on reducing explicit biases (e.g., sexism) and implicit biases (Becker, Zawadzki, & Shields, 2014). This work has shown, for example, that men tend not to ‘see’ gender-based discrimination in the workplace that is readily recognised as such by women (Becker & Swim, 2011), or if they do see gender-based discrimination they evaluate it as less serious and pervasive and, consequently, are less willing to do something about it (Iyer & Ryan, 2009).

Gender (in)equality research examining social change dynamics typically focuses on women and their willingness to engage in protest activities as they are the group disadvantaged by the status quo (e.g., Ellemers & Barreto, 2009; Garcia, Schmitt, Branscombe, & Ellemers, 2010; Radke, Hornsey, & Barlow, 2016; Schmitt, Ellemers, & Branscombe, 2003). This trend reflects a broader tendency within collective action research to focus primarily on disadvantaged groups (for a review, see van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008) rather than the emergence of more widespread support for social change (Subašić, Reynolds, & Turner, 2008; Subašić, Reynolds, Klandermans, & Reicher, 2012). Nonetheless, this work has clearly demonstrated the importance of both gender identity (particularly when informed by feminist ideology; e.g., Kelly & Breilinger, 1995) and feminist self-identification for women’s pro-gender equality activism (e.g., Moradi, 2012; van Breen, Spears, Kuppens, & de Lemus, 2017; Yoder, Tobias, & Snell, 2011) and willingness to confront sexism (e.g., Ayres, Friedman, & Leaper, 2009).

Similar to other work in the collective action tradition, this research typically overlooks the mobilisation or leadership aspect of the process—the question of *how* people become willing to act collectively for change (for more elaborate critique of these points see Haslam & Reicher, 2011; Subašić et al., 2008, 2012; Subašić, Reynolds, & Mohamed, 2015).

As a result, men's and women's role as agents and champions of change towards gender equality is typically overlooked and research examining the collective efforts of both men and women to challenge gender inequality and related phenomena, such as sexism, is rare (Becker et al., 2014). Nonetheless, extant findings show that men who do confront gender-based prejudice directed at women encounter more positive attitudes and fewer costs, in comparison to the backlash typically experienced by women who confront sexism (Becker & Barretto, 2014; B. Drury & Kaiser, 2014; Hekman, Johnson, Foo, & Yang, 2017).

### **Political Solidarity for Gender Equality: Mobilising Men (and Women) to Engage in Collective Action for Change**

In much of gender equality research, men and women are seen as homogeneous social categories with necessarily conflicted subgroup interests—and as such men are typically confined to the roles of perpetrators or bystanders while women are typically seen as victims. In turn, the achievement of gender equality becomes defined in terms of negative interdependence, such that advancing women's interests is seen as forcing men to give up their privilege (Branscombe, 1998). For many, however, when it comes to negotiating increasingly demanding workplace expectations and cultures, there is at least as much common ground between men and women as there is subgroup conflict between men and women.

For example, new fathers also want more flexible working hours and are becoming more willing to make use of such arrangements when available, preferences which can directly affect new mothers' prospects of returning to work post-childbirth and progressing their career (Workplace Gender Equality Agency [WGEA], 2013). Further, both men's and women's preferences for egalitarian relationships at home can be affected by gendered workplace norms and policies that make it non-normative for men to prioritise time with family (Sanders, Zeng, Hellicar, & Fagg, 2016; Pedulla & Thebaud, 2015). When such

organisational constraints are removed (experimentally), such that both men and women can opt for an egalitarian relationship, the majority choose this option, regardless of gender (Pedulla & Thebaud, 2015).

When it comes to explaining how such shared views and goals may emerge between men and women, the political solidarity model of social change (Subašić et al., 2008) is useful. This model explains how, via the emergence of shared higher order identities (e.g., men and women as feminists), the persistence of inequality and the achievement of equality come to be seen as social change problems that concern us all. As such, it allows for a shift from men as ‘bystanders’ and women as ‘victims’ to both men and women as agents of change. In line with this argument, recent evidence suggests relatively privileged groups have an important role to play as allies in the struggle for social justice, particularly when they share the disadvantaged groups’ view that the status quo is illegitimate (Becker, Wright, Lubensky, & Zhou, 2013).

As McGarty, Bliuc, Thomas, and Bongiorno (2009) have argued, the problem of collective action is one of common cause, whereby social categories become psychological groups defined by shared goals, values and important (action-relevant) opinions. As such, it is the emergence of common cause that makes collective action possible. One way to engender a sense of common cause between men and women is via collective action frames that redefine people’s understanding of the problem and willingness to take action to address it (e.g., McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996; Snow & Benford, 1992). Solidarity is unlikely to emerge as long as gender inequality is framed as a women’s issue that governments or organisations and their human resources departments are responsible for addressing. This approach may be particularly demobilising for men because it signals that inequality is either a matter of competing subgroup interests (e.g., men having to ‘give up’ privilege to achieve equality) or a women’s rather than ‘our’ problem. In contrast, when gender inequality is framed in a way

that positions men and women as agents of change towards a common cause, a key outcome may be men's willingness to challenge the status quo in solidarity with women (Subašić et al., 2008).

This process of message framing is fundamentally one of leadership and influence—it matters not only what is being said, but also who is saying it. Men occupy most positions of power and influence in society, they more readily fit the leader stereotype, and their involvement in reducing inequality is less likely to be seen as self-interested (B. Drury & Kaiser, 2014). As a result, when men and women confront gender-based discrimination, they are judged differently by observers, with female leaders facing far greater 'punishment' and backlash for parting with traditional gender norms (Hekman et al., 2017; Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2012). Further, from a political solidarity perspective, we suggest that male advocates of gender equality—and particularly those in positions of public leadership and authority—signal to both men and women that 'we are all in this together', making widespread engagement in collective action more likely.

Willingness to take part in collective action, however, is also a function of how people see themselves and the relevant social relations. For example, perceptions of shared social identity and a shared view regarding the illegitimacy of inequality have been shown to underpin women's collective action for gender equality (Iyer & Ryan, 2009; Jetten, Branscombe, Iyer, & Asai, 2013a; Jetten, Iyer, Branscombe, & Zhang, 2013b). Further, while high levels of gender identification are associated with increases in both perceived illegitimacy and collective action tendencies for women, there is evidence that this is primarily the case when gender identity is defined by feminist values (e.g., Kelly & Brelinger, 1995; van Breen et al., 2017). In contrast, men are more likely to see inequality as illegitimate and more willing to act the *less* they identify with their gender (Iyer & Ryan, 2009; see also Becker & Barreto, 2014, for related findings regarding confronting sexism), suggesting that

the context of gender equality evokes contrasting meanings of male and female gender identities.

For solidarity to emerge, then, we argue that it is not only necessary for men and women to come to a shared view of inequality as illegitimate, but also to a shared view of who ‘we’ are—the core values that define ‘us’—and for those values to be clearly aligned with an agenda for change (Subašić et al., 2015). In the context of gender equality, identifying as a feminist signals the emergence of such a higher-order identity defined by a shared agenda for change toward gender equality (i.e., common cause). In line with this argument, feminist self-identification has been shown to increase both activism (e.g., van Breen et al., 2017; Yoder et al., 2011) and willingness to confront sexism (e.g., Ayres et al., 2009). Further, the related concept of feminist solidarity—capturing the ingroup-ties aspect of social identification as particularly relevant for collective action mobilisation (Cameron, 2004; Leach et al., 2008; Wiley, Srinivasan, Finke, Firnhaber, & Shilinsky, 2012)—has been shown to fully explain the relationship between positive portrayals of feminist men and men’s collective action intentions in support of women (Wiley et al., 2012).

