

Intergroup Relations, Social Connection, and Individual Well-being  
in Neoliberal Societies

Dissertation

zur Erlangung des Doktorgrades (Dr. rer. nat.)  
des Fachbereichs Humanwissenschaften der Universität Osnabrück

vorgelegt von  
Lea Hartwich M.Sc.

aus  
Köln

Osnabrück, 2020

## List of appended manuscripts

This dissertation is based on the work described in the following manuscripts:

### Manuscript 1:

Hartwich, L., & Becker, J. C. (2020). *The Politics of Classism. How Middle Class Progressives and Conservatives Stereotype the Lower Social Class*. Manuscript submitted for publication.

### Manuscript 2:

Hartwich, L., & Becker, J. C. (2019). Exposure to Neoliberalism Increases Resentment of the Elite via Feelings of Anomie and Negative Psychological Reactions. *Journal of Social Issues*, 75(1), 113-133.

### Manuscript 3:

Becker, J. C., Hartwich, L., & Haslam, S. A. (2020). *Neoliberalism Reduces Well-being by Promoting a Sense of Social Disconnection, Competition and Loneliness*. Manuscript submitted for publication.

## Figures

Figure 1: Overview of the manuscripts included in the presented research.....18

## Table of contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Zusammenfassung</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>1. General Introduction</b> .....	<b>6</b>
1.1 Without Alternative? How We Came to Live in a Neoliberal World .....	7
1.2 No such Thing as Society? Well-being and Social Connection in a Competitive World.....	9
1.3 Unequal but Fair? Intergroup Relations in an Individualistic World .....	12
<b>2. The Present Research</b> .....	<b>16</b>
2.1 Overview.....	16
2.2 Manuscript 1 .....	19
2.3 Manuscript 2 .....	41
2.4 Manuscript 3 .....	67
<b>3. General Discussion</b> .....	<b>93</b>
3.1 Summary of Findings and Implications for Research and Theory .....	93
3.2 Limitations and Directions for Future Research.....	97
3.3 Social and Political Implications .....	100
3.3.1 We the Corporations? Democracy in a Marketized World .....	100
3.3.2 Divided We Fall? Collective Solutions in an Atomized World .....	102
3.4 Conclusion .....	103
<b>4. References</b> .....	<b>104</b>
<b>Anlage</b> .....	<b>113</b>

## Abstract

Neoliberalism's free market ideology has not only achieved hegemonic status as the dominant organizing principle of markets and economies the world over, its values and doctrines have also come to shape many other areas of contemporary life. The consequences of this takeover include rising inequality, a social policy shift away from welfare and toward personal responsibility, and the triumph of the economic rationale of profitability in the public sector as well as the private sphere. A growing body of research has studied the ramifications of individual facets of the neoliberal order, especially the expanding gap between the rich and poor, but to date, a more comprehensive understanding of how the underlying ideology molds societies is largely absent from the social psychological literature. This doctoral thesis seeks to take a first step toward closing this gap by identifying and investigating three key areas of interest in the context of neoliberalism's influence on individual and collective life. Based on previous research and theorizing, it puts forward the idea that the neoliberal reorganization of societies along the principles of individualism, competition, materialism, and privatization has a profound impact on intergroup relations, social connection, and individual well-being. The studies presented here provide evidence that neoliberal ideology and policies erode social cohesion (Manuscript 2) and make people feel lonely and isolated (Manuscript 3). Confirming the importance of social factors in determining health outcomes, these developments are then shown to increase feelings of threat, hopelessness, and unhappiness (Manuscript 2) as well as reduce mental and physical well-being (Manuscript 3). Beyond the individual level, intergroup attitudes, especially with regard to socio-economic status groups, are of particular interest to this research. Its findings demonstrate that despite neoliberalism's propagation of wealth and success as ultimate aspirations, the perceived breakdown of the social fabric and resulting discontent with neoliberal societies lead to negative perceptions of the elite who are seen as corrupt and immoral (Manuscript 2). They also provide support for the assumption that the belief in merit-based inequality, which is central to the neoliberal doctrine, is reflected in representations of individuals with lower socio-economic status who are assigned personal responsibility for their disadvantaged position and, unlike other underprivileged groups, are seen as lacking in moral deservingness by both conservatives and progressives (Manuscript 1). As a whole, the studies that constitute this thesis project bring together several different lines of research and make headway in developing an integrated perspective on the influence of neoliberal ideology on societies and the experiences and attitudes of the individuals within them.

*Keywords:* Neoliberalism, intergroup relations, stereotyping, classism, anti-elitism, social class, social inequality, social cohesion, well-being

*Thesis supervisor:* Prof. Dr. Julia C. Becker

## Zusammenfassung

Die neoliberale Ideologie der freien Marktwirtschaft hat mittlerweile nicht nur einen hegemonialen Status als weltweit vorherrschendes Prinzip für die Organisation von Märkten und Wirtschaften erreicht, sondern ihre Wertvorstellungen und Lehren schlagen sich auch in diversen anderen Bereichen des modernen Lebens nieder. Zu den Auswirkungen dieses ideologischen Siegeszuges gehören steigende soziale Ungleichheit, die schrittweise Abschaffung des Wohlfahrtsstaats zugunsten der Maxime von mehr Eigenverantwortung, und die profitorientierte Neuausrichtung von Institutionen des öffentlichen Sektors und privaten Lebens. Eine wachsende Anzahl von Forschungsarbeiten hat sich mit den Auswirkungen einzelner Facetten der neoliberalen Weltordnung beschäftigt, insbesondere im Hinblick auf die Folgen des Auseinandergehens der Schere zwischen Arm und Reich, aber ein umfassenderes Verständnis davon, wie die zugrundeliegende Ideologie ganze Gesellschaften umgestaltet, fehlt bisher in der sozialpsychologischen Literatur. Das Ziel dieser Dissertation ist es, einen ersten Beitrag zur Schließung dieser Forschungslücke zu leisten. Dazu identifiziert und untersucht sie drei Schlüsselbereiche, die im Kontext des neoliberalen Einflusses auf das individuelle und kollektive Leben von besonderem Interesse sind. Auf Basis der bisherigen Forschungsergebnisse und Theorien entwickelt sie die Hypothese, dass die neoliberale gesellschaftliche Restrukturierung nach den Prinzipien von Individualismus, Wettbewerb, Materialismus und Privatisierung weitreichende Implikationen für Intergruppenbeziehungen, sozialen Zusammenhalt und persönliches Wohlbefinden hat. Die hier präsentierten Studien liefern Belege für die Annahme, dass der Neoliberalismus und seine politische Umsetzung den gesellschaftlichen Zusammenhalt erodieren (Manuskript 2), was sich auf individueller Ebene in zunehmender Einsamkeit und sozialer Isolation niederschlägt (Manuskript 3). Diese Faktoren führen in Folge zu verstärkten Gefühlen von Bedrohung und Hoffnungslosigkeit (Manuskript 2) sowie verschlechterter mentaler und physischer Gesundheit (Manuskript 3). Neben den Auswirkungen auf das individuelle Wohlbefinden stehen im Rahmen dieses Forschungsprojekts gruppenbezogene Einstellungen, insbesondere in Bezug auf sozioökonomische Statusgruppen, im Vordergrund. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass trotz der neoliberalen Propagierung von Reichtum und Erfolg als wichtigsten Lebenszielen die wahrgenommene Auflösung des sozialen Gefüges und daraus resultierende Unzufriedenheit dazu führen, dass die gesellschaftliche Elite als korrupt und unmoralisch gesehen wird (Manuskript 2). Außerdem unterstützen sie die Annahme, dass sich die neoliberale Kerndoktrin einer meritokratisch gerechtfertigten Ungleichverteilung in der Wahrnehmung der unteren sozialen Schicht widerspiegelt, die als verantwortlich für ihre benachteiligte Position gilt und der, im Gegensatz zu anderen unterprivilegierten Gruppen, sowohl von Progressiven als auch von Konservativen ein Mangel an Werten und Moralität zugesprochen wird (Manuskript 1). In ihrer Gesamtheit bringen die hier präsentierten Studien eine Reihe von unterschiedlichen Forschungsbereichen zusammen und tragen dazu bei, eine integrierte Perspektive auf die Einflüsse neoliberaler Ideologie auf gesellschaftliche Zustände und individuelle Erfahrungen und Einstellungen zu entwickeln.

## 1. General Introduction

Since its rise to prominence in the 1970s, neoliberalism has become the dominant political and economic ideology across most of the world (Jones, 2014). Its principles of marketization, individualism and competition have permeated almost all areas of life, dictating the running not only of economies but also governments and institutions of the public sector (Schram, 2018). Along its way from economically right-wing think tanks like the Mont Pelerin Society, the Institute of Economic Affairs, or the Adam Smith Institute into the political mainstream where it has firmly arrived today (Mudge, 2008), neoliberalism has accomplished an impressive feat. It has managed to rise to global influence while at the same time remaining in a state of relative obscurity where its ideas are dressed as common sense rather than a very effectively promoted ideological agenda (Monbiot, 2016).

By now, neoliberalism has successfully permeated countless economic, political, social, and personal domains, shaping not only the way we work and consume in the economic sphere but also the way we structure our free time and is visible, for example, in trends of self-optimization and the blurring of lines between work and leisure. It stands to reason, then, that the effects of this ideological takeover should be reflected in the feelings, perceptions, and attitudes of the people experiencing it, including the way they feel (about) living in neoliberal societies, the way they connect to others, and how they view different social groups. These are the areas of interest to this thesis project. By making headway in understanding individual well-being, social connections, and intergroup relations under neoliberalism, the research that forms this work aims to shed light onto as yet unstudied aspects of the way this ideology shapes individual and collective life.