Further, White (2006) demonstrated that African American men and women who identify as feminists are equally supportive of feminist activism on a range of measures, including attendance at protests. White (2006) argues that these African American feminists’ experiences of discrimination (and therefore politicisation) based on their racial identity leads to greater solidarity between men and women within this group in the face of other forms of oppression. This research highlights the key role of shared, higher-order identities that form the basis of psychological groups defined by a common cause and, as such, transcend social category boundaries typically presumed to act as a barrier to solidarity (see McGarty et al., 2009).

## **Present Research**

Across three experiments, the present research contrasts established ways of thinking and talking about inequality (e.g., as a function of government policy, or as a women's issue) with ones that explicitly position men as being responsible for maintaining and addressing inequality (Experiment 1), and explicitly frame gender inequality as an issue concerning both men and women (Experiments 2-3). In the third experiment, we additionally focus on whether the source of the framing message is male or female to enable us to examine the proposition that male (compared to female) advocates may be more effective at mobilising men for gender equality. Key outcomes include collective action intentions (Experiments 1-3), perceptions of common cause (Experiment 1), feminist solidarity (Experiments 2-3), and perceived legitimacy of inequality (Experiment 3).

We expect that men's willingness to engage in collective action to achieve gender equality will be higher in response to messages which either position men as agents of change towards equality (and thereby enhance a sense of common cause; Experiment 1) or that explicitly frame inequality as a common cause for both men and women (Experiments 2-3) compared to more traditional approaches that focus on systemic responses via government policy or define the issue as one that primarily concerns women (Hypothesis 1). Under these conditions, men's responses should be more similar to those of women, while gender differences should be observed when 'traditional' frames are used (Hypothesis 2). However, for men, this shift in response to common cause messages should emerge more readily when the message is attributed to a male (rather than female) source (Hypothesis 3). Based on extant research (e.g., Iyer & Ryan, 2009; van Zomeren et al., 2008; Wiley et al., 2012), responses on relevant explanatory variables (perceptions of common cause in Experiment 1; feminist solidarity in Experiments 2-3; perceived legitimacy in Experiment 3) are expected to show a similar pattern. We expect to see more common cause, higher feminist solidarity, and

lower perceived legitimacy of inequality under the same conditions that enhance collective action.

## **Experiment 1**

### **Method**

#### **Participants and Design**

Participants were on-campus students at a large, urban Australian University ( $N=121$ , 58 women), between 17-60 years ( $M_{age}=22.16$  years,  $SD=7.03$  years), recruited by a female experimenter. The study was a 2 (Participant Gender: Male, Female) x 2 (Responsibility Framing: Men, Government) factorial design.

#### **Procedure and Materials**

Participants completed a paper questionnaire comprising the experimental manipulations and dependent measures described below.

**Responsibility framing manipulation.** A one-page article described the extent of gender inequality in Australian workplaces (e.g., “Fewer than 2% of companies listed on the Australian Securities Exchange have a female chief executive, and only one in 12 board directors are women”). Responsibility framing (government, men) was manipulated via highlighting either the role of government policy or men in maintaining and addressing inequality. In the government responsibility condition, the manipulation stated: “One key reason why income inequality persists today is that the government has not done enough to ensure that men and women receive equal pay for equal work... Women’s rights advocates and workers’ unions are calling for a new government policy that would achieve greater income equality, including mandatory audits of pay rates...”. In the men’s responsibility condition, the vignette stated: “One key reason why income inequality persists today is that there are more men than women in managerial and executive positions... Women’s rights advocates and workers’ unions are calling for a new campaign raising men’s awareness about

income inequality between genders. The campaign will argue that men in particular have a responsibility to ensure that their female colleagues are not disadvantaged (e.g. offered or paid a lower salary) because of their gender”.

**Manipulation checks.** All items were rated on 9-point Likert scales (1=*not at all agree*, 9=*very much agree*). Two items assessed the manipulation’s impact: “The high levels of gender inequality in Australian workplaces are due to a lack of government regulation” and “The high level of gender inequality in Australian workplaces exist because more men occupy positions of authority.”

**Collective action.** Six items ( $\alpha=.68$ ) assessed participants’ collective action intentions towards achieving gender equality (e.g., “Talk to male friends, family and colleagues to increase awareness about this issue”, “Talk to my boss/management about making more female appointments”).

**Common cause.** Four items ( $\alpha=.89$ ) assessed participants’ sense of common cause (e.g., “I feel solidarity with the women affected by income inequality”).

## Results and Discussion

### Manipulation Checks

When the vignette attributed the responsibility for gender inequality to a lack of adequate government policy, participants were more likely to see the government as responsible for inequality ( $M_{gov}=5.09$ ,  $SD=2.19$ ) compared to when inequality was attributed to higher numbers of men in leadership positions ( $M_{men}=3.79$ ,  $SD=2.05$ ),  $F(1, 115)=13.57$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.11$ . There was also a significant main effect of gender for this item,  $F(1, 115)=6.51$ ,  $p=.01$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.05$ , with female participants’ ( $M=4.89$ ,  $SD=2.07$ ) ratings of government responsibility being higher than males’ ( $M=4.07$ ,  $SD=2.28$ ).

When inequality was attributed to more men occupying positions of authority, participants (regardless of gender) saw men as being more responsible for inequality compared to when inequality was attributed to a lack of adequate government policy ( $M_{men}=6.72, SD=1.58; M_{gov}=5.59, SD=2.01$ ),  $F(1, 115)=10.95, p<.001, \eta_p^2=.09$ . There were no other significant main effects or interactions. Combined, these findings suggest that our responsibility framing manipulation was successful.

### **Collective Action**

A significant main effect for gender showed that, overall, women expressed higher collective action intentions ( $M=4.85, SD=1.79$ ) than men ( $M=4.09, SD=1.76$ ),  $F(1, 117)=4.88, p=.03, \eta_p^2=.04$ . However, this main effect was qualified by a significant Participant Gender x Responsibility Framing interaction,  $F(1, 117)=5.49, p=.02, \eta_p^2=.05$  (see Figure 1). In line with hypotheses (H1), male participants reported higher collective action intentions when exposed to a message that assigned their gender group the responsibility for maintaining and addressing inequality ( $M=4.63, SD=1.28$ ), in contrast to the message framing gender inequality as a matter for government policy ( $M=3.68, SD=1.97$ ),  $F(1, 61)=4.81, p=.03, \eta_p^2=.07$ . This effect was not observed for women,  $F(1, 56)=1.34, p=.25, \eta_p^2=.02$ . Further, gender differences in collective action intentions emerged only when inequality was attributed to a lack of adequate government policy,  $F(1, 61)=10.52, p=.01, \eta_p^2=.15$ , with men reporting lower collective action intentions ( $M=3.68, SD=1.97$ ) than women ( $M=5.14, SD=1.45$ ). In contrast, when men were said to be responsible for maintaining and addressing inequality, male and female participants expressed similar levels of collective action intentions,  $F(1, 56)=.1, p=.93, \eta_p^2=.00$ , supporting our hypotheses (H2).