In the following sections, the existing empirical research and theoretical background that form the basis for this undertaking are reviewed. The first part of this introduction sketches neoliberalism's rise from a relatively obscure economic theory to a set of principles that is widely regarded as without alternative, tracing its takeover of politics and institutions as well as the private sphere, down to the prevailing concepts of self and identity. The second part discusses the existing literature covering the way neoliberal ideology has remodeled societies according to its central tenets of individualism and competition and the marketization of interactions within the economic sphere and beyond. From this, the proposition that neoliberalism's overarching ideological triumph should have ramifications for social connections as well as individual health and happiness is derived. Finally, the third part is focused on neoliberalism's inseparable relationship with inequality and its propagation of a meritocracy of wealth. It arrives at the conclusion that it is unlikely for intergroup relations, particularly attitudes toward socio-economic status based groups, to remain unaffected by an ideology that emphasizes self-improvement, individual responsibility, and financial success while redistributing wealth to the top. Taken together, the theories and findings discussed below lay the groundwork for the assumptions that are tested in the manuscripts forming this thesis: that neoliberalism's ubiquitous influence impacts intergroup relations and social connections as well as individual well-being in neoliberal societies.

## 1.1 Without Alternative? How We Came to Live in a Neoliberal World

Neoliberalism has been defined as “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). It was first developed in the 1930s and 40s by a group of libertarian thinkers, first and foremost among them Austrian economist Friedrich von Hayek (Hayek, 1944). The new liberalism was a reissue of the core ideas of classic economic liberalism designed to provide a right-wing alternative to the Keynesian model of full employment and strong government regulation that was popular at the time. Although the idea attracted funding from wealthy donors which allowed its proponents to set up a number of think tanks and built an international network of advocates in politics, business and the media (Jones, 2014), its attempts to topple Keynesianism would remain unsuccessful for several decades (Metcalf, 2017). In fact, the post-war period with its relative scarcity of labor saw a period of unprecedented workers’ rights, high taxes, and strong welfare state provisions that resulted in declining levels of social inequality (Nachtwey, 2016). It wasn’t until economic growth slowed in the 1970s and many countries struggled with a combination of high inflation and rising unemployment that neoliberalism’s moment had come. The New Right blamed government spending for the recession-inflation, or stagflation, and advocated for a radical turn away from state regulation and toward free market *laissez-faire* capitalism (Harvey, 2005). This time around, their efforts bore fruit. The governments of Ronald Reagan in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom were the first of many to implement their ideas under the guidance of advisors like Milton Friedman, a prominent figure from the neoliberal Chicago School (Jones, 2014). Friedman and his ideological allies advocated the superiority of economic rationality for all decision-making, including the public sector and civil society, as well as private enterprise. The role of the state in the neoliberal system is merely to ensure the freedom of the market rather than to counterbalance its effects (Jones, 2014). Its interventions, particularly in the form of the welfare state, are seen as coercive and destructive to a free society because they are an example of “trying to do good in the wrong way, that is, with other people’s money” (Friedman, 1976, p. 3). According to neoliberal ideology, the free market, not democratic government, is the best mechanism to efficiently allocate resources and encourage human freedom and progress (Friedman, 1962; Harcourt, 2010).

Beyond its complete confidence in the forces of the market, neoliberalism can be described as “a potpourri of economic and political doctrines scattered around a minimal core”, making it adaptable to different geographical and political circumstances and allowing its proponents to disguise its highly ideological principles as economic common sense (Beattie, 2019, p. 94). Indeed, it appears that as a coherent belief system neoliberalism is not well known or understood by the general public, a relative anonymity that may well have helped its advance (Monbiot, 2016). And while, despite its name, neoliberalism is founded on ideas that are predominantly embraced by political and economic conservatives (Adorno,

1950), a big part of its success as a global ideology lies in the way its advocates have managed to position their proposals as being the only sensible option (Mirowski, 2014). As a case in point, the slogan “There is no alternative”, used frequently by Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s and brought back three decades later by one of her successors, David Cameron, when defending his government’s austerity measures and welfare cuts, has become so ubiquitous in British politics that it earned its own colloquial acronym, TINA (Robinson, 2013). The current state of the political economy where neoliberal solutions to social and economic problems seem to go largely unchallenged and are enacted almost by default has been referred to as “zombie neoliberalism” (Peck, 2010). The extent of this acceptance of neoliberalism as inevitable is perhaps best demonstrated by the fact that neoliberal policies such as punitive welfare reforms (Schram, Soss, Houser, & Fording, 2010) have come by no means exclusively from right-wing parties but were often delivered by ostensibly left-wing governments beginning in Australia and New Zealand in the 1980s (Coates, 2018) and continuing in the Northern hemisphere a decade or two later with the Democrats under Bill Clinton in the United States, Tony Blair’s deliberately rebranded New Labour in Britain or Gerhard Schröder’s coalition of the Social Democrats and the Green Party in Germany (Peck, 2001). As the traditional left entered a stage of decline and leftist parties became increasingly divorced from labor movements and unions (Bailey, 2018), neoliberal catchphrases like individual responsibility and competition became popular on all sides of the political aisle and the policies designed to advance them moved from the economically right-wing fringes into the mainstream consensus (Coates, 2018; Mudge, 2008).

The effects of this takeover can be felt in a wide range of areas. Cuts to government programs and social services and the abandonment of a safety net for all in favor of the doctrine of autonomy and self-reliance are only the most obvious example (Schram, 2018). Education and academia, too, have been submitted to the neoliberal maxim of profitability (Berg, Huijbens, & Larsen, 2016; Ergül & Coşar, 2017) and the field of mental health and psychology has adopted the individualistic language of personal choice, responsibility and resilience (Beattie, 2019; Sugarman, 2015). Even religions, particularly evangelical Christian churches in the United States, are embracing and disseminating neoliberal ideas domestically and internationally (Hackworth, 2012; Hoksbergen & Espinoza Madrid, 1997). As a result of this spreading marketization and privatization and a corresponding prioritization of private wealth over the public good (Perez & Salter, 2019), income inequality under neoliberalism has returned to levels last seen in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in many Western countries (Piketty, 2015) and the redistribution of wealth toward the top has led to an increasing wealth disparity within and between nations (Bettache & Chiu, 2019). The labor market on the other hand has seen a decline in the kind of relatively well-paid, stable employment with social security benefits that characterized the post-war decades and enabled Fordist systems of mass production and consumption in favor of an new emphasis on flexibility (Müller, 2013).

But neoliberalism’s demands on the individual go farther than merely requiring more adaptability in the workplace. In fact, it has rebranded the idea of wage labor with its uncomfortable connotations of exploitation and hierarchy altogether and has instead turned

its subjects into entrepreneurs of themselves (Foucault, 2008), CEOs of their personal brands that need to be marketed and sold (Sugarman, 2015). According to Hayek, the goal of neoliberalism is to produce individuals who subordinate themselves to the market in all their actions and decisions (Hayek, 1960). The ideal *homo neoliberalis* (Teo, 2018) is a calculating creature, utilitarian in the approach to not only work and career but also relationships, social life and the construction of identity, a model of rationality, autonomy, and self-interest in all aspects of life (Kashima, 2019). Indeed, it can be argued that neoliberalism has successfully transferred the relational model of the market which is geared toward the maximization of profit (Fiske, 1991) to areas of life previously ruled by other types of relations. Or, in Habermas's terms, neoliberalism can be seen as an example of a system and its logic colonizing domains of the lifeworld and corrupting their forms of communication (Habermas, 1981). This reinterpretation of human interaction has direct behavioral consequences as it has been shown that framing a decision as a market exchange significantly lowers social concerns compared to an equivalent decision framed as an individual choice (Bartling, Weber, & Yao, 2015). Thus, it is to be expected that the neoliberal revolution has not only profoundly changed political and economic life but that corresponding effects can be detected in the functioning of individuals and societies.

## 1.2 No such Thing as Society? Well-being and Social Connection in a Competitive World

An ideology as all-pervasive and unchallenged as neoliberalism does not only leave its mark on markets and states, but also shapes the personal and collective lives and experiences of the people they govern. Whereas its advocates claimed that neoliberalism's marketized world order would provide the ideal conditions for individuals to thrive in free competition, unconstrained by government meddling (Friedman, 1962), its critics have been more doubtful of the idea that health and happiness can be delivered automatically by the mechanisms of supply and demand. This section reviews the existing research which provides initial support for the concern that neoliberalism, rather than advancing progress and fulfilment, is more likely to be detrimental to human well-being. It proposes that this is because the core elements of neoliberal philosophy, including competition, individualism, and the prioritization of economic success and material values, as well as the corresponding increases in social inequality all contribute to creating unfavorable societal conditions. Specifically, neoliberal societies seem to be predestined to heightened levels of loneliness as well as anomie, that is, a lack of trust and cohesion resulting in a breakdown of the social fabric, two factors that negatively affect areas of well-being ranging from life satisfaction to physical health.