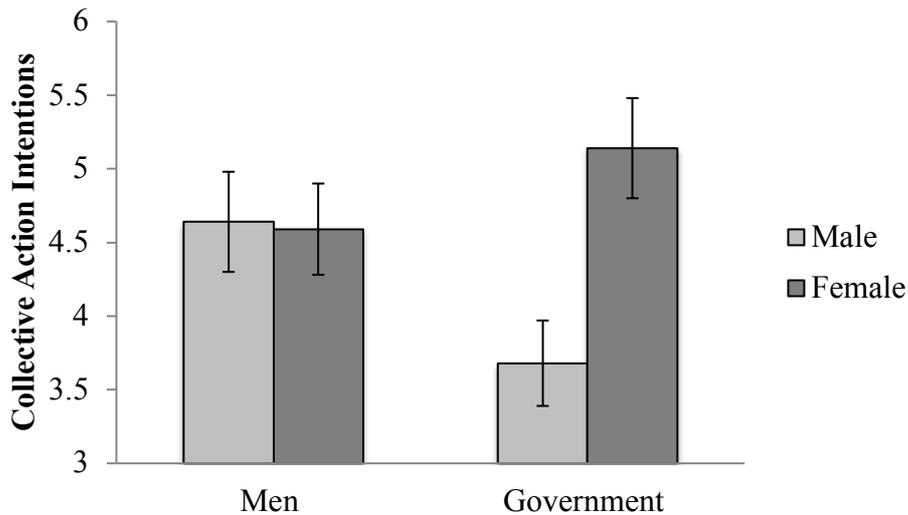


Figure 1. Mean collective action intentions as a function of responsibility framing (men, government) and participant gender (male, female). Error bars represent standard errors. (Experiment 1).

### Common Cause

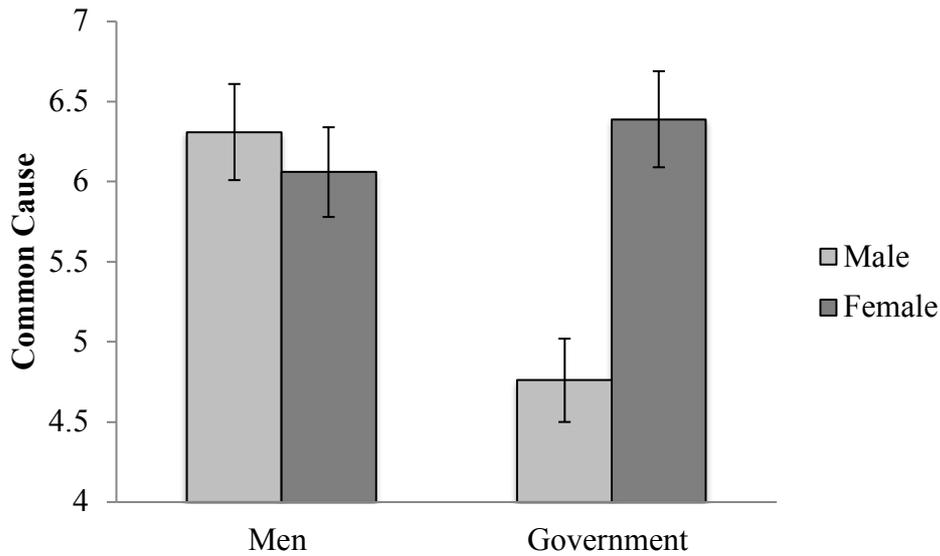
The results for common cause revealed a significant main effect for participant gender,  $F(1, 115)=5.74, p=.02, \eta_p^2=.05$ , with women ( $M=6.21, SD=1.46$ ) expressing a greater sense of common cause than men ( $M=5.42, SD=1.83$ ). There was also a significant main effect of responsibility framing,  $F(1, 117)=4.44, p=.04, \eta_p^2=.04$ . When men had the responsibility to address inequality, participants' sense of common cause was higher ( $M=6.17, SD=1.47$ ) compared to conditions attributing responsibility to government policy ( $M=5.46, SD=1.83$ ). These main effects were qualified by a significant two-way interaction,  $F(1, 117)=10.63, p=.001, \eta_p^2=.08$  (see Figure 2).

Supporting H1, male participants expressed a greater sense of common cause when men had the responsibility for addressing inequality ( $M=6.31, SD=1.41$ ), compared to those exposed to messages that focused on government policy ( $M=4.76, SD=1.79$ ),  $F(1, 61)=13.21, p=.001, \eta_p^2=.18$ . There were no differences amongst female participants as a function of

responsibility framing ( $M_{\text{men}}=6.06$ ,  $SD=1.48$ ;  $M_{\text{gov}}=6.39$ ,  $SD=1.44$ ),  $F(1, 58)=.75$ ,  $p=.39$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.01$ . Further, when government had the responsibility for addressing inequality, men's sense of common cause with women was significantly lower ( $M=4.76$ ,  $SD=1.79$ ) than that expressed by female participants ( $M=6.39$ ,  $SD=1.44$ ),  $F(1, 61)=14.95$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.20$ .

Supporting our hypotheses (H2), this pattern was *not* observed when men were said to have the responsibility for (addressing) gender inequality,  $F(1, 58)=.41$ ,  $p=.53$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.01$ , with men and women expressing similar levels of common cause with women affected by gender-based inequality.

Further, we examined whether common cause mediated the effect of responsibility framing on collective action intentions for male participants. We used Hayes' (2013) PROCESS software, with 5000 bootstrapping iterations to obtain bias-corrected bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals for indirect effects. There was a significant total effect of responsibility framing on collective action intentions ( $b=-.95$ ,  $SE=.43$ ,  $p=.03$ , BCa 95% CIs: -1.82, -.08), showing that collective action intentions were higher for male participants exposed to men's responsibility framing. The direct effect of responsibility framing on collective action intentions became non-significant ( $b=-.01$ ,  $SE=.43$ ,  $p=.98$ , BCa 95% CIs: -.78, .76), however, when common cause was included as mediator. The indirect effect was significant ( $b=-.95$ ,  $SE=.29$ , BCa 95% CIs: -1.55, -.41), indicating a significant mediating effect via common cause.



*Figure 2.* Mean sense of common cause as a function of responsibility framing (men, government) and participant gender (male, female). Error bars represent standard errors. (Experiment 1).

As predicted, when men were exposed to messages that focus on their role in the change process, they expressed greater willingness to engage in collective action and a stronger sense of common cause (supporting H1), to the extent that their responses on these measures were not significantly different from those of women (supporting H2). We further showed that the emergence of common cause with women disadvantaged by inequality helps explain this effect. These findings suggest that, to engage a male audience more effectively, gender equality interventions need to (a) make explicit (rather than obfuscate) men's role in creating and addressing inequality, and (b) do so in a way that highlights a sense of common cause (e.g., as colleagues) between men and women.

In Experiment 1, gender inequality was framed in a way that highlighted either men's or the government's role in maintaining and addressing inequality, while perceived common cause (theorised as the basis of collective action in this context) was measured. As such, this manipulation explicitly assigned the responsibility for both maintaining and addressing

inequality to either men or the government. It could be argued that such rhetoric, particularly when focused on men, potentially conflated responsibility with a sense of blame and collective guilt for male participants (e.g., Miron, Branscombe, & Schmitt, 2006), which in turn motivated collective action. Given the solidarity-based analysis that is central to this work, in the next two studies we focus instead on *manipulating* a sense of common cause between men and women, rather than implying that either subgroup has a responsibility to address inequality. Experiment 2 also includes a measure of feminist solidarity (Wiley et al., 2012), an aspect of social identification (Leach et al., 2008) as a feminist seen as particularly relevant to collective action intentions.

In Experiment 2, we focus on gender equality in the context of access to flexible working conditions for parents of young children. This issue was chosen because it can be readily framed at the subgroup (e.g., mothers, fathers) and superordinate level (e.g., parents), to attenuate or enhance a sense of common cause (respectively). Further, given the centrality of leadership processes (and leader gender) when it comes to mobilising support for gender equality, each message was (ostensibly) delivered by David Morrison, former Australian Chief of Army and a prominent advocate for gender equality (recognised for his advocacy as Australian of the Year for 2016).

## **Experiment 2**

### **Method**

#### **Participants and Design**

Participants were students at a large Australian university or members of the general public ( $N=192$ , 104 women), between 18-56 years ( $M_{age}=24.63$  years,  $SD=7.75$  years). The study was a 2 (Participant Gender: Male, Female) x 3 (Issue Framing: Fathers, Mothers, Parents) factorial design. Participants were recruited online (via email, Facebook, or research participation program) or face-to-face by a male experimenter approaching participants on-

campus. Because the manipulation focused on flexible working conditions for parents, we assessed parental status. Data patterns remained the same whether or not the 23 participants with children were excluded from the analyses, so they were included to increase power.

### **Procedure and Materials**

Participants completed the dependent measures, manipulation checks and demographics described below.

**Issue framing manipulation.** A one-page article ostensibly described the WGEA's report and statement by David Morrison highlighting the need for flexible work options. Issue framing was manipulated via message content, focusing on either fathers, mothers or both groups/parents: "...the WGEA conducted a survey looking at the relationships of new fathers [mothers/mothers and fathers] who are currently employed full-time. The survey highlighted that fathers [mothers/parents] want more flexible work options in their workplace...". David Morrison then discussed the (supposed) WGEA data and his interactions with fathers/mothers/parents: "I have spoken to many fathers [mothers/mothers and fathers] who all share this concern...Currently there is a lack of flexible work options for fathers [mothers/parents] within the workforce...The theme from both research and my discussions with fathers [mothers/fathers and mothers], is that fathers [mothers/parents] want more flexible work options to spend more time with their children."

**Manipulation check.** All items were completed on 7-point Likert scales (1=*strongly disagree*, 7=*strongly agree*). Participants were asked to identify the target group discussed (Mothers/Fathers/Both Parents).

**Collective action intentions.** Eight items assessed participants' collective action intentions ( $\alpha=.89$ ; adapted from Glasford & Calcagno, 2012, and van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004; e.g., "Talk to male [female] colleagues about this issue", "Participate in a demonstration promoting flexible work options").

**Feminist solidarity.** Three items assessed participants' feminist solidarity (adapted from Wiley and colleagues, 2013;  $\alpha=.95$ ; e.g., "I feel committed to feminism").

## Results and Discussion

### Manipulation Checks

Most participants (82.8%) correctly identified the target group (Mothers/Fathers/Both Parents). Ten participants (five women) in the fathers condition, 10 participants (four women) in the mothers condition and 13 participants (seven women) in the Both/parents condition failed this manipulation check, and were excluded from further analyses. The final sample was 159.

### Collective Action Intentions

A significant main effect for participant gender ( $F(1, 153)=10.94, p=.001, \eta_p^2=.07$ ) indicated that collective action intentions were significantly higher for women ( $M=5.11, SD=1.04$ ) than for men ( $M=4.54, SD=1.32$ ). The main effect of experimental condition was also significant ( $F(2, 153)=3.24, p=.04, \eta_p^2=.04$ ). While post-hoc testing did not reveal significant mean differences, the data pattern suggests that collective action intentions were highest when the message referred to parents ( $M=5.09, SD=1.25$ ), compared to either mothers ( $M=4.82, SD=1.29$ ) or fathers ( $M=4.67, SD=1.04$ ). These main effects were qualified by a significant two-way interaction,  $F(2, 153)=9.80, p<.001, \eta_p^2=.11$  (see Figure 3).

Simple effect analyses showed that issue framing did not have a significant effect on female participants,  $F(2, 85)=1.50, p=.23, \eta_p^2=.03$ , but it did have a significant effect on male participants,  $F(2, 68)=8.91, p<.001, \eta_p^2=.21$ . In line with predictions (H1), post-hoc comparisons (Dunnett's two-sided t-test with parents as the contrast condition) showed that men's collective action intentions were significantly higher in response to the parents message, compared to either the fathers or the mothers framing. Further, in line with predictions (H2), there were no significant differences between male and female participants

exposed to the parents framing,  $F(1, 49)=1.51, p=.23, \eta_p^2=.03$ . When the message focused on fathers or mothers however, men's collective action intentions were significantly lower than those of women (Fathers:  $F(1, 52)=6.14, p=.02, \eta_p^2=.11$ ; Mothers:  $F(1, 52)=24.47, p<.001, \eta_p^2=.32$ ).

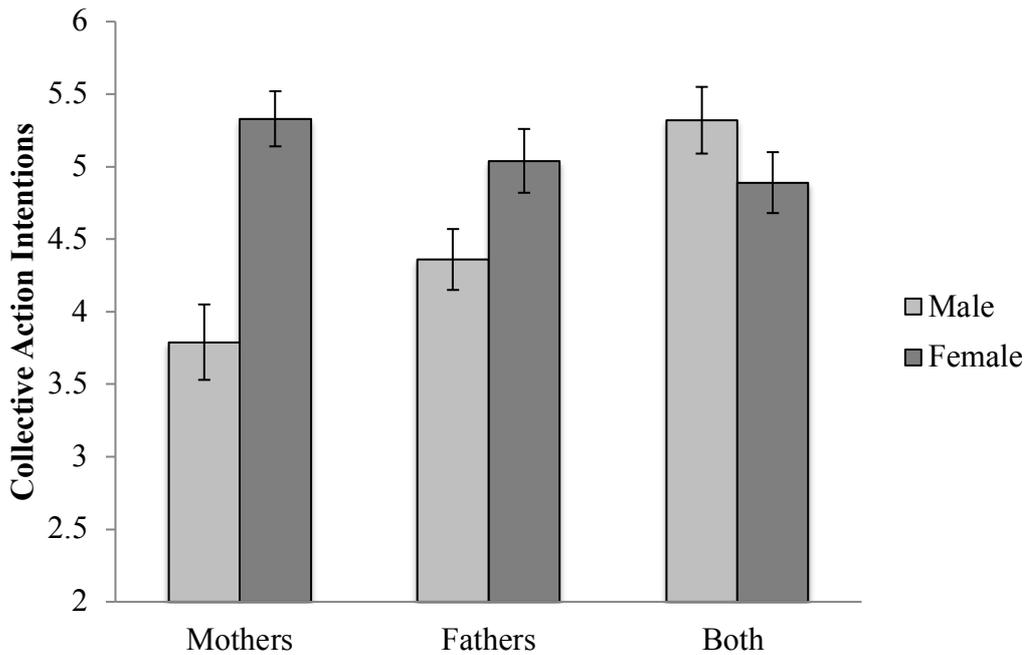
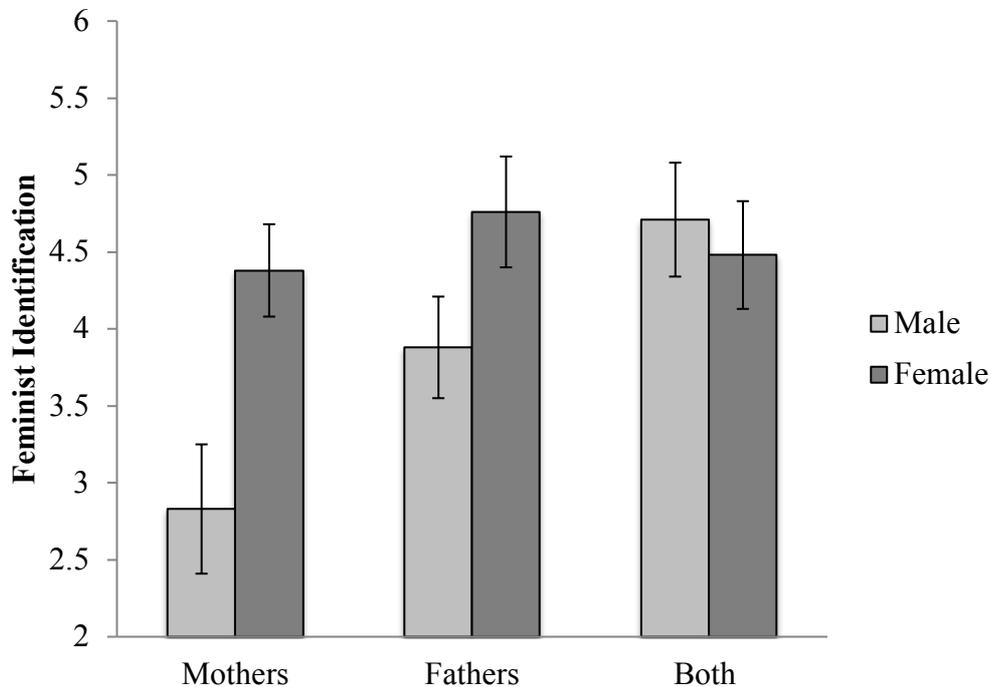