There is growing evidence for the idea that societal factors play a crucial role in human well-being (Haslam, Jetten, Cruwys, Dingle, & Haslam, 2018). The Social Cure approach stresses the importance of social identity and group membership in reducing mortality (Jetten, Haslam, & Haslam, 2012) by countering the detrimental effects of isolation and loneliness which have been identified as key risk factors (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, Baker, Harris, & Stephenson, 2015). These findings are highly relevant because those very risk factors are

currently on the rise, so much so that the situation in countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia has already been referred to as a loneliness epidemic (VicHealth, 2018). Governments and health care providers are being urged by experts to make the issue of social isolation a public health priority (Holt-Lunstad, Robles, & Sbarra, 2017) and a growing number of charities have made it their mission to provide human contact to those who otherwise lack social relationships (Hampson, 2019). On the societal level, the breakdown of social connections is captured by the concept of anomie, first coined by sociologist Emile Durkheim (Durkheim, 1897) to describe societies experiencing deregulation and disintegration. While it has been defined in different ways depending on the respective disciplines and contexts it is applied to, at its core, anomie refers to the perception of society as lacking trust, cohesion, and shared morals. It is linked to various indicators of well-being such as lower life-satisfaction and feelings of threat and hopelessness (Teymoori et al., 2016). The neoliberal age has been referred to as the age of loneliness (Monbiot, 2014) and it will be argued below that there are good reasons to believe that these parallel trends are no mere coincidence but that neoliberalism is the force that effectively transforms societies in ways that erodes the social fabric.

One of the major political figures credited for heralding the neoliberal age, former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher, once famously proclaimed that “there is no such thing as society” (Keay, 1987). While few would go so far as to say that neoliberalism has succeeded, or even set out, to completely abolish the concept, a more common perspective is that what it has achieved is to remodel societies in the image of a universal market that is able to efficiently allocate resources and determine the worth of anything and anyone in it (Kashima, 2019). According to the neoliberal belief system, free market style competition is the only legitimate principle of organizing all human activity (Metcalf, 2017) and the natural order of things. Of course, Thomas Hobbes, one of the founders of political philosophy, memorably described this state of nature as “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” (Hobbes, 1651, p. 78). But the idea that humanity’s natural inclination is toward ruthless competition for resources in a dog-eat-dog world is not only bleak and unappealing, it is also likely inaccurate. Anthropologists have argued that the kind of societal organization advocated by neoliberal ideology is a relatively new phenomenon and in fact runs counter to our instinct for altruism (Boehm, 2012) and psychological research suggests that prolonged states of competition actually have a negative impact on psychological well-being (Adams, Estrada-Villalta, Sullivan, & Markus, 2019).

The neoliberal emphasis on competitiveness has also seen a corresponding increase in perfectionism, self- and other-oriented, as well as socially prescribed (Curran & Hill, 2019). This means that generations that have grown up in the neoliberal age are not only passing increasingly harsh judgements on themselves and others but feel that they are being more critically judged by those around them, too. Perfectionism, especially when it is socially prescribed, negatively affects the quality of people’s social networks (Shahar, Blatt, Zuroff, Krupnick, & Sotsky, 2004) and intimate relationships (Haring, Hewitt, & Flett, 2003). Facets of perfectionism have also been linked to more narcissism and self-interested behavior and

reduced pro-sociality (Stoeber, 2015) as well as a striving for dominance in social interactions (Shim & Fletcher, 2012). Taken together, these findings suggest that in a society organized around the principle of competition social connections will likely suffer.

Alongside competition, individualism is another central tenet of the neoliberal belief system. It views the individual as the autonomous center of awareness and action and as set in contrast against not only other individuals but also the social and natural context (Kashima, 2019). Personal choice, self-expression, and a striving for growth are preconditions to happiness and fulfilment according to the neoliberal concept of the individual whereas commitments to other people, communities or society as a whole are seen as constraints on freedom (Adams et al., 2019). Interpersonal relationships have no intrinsic value in this paradigm and need only be maintained for as long as they are useful (Teo, 2018). Taken to its logical conclusion, this viewpoint legitimizes the treatment of others as instruments to serve one's purpose and represents a stark utilitarian rejection of Kant's second formulation of the categorical imperative (Kant, 1785). Accordingly, cultural changes toward individualistic values have been shown to negatively affect social relationships as reflected in the number of friends people feel close to (Ogihara & Uchida, 2014). The self-interested neoliberal approach to social interactions is also unlikely to encourage social trust and indeed, Durkheim suggested that highly individualistic societies would be prone to anomie as a result (Durkheim, 1897).

The neoliberal emphasis on individualism and competition goes hand in hand with the elevation of wealth and power as the ultimate measures of success, encouraging people to strive to be more like those at the top of the economic ladder (Beattie, 2019). Given that people tend to become more entitled and egocentric as they become rich and powerful (Piff, 2014), this aspiration already seems unlikely to be conducive to social cohesion. The advance of neoliberalism has also seen an increased prioritization of materialistic values (Twenge & Kasser, 2013) which themselves are not only linked to reduced happiness and impaired mental health, but also negatively impact social connections and empathy (Kasser, 2002). Materialism and a cultural focus on economic success have also been linked to anomie. Sociologist Robert Merton suggested that one reason societies become anomic is because they hold up aspirations that are unobtainable for the majority of the population (Merton, 1938). This may well be what is happening in neoliberal societies which combine an emphasis on economic success with decreasing levels of social mobility (Nachtwey, 2016).

Finally, the rampant social inequality in neoliberal societies also contributes to the deterioration of social connection and well-being. Inequality is not an unintentional consequence but a crucial feature of neoliberal politics (Foucault, 2008), a mechanism supposed to encourage individuals to work harder and increase productivity, thus constituting the supposed source of all progress and growth (Mirowski, 2014), a myth that prevails even in the face of growing evidence to the contrary (Ostry, Loungani, & Furceri, 2016; Stiglitz, 2016). But while neoliberal politicians and theorists may maintain that inequality is natural and necessary, mounting evidence points to the idea that historically, egalitarianism was actually the norm (Boehm, 2012), predisposing humans to view inequality

as unjust (Richerson & Boyd, 2005). Thus it is unsurprising that inequality has been found to adversely affect public health outcomes (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009) and to cause feelings of injustice and unhappiness (Oishi, Kesebir, & Diener, 2011). Importantly, it is also linked to indicators of eroding social connection including reduced generalized trust (Oishi et al., 2011), weakened social cohesion (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2017), and increased status anxiety (Buttrick & Oishi, 2017). When it comes to social behaviors, inequality leads to more free-riding and less cooperation (Nishi, Shirado, Rand, & Christakis, 2015) and a tendency, especially for privileged groups, to segregate themselves from the rest of society (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Taken together, this research provides plenty of reason to theorize that the neoliberal transformations taking place in a growing number of societies are bringing with them a breakdown of the social fabric that is detrimental to human well-being.

### 1.3 Unequal but Fair? Intergroup Relations in an Individualistic World

Neoliberalism creates social, economic, and political conditions that place values of individualism, competition, and materialism at the center of human life and relationships, and its policies have paved the way for growing social inequality. The idea that it is acceptable and deserved for some individuals to amass increasingly disproportionate amounts of resources relative to others has become widely uncontroversial, as demonstrated by New Labour's chief strategist telling an audience of Silicon Valley executives in 1999 that his government was "intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich" (Ratcliffe, 2016). Neoliberalism propagates a meritocracy of wealth administered by an unbiased market, meaning that rewards are assumed to go to each individual according to their hard work and ability. But while neoliberalism's relationship with social inequality between individuals is straightforward, its relationship with group-based inequality is more complicated. Intergroup relations under neoliberalism are a somewhat curious phenomenon because much like the concept of society, groups are not a unit of analysis that features heavily in the individualistic neoliberal paradigm. But while they are largely absent from neoliberalism's theoretical world of individuals, it will be proposed here that neoliberal ideology and policies do nonetheless affect intergroup relations in the real world, both by exacerbating group-based inequalities and by shaping attitudes toward social groups. First, it will be argued that the combination of rising levels of inequality, decreasing rates of social mobility, and the redistribution of wealth toward the top should ultimately result in resentment of the societal elites seen to benefit from it. Second, it will be suggested that neoliberalism's meritocratic conception of inequality should be reflected in the perception of those with lower socio-economic status who fail to demonstrate merit by neoliberal standards.

Critics have argued that one reason for the relatively vague nature of neoliberalism's ideological doctrines as well as its ability to adapt to changing circumstances and survive crises lies in the fact that theoretical rigor is far less important to the neoliberal project than its main practical purpose: to serve the interest of the global financial elite in the upward redistribution of resources (Harvey, 2005; Mirowski, 2014). The pertinent statistics

demonstrate that this redistribution is effectively what has been happening since the advent of the neoliberal age (Piketty & Saez, 2014) and there are good reasons to believe that it is the deliberate goal of neoliberal policies rather than an unintended consequence. While advocates of neoliberalism pay lip service to the idea of an economy without government interference whatsoever, in reality, the state often plays an active role in neoliberal policies designed deliberately to privatize the profits of a deregulated economy while collectivizing its risks and costs, be it by subsidizing workfare and providing prison labor (Wacquant, 2009) or by bailing out financial institutions (Chomsky, 1999; Peck, 2010). One take on this is that neoliberalism is in fact even more concerned with the state than it is with the market, shaping politics to increase the influence of wealth on the outcomes of electoral processes and remaking the state into an instrument that advances the interests of the elite and undermining the principles of democracy (Brown, 2015). Democracy, tellingly enough, is not actually crucial to safeguarding freedom in the neoliberal worldview, in fact, Hayek himself proclaimed that liberal autocracy was preferable to illiberal democracy (Hayek, 1969). As its name suggests, liberty is a central objective within neoliberal philosophy (Friedman, 1976; Hayek, 1960), but it is the negative, individual concept of liberty that neoliberals are concerned with, not the positive, collective sense of the word (Berlin, 1969). Negative freedom is the freedom from constraints, whether they take the form of regulations and taxes, or that of obligations to other people, communities, or the environment. This is the kind of freedom that is threatened by the idea of universal healthcare because it limits personal choice as neoliberal think tank The Heritage Foundation argued (Moffit, 2019). The emphasis on personal choice in the neoliberal definition of freedom glosses over the fact that this is not a freedom that is equally distributed, especially within a free market framework (Adams et al., 2019; Soss, Fording, & Schram, 2011). Personal choice in health care, for example, means one thing to those whose financial situation allows them to choose between an abundance of private providers but means another thing entirely to those at the other end of the economic ladder who are often effectively left to choose between medical debt and even bankruptcy or going without essential treatments and medications (Richard, Walker, & Alexandre, 2018).