Figure 3. Mean collective action intentions as a function of participant gender (male, female) and issue framing (mothers, fathers, both). Error bars represent standard errors. (Experiment 2).

### Feminist Solidarity

A significant main effect for participant gender showed that feminist solidarity was significantly higher for women ( $M = 4.52, SD = 1.95$ ) than for men ( $M = 3.89, SD = 1.69$ ),  $F(1, 153)=6.31, p=.01, \eta_p^2=.04$ . The main effect of issue framing was also significant,  $F(2, 153)=3.98, p=.02, \eta_p^2=.05$ . Although the post-hoc tests were not significant, the observed data pattern suggests that feminist solidarity was higher when the issue of flexible working conditions was framed as something both mothers and fathers are striving for ( $M=4.59, SD = 2.01$ ), compared to it being an issue for mothers ( $M=3.86, SD=1.95$ ) or fathers ( $M=4.29,$

$SD=1.56$ ). These main effects were qualified by a significant two-way interaction,  $F(2, 153)=3.07, p=.049, \eta_p^2=.04$  (see Figure 4).



*Figure 4.* Mean feminist solidarity as a function of participant gender (male, female) and issue framing (mothers, fathers, both). Error bars represent standard errors. (Experiment 2).

Simple effect analyses showed that issue framing did not have a significant effect on female participants,  $F(2, 85)=.29, p=.75, \eta_p^2=.01$ , but it did have a significant effect on male participants,  $F(2, 68)=7.46, p<.001, \eta_p^2=.18$ . In line with predictions (H1), post-hoc comparisons (Dunnett’s two-sided t-test with parents as the contrast condition) showed that men’s feminist solidarity was significantly higher in response to the parents framing, compared to the mothers framing. There were no significant differences between the fathers and parents framing, or between fathers and mothers framing. Further, in line with predictions (H2), there were no significant differences between male and female participants exposed to the parents framing,  $F(1, 49)=.16, p=.69, \eta_p^2=.00$ . When the message focused on fathers or

mothers however, men's (compared to women's) feminist solidarity was significantly lower (Fathers:  $F(1, 52)=4.54, p=.04, \eta_p^2=.08$ ; Mothers:  $F(1, 52)=8.54, p=.01, \eta_p^2=.14$ ).

As predicted, messages that highlighted a sense of common cause between men and women as parents elicited higher collective action intentions and higher feminist solidarity by male participants, compared to messages that focused on either women/mothers or men/fathers as the group demanding change (supporting H1). These messages also tended to result in similar levels of collective action intentions and feminist solidarity for men and women, such that gender differences typically observed on these measures were no longer present (supporting H2). Interestingly, while focusing on fathers was less effective at mobilising men's intentions to participate (compared to a common cause message), this frame was just as effective at mobilising women as those focusing on mothers and parents. For women, each of the frames used may be interpreted as supporting mothers—whether directly or via supporting fathers and parents more generally. In contrast, for men, it seems necessary to go beyond subgroup concerns to emphasise a shared, superordinate identity if they are to become willing to challenge the status quo (and express commitment to feminism)—and do so to the same extent as women (see also Schmitt, Ellemers, & Branscombe, 2003).

As highlighted in the introduction, leadership and mobilisation processes are central to better understanding social change (Reicher, Haslam, & Hopkins, 2005; Subašić et al., 2012, 2015), including in gender equality contexts. Therefore, a key feature of this experiment was the use of a prominent male leader as the message source across conditions. However, this design does not enable us to investigate whether male (compared to female) leaders have an advantage when it comes to mobilising men (and women) for gender equality. To do so, Experiment 3 includes a manipulation of leader gender, as a potential moderator of the effectiveness of solidarity-based frames.

Further, it could be argued that the dynamics observed in Experiment 2 are confined to contexts involving parents. To ensure our findings are generalisable beyond parenting contexts, Experiment 3 focuses on support for gender equality in the workplace more generally. It also includes a measure of perceived legitimacy of inequality, to enable us to examine whether leader gender and issue framing shape understandings of the status quo, as well as willingness to support change.

### **Experiment 3**

#### **Method**

##### **Participants and Design**

Participants ( $N=240$ ; 120 women) between the ages of 18-68 years ( $M_{\text{age}} = 28.13$  years,  $SD=10.44$  years) were recruited by a female experimenter either online, face-to-face, or via online research participation system. The study was a 2 (Participant Gender: Male, Female) x 2 (Issue Framing: Women's Issue, Common Cause) x 2 (Leader Gender: Male, Female) factorial design.

##### **Procedure and Materials**

**Manipulations.** A one-page article ostensibly described the Australian Gender Equality Commissioner's creation of a group whose aim was to reduce workplace gender inequality. Leader gender (male, female) was manipulated by Commissioner name ("Margaret [Matthew] Jamieson") and relevant pronouns ("her [his]", "she [he]"). Issue framing (common cause, women's issue) was manipulated via group name ("[Men and] Women for Gender Equality") and message content (e.g., "it is vital [men and] women are engaged and committed to tackling this issue [together]", "[men and boys] working [together] with women and girls"). The Commissioner referred to an annual report ostensibly published by the group, which found that "gender equality matters to [both men and] women" and expressed his/her

commitment to serving “[men and] women of this country” and the gender equality movement.

**Manipulation checks.** To assess the manipulations’ effectiveness, participants were asked to identify the gender of the Commissioner (male/female), and to what extent the article provided information about gender inequality being (a) a women’s only issue and (b) a men’s and women’s issue.

**Dependent measures.** All measures used 7-point Likert scales (1=*strongly disagree*, 7=*strongly agree*). Measures of collective action intentions ( $\alpha=.91$ ) and feminist solidarity ( $\alpha=.95$ ) were identical to those used in Experiment 2. Eight items assessed participants’ perceived legitimacy of inequality (Miron et al., 2006;  $\alpha=.84$ ; e.g., “[Overall, I believe...] Women have just as many privileges as men do”).

## Results and Discussion

**Manipulation checks.** Fifteen participants in the female leader condition and 17 in the male leader condition failed the leader gender manipulation check. These participants were excluded from further analyses. The final sample was 208.

Participants in the women’s issue condition were significantly more likely to agree that the article discussed gender inequality as a women’s only issue ( $M=3.67$ ,  $SD=2.01$ ), compared to those in the common cause condition ( $M=2.45$ ,  $SD=1.49$ ),  $F(1, 200) = 24.44$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.11$ . In contrast, participants in the common cause condition were significantly more likely to agree the article discussed gender inequality as a men’s and women’s issue ( $M=5.89$ ,  $SD=1.36$ ), compared to those in the women’s issue conditions ( $M=4.58$ ,  $SD=1.36$ ),  $F(1, 200) = 33.30$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.14$ . For this item, there was also a main effect of leader gender, such that participants in the male leader condition were more likely to agree that the article discussed gender inequality as an issue for men and women ( $M=5.57$ ,  $SD=1.52$ ), compared to those in the female leader condition ( $M=4.90$ ,  $SD=1.95$ ),  $F(1, 200) = 8.12$ ,

$p=.01$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.04$ . There were no other significant main effects or interactions. Combined, these results suggest that our manipulations were successful.

**Collective action intentions.** Main effects of participant gender ( $F(1, 200)=6.99$ ,  $p=.01$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.03$ ;  $M_{male}=4.95$ ,  $SD=1.19$ ;  $M_{female}=5.34$ ,  $SD=1.19$ ) and message framing ( $F(1, 200)=4.45$ ,  $p=.04$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.02$ ;  $M_{women's\ issue}=4.99$ ,  $SD=1.19$ ;  $M_{common\ cause}=5.23$ ,  $SD=1.21$ ) were obtained, but were qualified by the predicted three-way interaction,  $F(1, 200)=23.55$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.11$  (see Figure 5).

To unpack the interaction, further analyses were performed at each level of leader gender. A significant two-way Participant Gender x Issue Framing interaction was found for both male leader ( $F(1, 99)=18.71$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.16$ ) and female leader ( $F(1, 101)=6.74$ ,  $p=.01$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.06$ ) conditions. When the leader was male, men reported higher collective action intentions under common cause framing than women's issue framing,  $F(1, 48)=31.51$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.39$ , while this effect was not observed for women,  $F(1, 51)=1.51$ ,  $p=.32$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.02$ . Further, male leaders focused on gender inequality as a women's issue, women expressed higher collective action intentions than men,  $F(1, 49)=30.43$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.38$ . However, as predicted (H2), men's and women's responses did not differ in response to the common cause message,  $F(1, 50)=1.09$ ,  $p=.30$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.00$ . This pattern of results supports our hypotheses (H1, H2) and replicates findings of Experiment 2. When the leader was female, women reported significantly higher collective action intentions in response to a common cause frame compared to a women's issue frame,  $F(1, 50)=4.21$ ,  $p=.045$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.08$ , but this difference did not emerge for male participants,  $F(1, 51)=2.64$ ,  $p=.11$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.05$ . Further, participant gender did not affect responses to the women's issue message,  $F(1, 52)=1.23$ ,  $p=.27$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.00$ , but women's collective actions were higher than men's in response to a female leader framing gender inequality as a common cause,  $F(1, 49)=6.37$ ,  $p=.02$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.12$ .

To compare the effects of leader gender across male and female responses, we further unpacked the three-way interaction by examining each level of issue framing. A significant two-way Participant Gender x Leader Gender interaction was found for women's issue ( $F(1, 101)=19.77, p<.001, \eta_p^2=.16$ ) and common cause ( $F(1, 99)=6.37, p=.01, \eta_p^2=.06$ ) conditions. In line with predictions (H3), simple effect analyses revealed that, male participants expressed higher collective action intentions in response to a male leader advocating a common cause, compared to when the same common cause message was delivered by a female leader,  $F(1, 50)=7.44, p=.01, \eta_p^2=.13$ . Female participants' intentions to take part in collective action remained the same whether the common cause message was delivered by a male or female leader,  $F(1, 49)=.83, p=.37, \eta_p^2=.02$ . Interestingly, when the issue was framed as primarily concerning women, male participants expressed higher collective action intentions in response to a female leader ( $F(1, 49)=17.59, p<.001, \eta_p^2=.26$ ), while the opposite was true for female participants ( $F(1, 52)=4.87, p=.03, \eta_p^2=.09$ ), who expressed higher collective action intentions in response to a male leader. This is an unexpected pattern of findings, suggesting an asymmetry between male and female leaders, not only in terms of delivering common cause messages, but also when framing gender inequality as an issue that primarily concerns women. As such, while male (compared to female) leaders seem to mobilise men when they highlight common cause, male leaders framing gender inequality as a 'women's issue' seems to demobilise this group, at least in contrast to female leaders endorsing the same message.

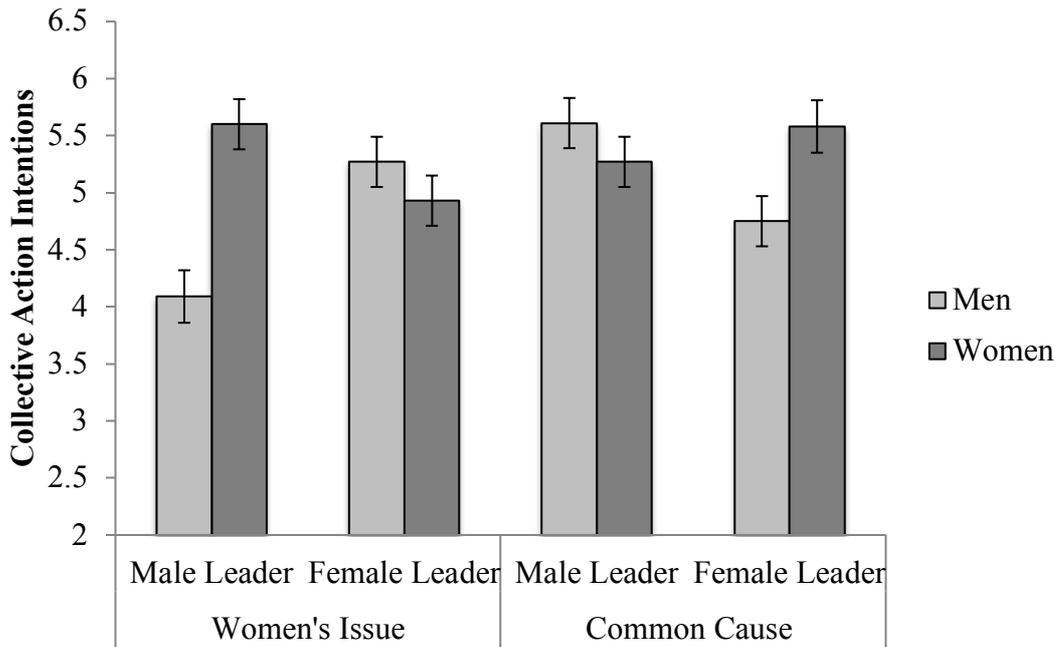


Figure 5. Mean collective action intentions as a function of participant gender, leader gender, and message framing. Error bars represent standard errors. (Experiment 3).

**Feminist solidarity.** Main effects of leader gender ( $F(1, 200)=4.97, p=.03, \eta_p^2=.02$ ;  $M_{Lmale}=4.46, SD=1.79$ ;  $M_{Lfemale}=3.94, SD=1.58$ ) and participant gender ( $F(1, 200)=11.28, p<.001, \eta_p^2=.05$ ;  $M_{men}=3.83, SD=1.64$ ;  $M_{women}=4.57, SD=1.70$ ) were obtained, but were qualified by a significant three-way interaction,  $F(1, 200)=18.82, p<.001, \eta_p^2=.09$  (see Figure 6).