If it becomes obvious that the neoliberal promise of individual freedom and prosperity is only being fulfilled for a small group of people, this is unlikely to bode well for the group in question, at the very least in terms of their public image. Neoliberalism certainly benefits them in many ways, but it may also be creating the necessary conditions for attitudes toward the elite to turn sour. Anomie, for one, can lead to the view that the leadership is failing and illegitimate (Teymoori et al., 2016) and extreme inequality triggers the perception that those at the top are not getting there by fair and legitimate means (Buttrick & Oishi, 2017). Given that within already wealthy countries, additional increases in wealth that are allocated disproportionately toward a small elite do not lead to improved overall happiness (Oishi & Kesebir, 2015), it is perhaps unsurprising that the neoliberal age has seen the renewed rise of populism (Mudde, 2007), of which anti-elitism is a main element (Schulz et al., 2018). Thus,

the research question of if and how neoliberalism affects attitudes toward the elite is highly relevant to our understanding of the current political and economic climate.

The other social group of interest to this thesis project are those with low socio-economic status, or the lower social class. While unfavorable perceptions of the elite are dangerous to the neoliberal world order because they undermine its contention that inequality is meritocratic and therefore, according to its belief system, just, neoliberalism equally depends on negative representations of those at the bottom of the economic ladder in order to maintain this claim. If wealth and status are distributed according to hard work and entrepreneurship in a fair competition, then poverty too must be attributable to personal responsibility (Beattie, 2019; Perez & Salter, 2019). Poignant support for the idea that neoliberal images of the rich and the poor are not only two sides of the same coin but serve the same purpose comes from research that shows exposure to contemporary media valorizing materialism and celebrating the lives of the wealthy and famous directly leads to opposition to government welfare programs (Leyva, 2019).

Inequality in the neoliberal world is framed as individual differences in wealth and status reflecting individual differences in merit. That neoliberalism focuses on the individual as the sole unit of interest within its ideological framework and largely ignores social groups and their role within political and economic structures is no accident. On the contrary, it is only through the removal of group-based dimensions of inequality from the picture that neoliberalism is able to create its narrative of a fair market giving out fair rewards in the first place. This market is supposed to eradicate group-based inequality more efficiently than governments could because it is assumed that discrimination against buyers or suppliers on the basis of economically irrelevant characteristics would put people at a disadvantage and thus prove to be an unviable strategy (Friedman, 1962). This analogy demonstrates neoliberalism's view of group-based oppression and its limitations rather accurately. It views differential treatment based on group membership as undesirable and unsustainable because it does not follow economic rationale but its reasoning ignores three crucial factors. One, that people are rarely motivated by economic considerations alone and discrimination is therefore unlikely to be smoothly removed by the invisible hand of the market. In fact, people will sometimes decide to discriminate based solely on the group membership of an otherwise unknown individual even when it incurs costs to themselves or their own group (Tajfel, 1970). Findings like this one demonstrate why a conceptualization of inequality and oppression that fails to understand individuals as members of social groups will always remain inadequate because it does not account for the strong motivations that arise from the desire for positive social identities (Hogg & Williams, 2000; Turner, 1975). Two, that simply removing discriminatory regulations does not actually create equality of opportunity because it leaves the effects of historical oppression in place. In line with this logical lapse, the rejection of affirmative action as constituting unequal treatment forms a part of the neoliberal belief system (Bay-Cheng, Fitz, Alizaga, & Zucker, 2015). And three, that because of this pre-existing inequality, neoliberal policies that roll back the social safety net will inevitably hit those who are already disadvantaged hardest. In this sense, neoliberalism takes a classic identity blind

approach (Kulik & Li, 2015) to social justice, an ostensibly egalitarian stance that in effect merely ignores the disadvantages people may be facing (Teo, 2018).

Thus, neoliberalism successfully obscures the link between poverty and systemic factors and instead creates an alternative narrative centered around poor choices or so-called welfare dependency that deflect blame onto disadvantaged individuals and families (Schram, 2018). This narrative serves to justify its ideological opposition to systemic interventions (Perez & Salter, 2019) and the more people buy into it, the less supportive they become of government programs to relieve poverty (Bullock, Williams, & Limbert, 2003). Individuals with lower socio-economic status are exposed to a barrage of negative representations in the media (Bullock, Wyche, & Williams, 2001) and elsewhere, suggesting that they are not making sufficient contributions to society (Beattie, 2019) and should strive to make themselves less of a burden on others (Harcourt, 2010). Combined with the fact that the competitive neoliberal age is ripe with social comparisons (Cheung & Lucas, 2016; Curran & Hill, 2019), this is bound to result in an inescapable awareness of their low status and the negative identity associated with it. Since the problem has been reframed as an individual one, it follows logically that the solution should be found on the individual level too, leading to an increasing focus on social mobility strategies as a way of coping with the frustrations resulting from unfavorable social comparisons (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This is reflected in the growing popularity of self-improvement, self-help, and the like, as well as the fact that even governments increasingly count on behavior change programs, coaching, or self-esteem classes to address challenges such as unemployment (Soss et al., 2011). Put succinctly, under neoliberalism the problem is not that there are people in need, but that these people ask for or rely on help. Poverty is reinvented as welfare-dependency, evoking, perhaps deliberately, the image of addiction and personal failure, thereby absolving everyone but the poor from responsibility for what is a social issue.

Viewed through the lens of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), this meritocratic narrative serves a second purpose besides directing the disadvantaged toward attempts at individual mobility which, unlike collective strategies, are perfectly compatible with neoliberal ideology. It also functions as a legitimizing myth that helps the winners of the neoliberal economy to argue that the unequal distribution of resources is fair and maintain their own positive identity. Like the endorsement of legitimizing myths more generally, negatively stereotyping those with low socio-economic status and blaming them for their disadvantaged situation in order to justify social inequality is a strategy that one would predominantly associate with conservative political orientation. Indeed, agreement with neoliberal beliefs and support for the free market are positively associated with a wide range of other attitudes linked to conservatism, such as right-wing authoritarianism, social dominance orientation, economic system justification and gender-specific system justification (Azevedo, Jost, Rothmund, & Sterling, 2019), anti-immigration attitudes (Dutt & Kohfeldt, 2019), support for Donald Trump, and climate-change skepticism (Panno, Carrus, & Leone, 2019). However, the reason why representations of the lower class are of particular interest in the context of neoliberal societies is that it is not only conservatives who should

be motivated to negatively stereotype those with lower socio-economic status. The idea put forward in this thesis project is that the belief in the existence of a legitimate form of economic inequality is so essential to the neoliberal ideology, which in turn has arrived at the center of the global economic and political order, that it becomes accepted even by those who otherwise tend to oppose inequality, especially in the form of group-based hierarchies. We live in a world where the core elements of the neoliberal doctrine are widely regarded as common sense rather than ideological and have been adopted by governments and institutions, including many progressive parties (Beattie, 2019; Peck, 2010). In such a world, the conclusion that meritocracy is both real and desirable and social inequality is fair is likely to become almost inescapable to many people. Moreover, in a system where individuals have become entrepreneurs of their own lives and financial success is assumed to be an accurate reflection of one's worth (Palley, 2004), the association between deservingness and socio-economic status is likely to be so deeply ingrained that it will be reflected in the views of the people subjected to it, regardless of political orientation or ideological preferences. It can be assumed that renouncing this idea would be uncomfortable, not only because it requires a rejection of the prevailing narrative but also because it divests those not on the losing side of neoliberalism of a source of positive identity. Therefore, this research project proposes that the representations of the lower social class and the values ascribed to them by both progressives and conservatives are designed to support the idea that economic status is a reflection of deservingness.

Given the centrality of beliefs about inequality and meritocracy within neoliberal ideology, its effects on intergroup relations are an area of study that deserves attention from the perspective of social psychology. This is especially important in light of the fact that neoliberalism propagates a strictly individualistic approach to all aspects of life, including coping with disadvantage, and often manages to hide the detrimental consequences of its policies for oppressed groups behind its commitment to equality of opportunity. Therefore, the research in this thesis constitutes an attempt to advance our understanding of group-based attitudes and perceptions in neoliberal societies with a particular focus on socio-economic status groups.