To unpack the interaction, further analyses were performed at each level of leader gender. A significant two-way Participant Gender x Issue Framing interaction was found for both male leader ( $F(1, 99)=10.12, p=.002, \eta_p^2=.09$ ) and female leader ( $F(1, 101)=8.67, p=.004, \eta_p^2=.08$ ) conditions. When the leader was male, in line with predictions (H1), men reported higher feminist solidarity under common cause compared to women's issue framing,  $F(1, 48)=4.91, p=.03, \eta_p^2=.09$ . In contrast, women reported higher feminist solidarity under women's issue compared to common cause framing,  $F(1, 51)=5.25, p=.03, \eta_p^2=.09$ . Further, when the male leader focused on gender inequality as a women's issue, women expressed

higher feminist solidarity than men,  $F(1, 49)=12.90, p<.001, \eta_p^2=.21$ . However, as predicted (H2) and replicating findings for collective action, men's and women's feminist solidarity did not differ in response to the common cause message,  $F(1, 50)=.53, p=.47, \eta_p^2=.01$ . When the leader was female, women reported similar levels of feminist solidarity regardless of issue framing,  $F(1, 50)=1.18, p=.28, \eta_p^2=.02$ . For male participants, in line with collective action findings, feminist solidarity was significantly higher when a female leader framed inequality as a women's issue compared to when she described it as a common cause for men and women,  $F(1, 51)=9.86, p=.003, \eta_p^2=.16$ . Further, participant gender did not affect responses to the women's issue message,  $F(1, 52)=.07, p=.79, \eta_p^2=.00$ , but women's feminist solidarity was higher than men's in response to a female leader framing gender inequality as a common cause,  $F(1, 49)=16.03, p<.001, \eta_p^2=.25$ .

To compare the effects of leader gender across male and female responses, we further unpacked the three-way interaction by examining each level of issue framing. A significant two-way Participant Gender x Leader Gender interaction was found for both women's issue ( $F(1, 101)=6.75, p=.01, \eta_p^2=.06$ ) and common cause ( $F(1, 99)=10.38, p=.002, \eta_p^2=.10$ ) conditions. In line with predictions (H3) and results for collective action intentions, simple effect analyses revealed that, for messages that highlight common cause between men and women, male participants expressed higher feminist solidarity in response to a male leader, compared to when the same common cause message was delivered by a female leader,  $F(1, 50)=17.37, p<.001, \eta_p^2=.26$ . Female participants' feminist solidarity remained the same whether the common cause message was delivered by a male or female leader,  $F(1, 49)=.42, p=.52, \eta_p^2=.01$ . When the issue was framed as primarily concerning women, male participants' responses did not differ as a function of leader gender,  $F(1, 49)=1.89, p=.17, \eta_p^2=.04$ . In contrast, and in line with collective action findings, female participants expressed

higher feminist solidarity in response to a male (compared to female) leader,  $F(1, 52)=7.82$ ,  $p=.01$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.13$ .

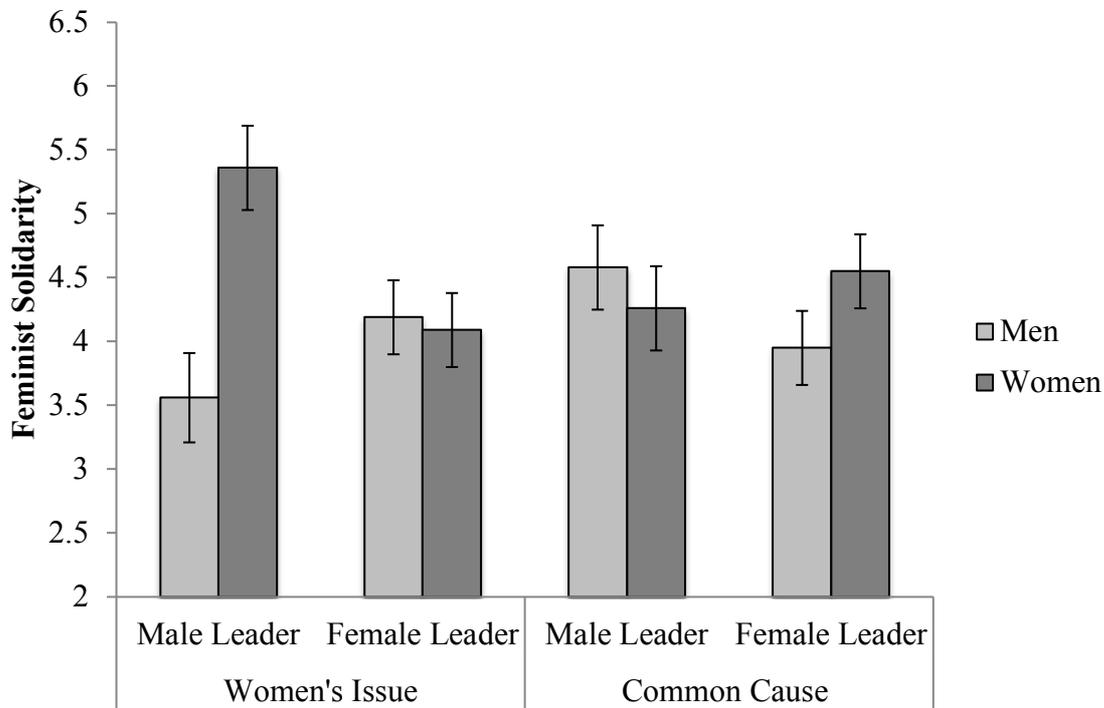


Figure 6. Mean feminist solidarity as a function of participant gender, leader gender, and issue framing. Error bars represent standard errors. (Experiment 3).

**Legitimacy of inequality.** A significant main effect of participant gender ( $F(1, 200)=23.39$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.11$ ; Men:  $M=3.12$ ,  $SD=1.12$ ; Women:  $M=2.44$ ,  $SD=.95$ ) was qualified by the predicted three-way interaction ( $F(1, 200)=4.19$ ,  $p=.04$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.02$ ; see Figure 7).

To unpack the three-way interaction, further analyses were performed at each level of leader gender. A significant two-way Participant Gender x Issue Framing interaction was found only under male leader conditions,  $F(1, 99)=9.17$ ,  $p=.003$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.09$ . When the leader was male, in line with predictions (H1), men reported lower legitimacy of inequality (i.e., they saw it as more illegitimate) under common cause compared to women's issue framing,  $F(1, 48)=10.71$ ,  $p=.002$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.18$ . These differences were not observed for male participants

exposed to a female leader or female participants (regardless of leader gender). Further, when male leaders focused on gender inequality as a women's issue, women expressed lower perceived legitimacy than men,  $F(1, 49)=14.05, p<.001, \eta_p^2=.22$ . However, as predicted (H2) and replicating findings for collective action and feminist solidarity, men's and women's perceptions of legitimacy did not differ in response to the common cause message,  $F(1, 50)=.03, p=.87, \eta_p^2=.00$ . In contrast, when the leader was female, men perceived gender inequality as significantly more legitimate compared to women, whether she focused on inequality as a women's issue,  $F(1, 52)=6.61, p=.01, \eta_p^2=.11$ , or a matter of common cause,  $F(1, 49)=9.69, p=.003, \eta_p^2=.17$ .

To compare the effects of leader gender across male and female responses, we conducted further analyses at each level of issue framing. A significant two-way Participant Gender x Leader Gender interaction was found only under common cause conditions,  $F(1, 99)=6.34, p=.01, \eta_p^2=.06$ . In line with predictions (H3), when the message highlighted common cause between men and women, male participants expressed lower legitimacy of inequality in response to a male leader, compared to when the same common cause message was delivered by a female leader,  $F(1, 50)=6.22, p=.02, \eta_p^2=.11$ . Female participants' perceptions of legitimacy remained the same whether the common cause message was delivered by a male or female leader,  $F(1, 49)=1.13, p=.29, \eta_p^2=.02$ .