## 2. The Present Research

### 2.1 Overview

The previous chapter demonstrated that the impact of neoliberal ideology and policies can be detected in a large number of domains spanning the political, economic, social, and personal spheres. The review of the existing body of empirical research and theory helped to identify three key areas of neoliberal influence that promise to be of particular interest from a social psychological point of view but remain as yet largely unstudied: intergroup relations, social connection, and individual well-being. The following three manuscripts examine different aspects of these areas and their relationships with neoliberalism and each other (see Figure 1). Across a total of eight studies, the overarching goal is to investigate how life in

neoliberal societies is shaped by its doctrine of competitive individualism in everything from social trust and cohesion, to group-based stereotyping and attitudes, to mental and physical health. Using both correlational and experimental research designs, these manuscripts investigate negative class-based attitudes directed at both the top (Manuscript 2) and bottom (Manuscript 1) socio-economic status groups in neoliberal societies, in the form of anti-elitism and classism, and compare them to prejudice against other groups. They also examine how neoliberalism affects reports of personal well-being, including mental and physical health (Manuscript 3), and feelings of hopelessness, and threat (Manuscript 2). Finally, they set out to shed light on the role of social connection in mediating the impact of neoliberalism on both those outcomes. The way neoliberal ideology fosters a societal environment of isolation and loneliness (Manuscript 3) and increased levels of anomie (Manuscript 2) is assumed to play an important part in both its individual and group level effects.

**Manuscript 1** investigates classism, specifically stereotypes about the lower social class held by the middle class. It has been argued above that as a result of neoliberalism's individualistic and meritocratic view of social inequality, the lower class becomes a prime target for blame and stereotyping in neoliberal societies. Therefore, examining the nature and content of these stereotypes as well as their prevalence among those both more and less ideologically predisposed to justifying social hierarchies will help to close an important gap in the existing research on intergroup relations. Given the wide range of classist stereotypes being perpetuated both in the media and political discourse, the first aim is to contribute to the relatively sparse literature on classism by categorizing them in a meaningful way. This is accomplished by conceptualizing classist stereotypes as violations of core human values and developing a multi-component model of classism based on Schwartz's (Schwartz & Boehnke, 2004) two value dimensions and their established alignment with political orientation. The second aim is to show that, unlike stereotypes about other disadvantaged groups, endorsement of classist stereotypes does not show a straightforward relationship with political conservatism. Rather, the assumption is tested that progressives and conservatives both agree with stereotypes about the lower class but that these differ in content and are based on alleged violations of their respective values. This would allow them to legitimize socio-economic status-based inequality while maintaining their own positive identity.

**Manuscript 2** examines class-based attitudes that are directed the other way. Unlike Manuscript 1, it does not do this in the naturalistic context of a current-day neoliberal society but develops an experimental manipulation that lets individuals imagine life in a neoliberal or egalitarian future. Across two studies and national contexts, it tests a model proposing that life under neoliberalism causes a deterioration of social connections, leading to feelings of unhappiness, unfairness, and threat, which in turn give rise to resentment directed at outgroups. The model proposes that rather than scapegoating disadvantaged outgroups such as immigrants, as is often assumed to happen in hostile economic climates when competition for employment is fierce (Fritsche & Jugert, 2017), individuals will direct their anger at the social elite in charge of these developments. The aim of this research is to contribute to our understanding of the link between the coinciding trends toward neoliberalism and populism

(Mudde, 2007) by investigating how different societal configurations affect attitudes toward those at the top. Its hypothesis is that despite the neoliberal idolization of wealth and power, the increasing concentration of resources in the hands of a small group goes hand in hand with a rise in anti-elitism.

**Manuscript 3** employs both correlational designs and the experimental manipulation used in Manuscript 2 in order to investigate the effects of neoliberalism on health. It tests two central assumptions. The first hypothesis is that life in neoliberal societies negatively impacts self-reported well-being. This is based on previous research which has demonstrated that individual aspects of neoliberalism such as materialism or social inequality adversely affect mental and physical health outcomes (Kasser, 2002; Pickett & Wilkinson, 2015). The second hypothesis is that this effect is mediated by neoliberalism’s erosion of social connections, a proposal that is in line with the emerging social cure approach (Jetten et al., 2012). Across four studies set in three different countries, the dual pathway model is tested, developing the theory that neoliberalism causes people to perceive society as individualistic and competitive, resulting in feelings of loneliness which in turn negatively affect their overall well-being.

Taken together, the manuscripts that form this PhD project aim to contribute to the research on the interplay of political orientation and intergroup relations as well as the literature concerning the role of social factors in individual health and happiness all while considering the influence of an all-pervasive ideology that forms the context against which these processes take place. They set out to tackle different aspects of these research areas that, brought together, hope to shed light on larger patterns of eroding social cohesion and class tension in neoliberal societies.

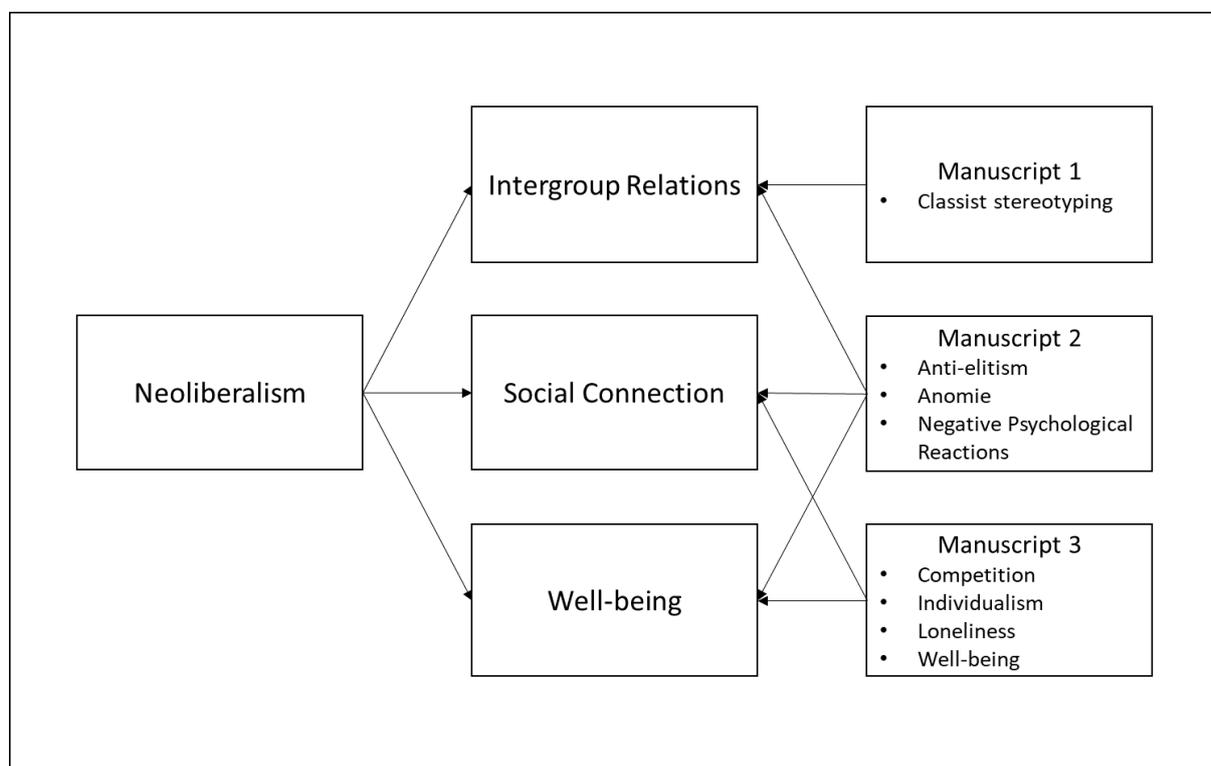


Figure 1. Overview of the manuscripts included in the present research.

## 2.2 Manuscript 1

### **The Politics of Classism. How Middle Class Progressives and Conservatives Stereotype the Lower Social Class**

Hartwich, L.<sup>1</sup>, & Becker, J. C.<sup>1</sup> (2020) *The Politics of Classism. How Middle Class Progressives and Conservatives Stereotype the Lower Social Class*. Manuscript submitted for publication.

<sup>1</sup> Social Psychology Unit, Department of Psychology, Osnabrück University, Germany

Submission date: February 12, 2020, Social Psychological and Personality Science

## Abstract

Most forms of prejudice against lower status groups are more strongly endorsed by conservatives than progressives. We examined whether classism is an exception to that rule. In Study 1 (N = 263), we developed a multi-component model of classism illustrating that the lower class is stereotyped as violating both conservative and progressive core values and showed that while agreement with stereotypes of the lower class as violating conservative values (e.g. lacking work ethic) is linked to more conservative political orientation, stereotypes of the lower class as violating progressive values (e.g. being intolerant) are endorsed more strongly by progressives. In Study 2 (N = 375), we replicated these findings and expanded on them by showing that when applied to refugees as a target group, both stereotype dimensions are more strongly endorsed by conservatives. Thus, our results indicate that classist sentiments exist across the political spectrum but are expressed in different ways.

*Keywords:* classism, stereotypes, values, prejudice, social inequality, meritocracy

## The politics of classism: How middle class progressives and conservatives stereotype the lower social class

“Fury over £28bn bill for workshy – half a million scroungers get benefits...and you pay”, read the front page of British newspaper, *The Daily Express* (Little, 2010). “Vile product of welfare UK” the *Daily Mail* (Dolan & Bentley, 2013) dubbed a man who had been found guilty of killing six of his own children. Neither tabloid was shy about their assessment of individuals who collect government benefits – they have no work ethic, the *Express* declares while the *Mail* draws a direct link from poverty to criminal behavior.

Progressive outlets seem to focus more on the lower class’s undesirable political attitudes in their portrayals. The *Washington Post* explained Donald Trump’s presidential win as “the revenge of working-class whites” in a headline the morning after the election (Tankersley, 2016), and an editor for the German edition of the *Huffington Post* argued that ethnocentrism in Germany was a problem of the lower class who, it was alleged, lacked empathy and made political decisions based on feelings rather than facts (Hoffman, 2015).