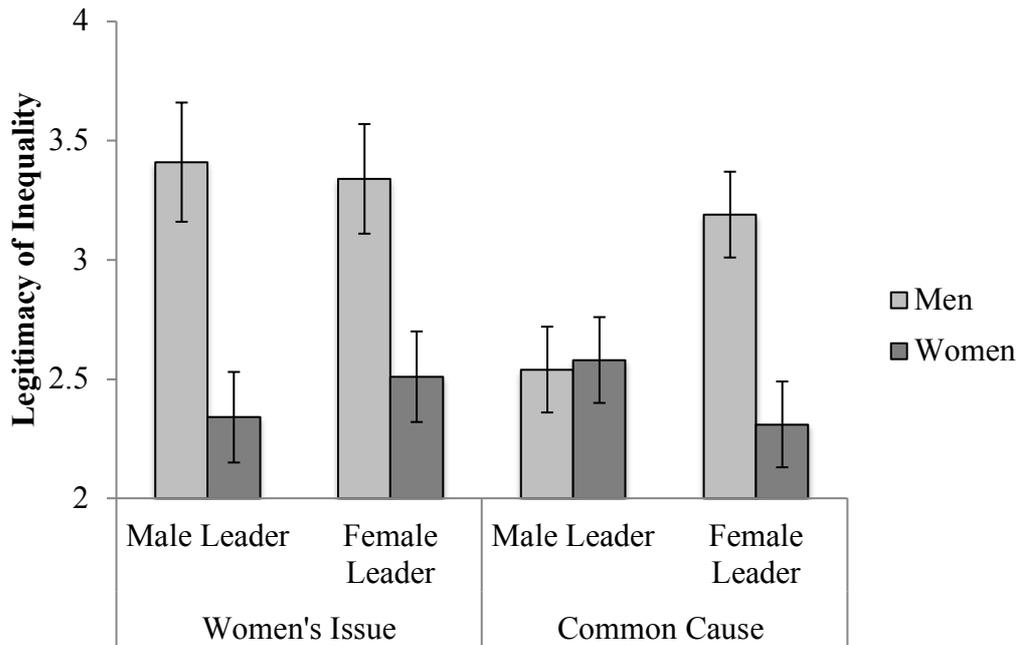


Figure 7. Mean legitimacy of inequality as a function of participant gender, leader gender, and message framing. Error bars represent standard errors. (Experiment 3).

Compared to messages focusing on inequality as a women’s issue, the common cause message delivered by a male leader more readily mobilised men for collective action, increased their solidarity with feminists and decreased perceptions of inequality as legitimate. However, the same common cause message delivered by a female leader resulted in lower collective action intentions and feminist solidarity, and higher perceived legitimacy of inequality. This pattern of results, while in line with predictions and work in related domains (e.g., confronting sexism; Becker & Barreto, 2014), suggests that solidarity-based frames, while perhaps necessary as a starting point in the change process, are far from sufficient. This finding also highlights the need to better understand when men will be mobilised by female leaders advocating for gender equality as a common cause, and as much as they are by male advocates of this view.

For female participants, common cause (compared to women’s issue) framing was also more mobilising—but only when attributed to a female leader. In other words, women

were equally mobilised by male leaders, regardless of message, whereas they were more mobilised by a female leader using common cause rhetoric. Indeed, women's feminist solidarity was higher in response to a male leader framing inequality as a women's issue, compared to a female leader using the same approach. This pattern of findings reveals the central role that male leaders have in mobilising support for gender equality across groups, but also perhaps highlights women's readiness for a shift in the gender equality debate—towards more solidarity-based understandings. Finally, when it comes to perceptions of inequality as legitimate, only when a male leader framed inequality in terms of a common cause between men and women did male responses match those of females. This data pattern suggests a key role for male advocates of gender equality in engendering a shared view of the status quo as illegitimate—as long as their rhetoric clearly articulates a sense of common cause between men and women (see also Becker et al., 2013).

### **General Discussion**

Across three experiments, as hypothesised, positioning men as agents of change enhanced their support for gender equality—in terms of collective action intentions, but also feminist solidarity and (lower) perceived legitimacy of inequality. There is also evidence that solidarity-focused messages tended to shift men's responses to be closer to those of women, thereby reducing gender differences that are typically observed in research examining willingness to challenge gender inequality and gender-based discrimination (e.g., Czopp, Monteith, & Mark, 2006; Iyer & Ryan, 2009). Given the prevalence of gender differences in this domain, we argue that the 'no difference' response is evidence of political solidarity emerging across gender groups (Subašić et al., 2008). In particular, we see the same pattern for feminist solidarity (a concept closely related to identification or ingroup ties with regard to this particular identity) and perceived legitimacy of inequality, suggesting that solidarity in the form of collective action is underpinned by both an emergence of a shared 'us' (e.g., as

feminists) but also a shared view that a system of social relations is unjust and, as such, warrants change.

Like men, women were more readily mobilised by female leaders who used solidarity-focused language, compared to the more traditional focus on gender equality as a women's issue. As such, solidarity messages seem to have a broad appeal, more readily mobilising collective action beyond the disadvantaged group. Assuming widespread mobilisation for change towards equality is a key goal, a clear implication for practice is to advance understandings of gender (in)equality as a concern for both men and women, and the role that both groups have in achieving equality (see also Connell, 2005; Scambor et al., 2012).

For a male audience, however, it seems that the mobilising effect of solidarity messages (all else being equal) may be confined to male leaders, speaking to the notion that leaders' efforts to transform 'us' rest on there being a shared 'us' in the first place. From a social change perspective, this finding brings into sharper relief the question of motivation. While Experiment 1 findings are consistent with the notion that common cause helps explain men's collective action intentions, it is important that future work examines the role of explanatory variables (including common cause, but also collective emotions such as guilt and outrage) in a more systematic fashion. Experiments 2 and 3 further suggest that common cause messages are an effective starting point for engaging men, particularly when espoused by male leaders. However, for such messages to resonate regardless of leader gender, they may need to be contextualised by leader-follower relations stemming from shared social identity (see Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011). From this perspective, another key focus for future research is to better understand the conditions under which such identities can emerge for both male and female leaders advancing a solidarity-based agenda for change. With longitudinal designs that engage participants directly in action for change, it may also be possible to investigate more systematically the idea that collective action participation can

shape attitudes towards gender (in)equality, as well as being the product of such attitudes (see J. Drury & Reicher, 2005).

The findings presented here also have some broader theoretical implications. First, this research highlights the need to expand the study of social change and collective action beyond groups directly affected by unjust social arrangements. While this point applies to social change research generally (see Subašić et al., 2008, 2012), it assumes additional significance when it comes to gender relations, where the domestic, professional, and political spheres are so intimately entwined. Second, this research speaks to recent debates regarding the tension between prejudice reduction and collective action approaches to social change, where strategies aimed at ‘improving’ intergroup attitudes may simultaneously undermine mobilisation for change (Becker et al., 2013; Dixon, Levine, Reicher, & Durrheim, 2012; Reynolds, Subašić, Batalha, & Jones, 2017; Wright & Baray, 2012).

In our view, while the maintenance of *inequality* may be explained in terms of prejudiced attitudes, implicit biases, and related phenomena, the achievement of gender *equality* demands a social change explanation. To the extent that gender-based prejudice stems from and reflects unequal social relations, to eliminate prejudice and bias it is necessary to first change the social reality of gender inequality. To illustrate this point, we return to Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (2015) and his decision to appoint a gender-balanced cabinet, elegantly captured in one of his post-election tweets: “A cabinet that looks like Canada. Because it’s 2015.”

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