These headlines are far from exceptional. Analyses of media coverage have shown that the lower social classes are frequently portrayed as outsiders deviating from middle class values and norms (Sidel, 1996), and that even progressive news sources reinforce class-based distinctions and pass negative judgement on the values and behaviors of lower class individuals (de Goede, 1996). From respectable news magazines to scripted reality TV formats (Bullock, Wyche, & Williams, 2001), a wide range of stereotypes about the lower social class are perpetuated to largely uncritical reception. This has not gone entirely unnoticed in recent public discourse, with several political commentators from working class backgrounds casting a critical light onto the treatment of the lower class by political progressives (e.g. Baron, 2016; Jones, 2011). This is particularly noteworthy because on the whole, progressives tend to have a more positive attitude towards disadvantaged social groups and show less prejudice (Duckitt & Sibley, 2010; Wilson, 1973).

It seems to us that the wide range of classist stereotypes as well as their apparent prevalence across the political spectrum deserves attention from a social psychological perspective. Our interest in classism is threefold: first, given that stereotypes range in content from the lower class’ alleged populist politics to their presumed lack of work ethic, we aim to develop a model that conceptualizes the structure and content of classist stereotypes based on which values they violate. Second, we intend to investigate the relationship between political orientation and classist sentiments, particularly, whether, as their representation in the media suggests, both progressives and conservatives endorse classist stereotypes and whether this depends on their content. Third, we want to find out whether the structure and patterns of endorsement differ between classist stereotypes and those about other targets.

## **Classism, Meritocracy, and the Legitimization of Social Inequality**

Social class, or socio-economic status (SES), two terms that will be used interchangeably for the purpose of this paper, is defined as an individual's position in the economic hierarchy of society determined by income, education, and occupational prestige (Adler et al., 1994; Kraus, Park, & Tan, 2017; Oakes & Rossi, 2003). Social class shapes individuals' thinking and behavior (Fiske & Markus, 2012; Stephens, Markus, & Philips, 2014) as well as their cultural expression (Becker, Kraus, & Rheinschmidt Same, 2017) and plays an important role in determining outcomes and opportunities in many areas of life, from health (Lachman & Weaver, 1998), to education (Carnevale & Rose, 2004), to their choice of romantic partners (OECD, 2011). Social class membership is signaled and communicated frequently in everyday interactions and constitutes a crucial element of person perception (Gillath, Bahns, Ge, & Crandall, 2012; Kraus, Park, & Tan, 2017). Yet as a source of identity and exclusion, SES is not as salient as one might expect (Kraus & Stephens, 2012). According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), what distinguishes social class from more salient categories such as gender, race or ethnicity is the permeability of group boundaries. Boundaries between social classes are, at least in theory<sup>1</sup>, permeable, which makes individual social mobility the preferred strategy of coping with the negative social identity that comes with membership in a lower status group. Accordingly, when it comes to SES, the focus of social justice efforts tends to be less on equality between groups and more on equality of opportunity, and leaving the lower class group is framed as something to be aspired to.

Closely linked to social mobility is the concept of meritocracy. Meritocracy is a dominant ideology in modern capitalist societies which is based on the belief that rewards and status reflect hard work and deservingness (Kluegel & Smith, 1986). Because it firmly locates responsibility within individuals and their ability and effort, meritocracy serves to justify the status quo and legitimize social inequality (Jost & Banaji, 1994; McCoy & Major, 2006; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). This widely shared belief that society is and should be stratified according to individual merit explains why negative attitudes towards those at the bottom of the ladder are so common: meritocratic ideology directly implies that they are responsible for their status since they must have failed to demonstrate merit.

Classism is so ubiquitous that even pre-school children already show a preference for wealthier peers, rate lower SES individuals as less competent, and hold more negative stereotypes about the lower class than the middle class (Durante & Fiske, 2017). In this light, it is perhaps unsurprising that an analysis of 17 stereotyped groups showed welfare recipients, a subgroup of the lower social class, were the only one to be both disliked and disrespected, that is, they were perceived as low in both competence and warmth within the framework of the Stereotype Content Model (Fiske, Xu, Cuddy, & Glick, 1999). Classist

---

<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that actual rates of social mobility tend to be much lower than popular estimations (Kraus & Tan, 2015) and have been declining over the three decades with the rise of neoliberal economics (OECD, 2018).

stereotypes serve to legitimize social inequality and justify the privileged position of the middle class, all the while confirming popular meritocratic belief systems.

### **Value Violating Stereotypes as an Expression of Classism**

Crandall and Eshleman (2003) developed the Justification-Suppression Model (JSM) of prejudice which, similar to other theories of modern prejudice (Sears & Henry, 2003), is based on the idea that people experience a conflict between societally shared prejudice, which is wide-spread and internalized early on, and social norms of egalitarianism and tolerance that condemn such prejudice and motivate individuals to suppress it. The JSM states that this conflict is resolved by finding ways to express prejudice in a form that is acceptable, so-called justifications. One such justification is the stereotyping of an outgroup as violating ingroup values. The term value violation refers to the perception that another person or group demeans or disregards one's values (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987) and previous research suggests that these perceived violations, more than abstract value preferences themselves, predict behavior towards outgroups (Henry & Reyna, 2007; Pedersen & Hartley, 2012; Reyna, Wetherell, Yantis, & Brandt, 2014).

A model of human values that is commonly used in social psychology is Schwartz's model of value priorities which distinguishes between four basic value categories on two dimensions: openness to change vs conservation, and self-transcendence vs self-enhancement (Schwartz & Boehnke, 2004). Conservation values emphasize order and preservation in contrast to openness to change values which prioritize independence of thought and action. Self-enhancement values advocate the pursuit of self-interested goals and ambitions, and a desire for success and power, and are contrasted with self-transcendence values that revolve around egalitarianism and concern for the welfare of others (Schwartz, 1992).

There is a strong link between value preferences and political orientation (Barnea & Schwartz, 1998; Schwartz, Capara, & Vecchione, 2010). Generally, individuals with more progressive attitudes tend to be higher in self-transcendence and openness values while rating self-enhancement and conservation values as less important (Caprara et al., 2017; Piurko, Schwartz & Davidov, 2011). On the other end of the political spectrum, von Collani & Grumm (2009) found a coherent belief system combining conservatism, right-wing authoritarianism (RWA), social dominance orientation (SDO), and value orientations high in conservation and self-enhancement and low in self-transcendence and openness. Importantly, this profile also included an inclination towards prejudice.

Stereotypes about the lower class appear to include violations of all four of these basic value categories. Non-adherence to self-enhancement values is expressed in the idea that the lower class consists of the lazy and work-shy (Lindqvist, Björklund, & Bäckström, 2017), those who lack the ambition and self-reliance necessary to succeed (Durante, Bearns, Tablante, & Fiske, 2017). Moreover, the media routinely paints a picture of their lifestyle as irresponsible and disrespectful of traditional social norms (Sidel, 1996), thus violating conservation

values. Notably, these stereotypes not only go against the core principles of conservatism but are also directly related to social status, thereby blaming the lower social class for their disadvantaged position.

While previous research has already established that lower class individuals are stereotyped in ways that imply the violation of conservative values, to our knowledge, no social psychological studies to date have looked at stereotypes about lower SES individuals as violating progressive values. However, from the headlines cited above, it appears that the lower class is not seen as open to change or committed to self-transcendence, but rather associated with backward-oriented political movements and intolerance. Unlike the stereotypes linked to conservative values, these portrayals of the lower class do not blatantly justify social inequality but constitute a subtler way of painting this group as morally undeserving.

Thus, the idea of prejudice being expressed and justified through value violations provides a useful framework for looking at classism and allows us to organize the wide range of classist stereotypes into meaningful categories. Given that lower SES individuals seem to be stereotyped as violating both conservative and progressive values, we are particularly interested in the endorsement of these different categories of stereotypes across the political spectrum.

### **Political Orientation and Endorsement of Value Violating Stereotypes**

While in general, progressives tend to be less prejudiced, previous research has shown that under some circumstances, they do support discriminatory measures, namely against target groups like anti-choice advocates or tea party supporters that are perceived to be in strong violation of their values (Wetherell, Brandt, & Reyna, 2013). Moreover, while progressive middle class individuals may not endorse meritocratic beliefs as strongly as conservatives do, social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) would suggest that they should still be motivated to strive for a positive identity and attribute their advantaged position to deservingness rather than inherited privilege. Taken together, this means that it is unlikely that progressives would express classism in a way that directly blames lower SES individuals for their disadvantaged status, that is, in a way that suggests a violation of conservative values. Instead, we propose that by stereotyping the lower class as violating progressive values, for example viewing them as close-minded or harming minorities, progressives express their prejudice in a manner that can be framed as defending their egalitarian values.

Lower SES individuals are not the only ones stereotyped as violating both conservative and progressive values. For example, a similar breadth of stereotypes exists about refugees, particularly from North African and Middle Eastern countries, painting their cultural heritage and religious beliefs as incompatible with Western traditions (conservation), accusing them of taking advantage of social security systems (self-enhancement), being unwilling to change and adapt to the host culture (openness) and not respecting the rights of women or LGBT people (self-transcendence). What distinguishes anti-refugee prejudice from classism in this

respect is that it is usually conservative groups, politicians or media outlets that perpetuate the image of refugees as violating conservative as well as progressive values. French far-right leader Marine Le Pen, for example, warned that the so-called refugee crisis would signal the end of women's rights (Vinocur & Melo, 2016) and conservatives in general tend to be higher in anti-Arab prejudice (Echebarria-Echabe, & Guede, 2007), islamophobia (Saroglou, Lamkaddem, Van Pachterbeke, & Buxant, 2009) and anti-immigration attitudes (Vecchione, Caprara, Schoen, Castro, & Schwartz, 2012).

## The Current Research

The aim of this research is to examine the structure and content of classist stereotypes and their endorsement across the political spectrum, and to determine whether they differ from stereotypes about the comparison group of refugees with regard to these criteria. To this end, we conducted two studies. The first study proposes a model of classism with two main dimensions (violations of conservative and progressive values) and four sub-dimensions (conservation, self-enhancement, openness to change, and self-transcendence value violations). We expect classist stereotypes based on violations of conservative values to be endorsed more strongly by those individuals who hold more conservative political views, and those based on violations of progressive values to be endorsed more strongly by those with more progressive views. In a second study, we aim to replicate these findings and to test the hypothesis that the endorsement of the same stereotypes follows a different pattern when they are applied to refugees as an alternative target group<sup>2</sup>, with endorsement of both dimensions linked to more conservative political views.

### Study 1

#### Method

**Participants.** Based on a power analysis for linear regression analysis assuming a small effect size ( $f^2 = .03$ ,  $\beta - 1 = .80$ ,  $\alpha = .05$ ) which suggested 264 participants, and the recommendation that samples of 250 or more (Hu & Bentler, 1999) be used for structural equation modeling, we recruited 263 participants (32% female, mean age=52, SD=18.5) from local political associations, student groups and via social media. Two-thirds (65.8%) were university educated, 54.3% currently employed, 21.9% in education or training, and 28.1% retired. The sample was politically progressive with 75.4% indicating political views left-of-center. A combined 26.3% indicated they would vote for conservative, right-wing or libertarian parties while 70.3% indicated they would vote for green, left or social-democratic parties. Of our participants, 22.8% identified as lower middle class, 47.5% as middle class,

---

<sup>2</sup> Given that there is an overlap between the two target groups because refugees generally have relatively low SES in the host country, we chose the term lower class to refer to the low SES group as it tends to be associated with the white lower class in Germany where the data was collected.

27.8% as upper middle class and 1.9% as upper class. Participants who identified as belonging to the lower social class were filtered out at the beginning of the survey since we were interested in outgroup perceptions of the lower class.

### **Measures.**

*Political orientation.* Political orientation was measured with five items ( $\alpha=.86$ ) asking participants to rate their views on three general scales (liberal – conservative, left – right, socialist – capitalist) and two additional items, all measured on seven-point scales.<sup>3</sup>

*Stereotypes.* In order to measure stereotypes about lower class individuals, we created 36 items (for the 13 items in the final scale see Appendix A) designed to describe violations of the four value categories (e.g. ‘Many lower class people don’t spend their money responsibly’).

## **Results and Discussion**

We conducted structural equation modeling (SEM) in M-Plus Version 7 (Muthén & Muthén, 2012) to test the fit of our proposed model with two dimensions (progressive and conservative) and four sub-dimensions (violations of conservation, self-enhancement, openness and self-transcendence values) of classist stereotypes. We followed the software’s model modification indices to eliminate items that loaded on more than one dimension or were highly correlated with other items which left a total of thirteen items, four from the self-enhancement category and three each from the other categories (Figure 1).

We compared our proposed model (M1) to three other models: a one-dimensional model (M2), a two-dimensional model (M3) and a four-dimensional model (M4) and found significant improvements in model fit compared to the one- and two-dimensional models but only a small improvement compared to the four-dimensional model (Table 1). This confirmed our first hypothesis, that classist stereotypes could be conceptualized as violations of progressive and conservative values with openness/self-transcendence and conservation/self-enhancement as the respective sub-categories. Endorsement of progressive value violating stereotypes ( $M = 3.51, SD = 1.33$ ) was significantly higher than endorsement of conservative value violating stereotypes ( $M = 3.16, SD = 1.34$ ) in our sample,  $t(244) = 3.96, p < .001$ , (see Table 2 for all variable means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations).

We then tested the hypothesis that endorsement of stereotypes depicting the lower social class as violating conservative values would be predicted by more conservative political orientation while endorsement of stereotypes depicting them as violating progressive values would be predicted by more progressive political orientation. We conducted a linear regression analysis with conservative value violating stereotypes<sup>4</sup> as the dependent variable,

---

<sup>3</sup> Social Dominance Orientation, Right-Wing Authoritarianism, and Value Preferences were also measured for exploratory purposes in both studies. The first author can be contacted for more information.

<sup>4</sup> To increase readability, we will refer to conservative and progressive value violating stereotypes as conservative and progressive stereotypes respectively from here on forward.

political orientation as the predictor, and progressive value violating stereotypes as a covariate to control for participants general tendency to endorse stereotypes about the target group. Agreement with conservative stereotypes was predicted by more conservative political orientation,  $B = .28$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $t(230) = 6.67$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.20, .36]. A second regression with progressive stereotypes as the outcome, political orientation as the predictor, and conservative stereotypes as a covariate showed that agreement with progressive stereotypes was predicted by more progressive political orientation,  $B = -.11$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $t(230) = -2.32$ ,  $p = .022$ , 95% CI [-.21, -.02].<sup>5</sup> Thus, the second hypothesis was confirmed. Endorsement of stereotypes that constitute violations of conservative values was linked to more conservative political views while stereotypes painting the lower social class as going against progressive values were endorsed more by participants with more progressive views. Taken together, the results of Study 1 suggest that there are subsets of classist stereotypes which differ with regard to their content, endorsement, and relation to political orientation.

## Study 2

We conducted a second study to replicate our model of classist stereotypes. Since Study 1 showed that the progressive value violating dimension of classism exhibited a different relationship with political views from the conservative value violating dimension and from previously found patterns of prejudice and political orientation more generally, the second goal of Study 2 was to confirm that this is specific to classism rather than specific to stereotypes based on progressive value violations.

To this end, Study 2 was designed as an experiment with two conditions, measuring endorsement of stereotypes about the lower class in one and about refugees in the other. Given that refugees face a similar range of stereotypes and have a similar economically disadvantaged status to the lower class, choosing this comparison group allowed us to use the same items from Study 1 in both conditions. While we expect to replicate the same structure and patterns of agreement with regard to classist stereotypes, we do not expect the same findings for the comparison group. Instead, based on previous research on racism and anti-immigration attitudes (e.g. Vecchione et al., 2012), we hypothesize that endorsement of stereotypes about refugees will be a one-dimensional construct that is linked to more conservative political views.

## Method

**Participants.** The sample size was determined a priori using G\*Power for a moderated regression analysis with two groups, one predictor, and two response variables. The power analysis ( $\beta-1 = .80$ ,  $\alpha = .05$ ) suggested that a sample of at least 325 participants would be required to detect a small effect of  $f^2 = .03$  (Cohen, 1988). A total of 375 participants (43%

---

<sup>5</sup> Results are reported for the two main stereotype dimensions. Separating the stereotypes further into the four sub-categories revealed similar patterns of results.

female, mean age=40, SD=17.9) completed the study. Most (57.3%) were university educated, 37.1% were still in education or training, 42.7% in employment, and 14.9% retired. Again, the sample showed a progressive bias with 73.6% expressing political views left-of center. A combined 33.3% indicated they intended to vote for conservative, right-wing or libertarian parties in the next election while 53.1% reported intentions to vote for left, green and social-democratic parties. Over half the sample identified as middle class (52.8%), 17.6% identified as lower middle class, 28.5% as upper middle class and 1.1% as upper class. 183 participants were randomly selected for the lower class condition, 192 for the refugee condition.

**Measures.** The same measure of political orientation ( $\alpha=.84$ ) as in the last study was used. Stereotypes were measured using the scale developed in Study 1 with the wording changed to 'refugees' instead of 'lower class people' in the refugee condition.

## Results and Discussion

We used structural equation modeling (SEM) in M-Plus Version 7 (Muthén & Muthén, 2012) to confirm the model from Study 1. As expected, the model was a good fit for the data from the lower class condition,  $\chi^2(60) = 75.24$ , CFI = .984, RSMEA = .037. Principal component analysis with Promax rotation confirmed that in the refugee condition, stereotype endorsement was a one-dimensional construct with all items loading onto a single factor.<sup>6</sup> This supports our hypothesis that classism, unlike anti-refugee stereotypes, can be divided into distinct subtypes.

In order to test whether the relationship between political orientation and stereotype endorsement differed depending on the target group, moderated regression analysis was conducted using PROCESS (Hayes, 2018, Model 1, 95% confidence intervals, 10,000 bootstrap samples) with political orientation as the independent variable and condition (lower class vs refugees, contrast coded: -1/+1) as the moderator (see Table 3 for all variable means, standard deviations and correlations).

First, conservative stereotypes were entered as the dependent variable and progressive stereotypes as a covariate, revealing a main effect of political orientation with more conservative participants endorsing conservative stereotypes more strongly,  $B = .24$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $t(325) = 6.53$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.17, .31], but no main effect for condition,  $B = .03$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $t(325) = .25$ ,  $p = .803$ , 95% CI [-.21, .27]. There was a significant interaction,  $B = -.10$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $t(325) = -2.85$ ,  $p = .005$ , 95% CI [-.17, -.03], with the effect of political orientation stronger in the lower class condition,  $B = .34$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $t(180) = 6.62$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.24, .44], than the refugee condition,  $B = .14$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $t(190) = 2.75$ ,  $p = .006$ , 95% CI [.04, .24].

Second, progressive stereotypes were entered as the dependent variable and conservative stereotypes as a covariate, showing no main effect of political orientation,  $B = .004$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $t(325) = .10$ ,  $p = .918$ , 95% CI [-.07, .08], but a main effect for condition,  $B = -.42$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $t(325) = -3.65$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [-.65, -.20], as well as a significant interaction,  $B$

---

<sup>6</sup> For comparison, in the social class condition, two factors with eigenvalues greater than one were extracted, reflecting the conservative and progressive stereotype dimensions (see Appendix for factor loadings).

= -.19,  $SE = .03$ ,  $t(325) = 5.69$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.12, .26]. While more progressive political views predicted more agreement with progressive stereotypes in the lower class condition,  $B = -.19$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $t(180) = -3.53$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [-.29, -.08], they predicted less agreement with these stereotypes in the refugee condition,  $B = .19$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $t(190) = 4.00$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.10, .29].

The results of Study 2 confirm our findings from Study 1 with regard to the dimensions of classist stereotypes and their endorsement as a function of political orientation. Again, we demonstrated that while endorsement of conservative value violating stereotypes is linked to more conservative political orientation, the reverse is true for agreement with stereotypes of the lower class as violating progressive values. Importantly, Study 2 expands these findings by showing that when refugees are substituted as a target group for the same stereotypes, endorsement is strongly predicted by conservative political views independent of content, suggesting that this pattern might be specific to classism.

## General Discussion

The aim of this research was to investigate how prejudice against lower SES individuals is expressed and how the structure and endorsement of classist stereotypes compares to those about other targets. Based on theories about the suppression and expression of prejudice (Crandall & Eshleemann, 2003), we hypothesized that classism is expressed through representations of lower SES individuals as not adhering to core conservative and progressive values. We developed and confirmed a model of classist stereotypes based on these value violations and were able to show two distinct dimensions, depicting the lower class as violating conservative and progressive values respectively, with four sub-dimensions corresponding to Schwartz's (1992) basic value categories.

While endorsement of stereotypes violating conservative values was linked to more conservative political views, endorsement of the progressive value violating dimension of classism was linked to more progressive views, showing the reverse pattern of the usual relationship between conservatism and prejudice of any kind (von Collani & Grumm, 2009; Wilson, 1973). The comparison between lower SES individuals and refugees as targets of prejudice in Study 2 confirmed that this finding is specific to classism since all stereotype dimensions were strongly associated with conservatism when refugees were the target. Taken together, these findings suggest that not only is classism a form of prejudice that deserves more attention, but also that the way classism is expressed by progressives specifically is worth looking at more closely.

It might not seem obvious, at first sight, why the lower class should be the target of prejudice from middle class progressives. Compared to conservatives, progressives are less likely to subscribe to belief systems that justify social inequality and discrimination of lower status groups and are less invested in social hierarchies (Furnham & Gunter, 1984). Thus, they should prefer not to directly blame individuals for their low SES, a finding supported by our results concerning stereotypes based on violations of conservative values of hard work and

ambition. However, that does not mean that they are not to some degree affected by the all-pervasive idea of deservingness.

As sociologist Rachel Sherman (2017) reported in her analysis of the uneasiness surrounding affluence, her interviewees, independent of political preferences, desired moral legitimacy above all and went to great lengths to justify their wealth as deserved, be it through hard work and frugality or dedication to public service and charity. This desire may explain why we see both conservative and progressive middle class individuals using their respective values to assert their own moral deservingness while denying that of the lower class.

Since progressive values include tolerance and egalitarianism, denying these values to an outgroup implies that the targets of prejudice are themselves prejudiced. Accusing the lower class of being sexist, ethnocentric and opposed to minority rights allows middle class progressives to establish their moral superiority by assuming the role of protecting another disadvantaged group. However, the results of Study 2 show that this is not a strategy used exclusively by progressives. Indeed, when refugees were the targets, it was not progressives but conservatives who showed higher endorsement of these kinds of stereotypes. Given that conservatives traditionally are themselves high in the types of prejudice they were accusing refugees of (e.g. Christopher & Mull, 2006; Heaven & Oxman, 1999), a cynical explanation would be that there are those that take on the mantle of advocate for, say, women or sexual minorities only in the relatively narrow context where it allows them to justify prejudice against other groups such as refugees or lower SES individuals.

### **Limitations and Directions for Further Research**

The two studies reported here are a first step towards a better understanding of classism and its expression, particularly by middle class progressives. While we have proposed possible interpretations of our results, more research is necessary to confirm these ideas, particularly with regard to the motivations behind the expression of classist prejudice through progressive value violations.

The potential for generalization of these results is somewhat limited by the composition of the samples which were leaning towards the progressive end of the political spectrum. Even though progressives were central to our research interest, a replication of these findings with a more conservative sample might be of interest. Similar, additional studies conducted outside of Germany would help to ascertain whether this pattern of classist stereotyping is generalizable across national contexts.

### **Conclusion**

Social inequality is widely unpopular and detrimental to the well-being of individuals and the functioning of societies, yet it continues to rise (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). This inequality paradox (Piff, Kraus, & Keltner, 2018) is made possible by the interplay of structural and ideological factors that concentrate resources at the top and reinforce disadvantages at

the bottom of society. Our research provides evidence for one more mechanism through which systemic inequality maintains itself: the way in which both conservative and progressive middle class individuals are able to assert moral superiority by stereotyping the lower class as violating their respective values.

## References

- Adler, N. E., Boyce, T., Chesney, M. A., Cohen, S., Folkman, S., Kahn, R. L., & Syme, S. L. (1994). Socioeconomic status and health: The challenge of the gradient. *American Psychologist, 49*, 15–24.
- Barnea, M., & Schwartz, S.H. (1998). Values and voting. *Political Psychology, 19*, 17-40.
- Baron, C. (2016). *Pöbel, Penner, Parasiten: Warum die Linken die Arbeiter Verachten* [Plebs, hobos, parasites: why the left scorns the working class]. Berlin: Das Neue Berlin.
- Becker, J.C., Kraus, M., & Rheinschmidt Same, M., (2017). Cultural Expressions of Social Class and Their Implications for Group-Related Beliefs and Behaviors. *Journal of Social Issues, 73*, 158-174.
- Bullock, H. E., Fraser Wyche, K., & Williams, W. R. (2001). Media Images of the Poor. *Journal of Social Issues, 57*(2), 229–246.
- Caprara, G. V., Vecchione, M., Schwartz, S. H., Schoen, H., Bain, P. G., Silvester, J., ... others. (2017). Basic values, ideological self-placement, and voting: A cross-cultural study. *Cross-Cultural Research, 51*(4), 388-411.
- Carnevale, A.P., & Rose, S.J. 2004. Socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, and selective college admissions. In Kahlenberg, R.D. (ed.) *America's Untapped Resource: Low-Income Students in Higher Education*, pp. 101–56. New York: Century Found.
- Christopher, A. N., & Mull, M. S. (2006). Conservative Ideology and Ambivalent Sexism. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 30*(2), 223–230.
- Cieciuch, J., & Schwartz, S.H. (2012). The Number of Distinct Basic Values and Their Structure Assessed by PVQ-40. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 94*(3), 321-328.
- Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Crandall, C. S., & Eshleman, A. (2003). A justification-suppression model of the expression and experience of prejudice. *Psychological Bulletin, 129*(3), 414-446.
- de Goede, M. (1996). Ideology in the US welfare debate: Neo-liberal representations of poverty. *Discourse and Society, 7*(3), 317–357.
- Dolan, A., & Bentley, P. (2013, April 3). *Vile product of welfare UK: Man who bred 17 babies by five women to milk benefits system is guilty of killing six of them*. The Daily Mail, p. 1.
- Duckitt, J., & Sibley, C. G. (2010). Personality, Ideology, Prejudice, and Politics: A Dual-Process Motivational Model. *Journal of Personality, 78*(6), 1861–1894.
- Durante, F., & Fiske, S. T. (2017). How social-class stereotypes maintain inequality. *Current Opinion in Psychology, 18*, 43–48.

- Durante, F., Tablante, C. B., & Fiske, S. T. (2017). Poor but Warm, Rich but Cold (and Competent): Social Classes in the Stereotype Content Model. *Journal of Social Issues, 73*(1), 138–157.
- Echebarria-Echabe, A., & Guede, E. F. (2007). A new measure of anti-Arab prejudice. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 37*, 1077–1091.
- Fiske, S. T., & Markus, H. R. (2012). *Facing social class*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Fiske, S. T., Xu, J., Cuddy, A. C., & Glick, P. (1999). (Dis)respecting versus (dis)liking: Status and interdependence predict ambivalent stereotypes of competence and warmth. *Journal of Social Issues, 55*(3), 473–490.
- Furnham, A., & Gunter, B. (1984). Just world beliefs and attitudes towards the poor. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 23*, 265–269.
- Gillath, O., Bahns, A. J., Ge, F., & Crandall, C. S. (2012). Shoes as a source of first impressions. *Journal of Research in Personality, 46*, 423–430.
- Hayes, A. F. (2018). *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Heaven, P. C. L., & Oxman, L. N. (1999). Human values, conservatism and stereotypes of homosexuals. *Personality and Individual Differences, 27*(1), 109–118.
- Henry, P.J., & Reyna, C. (2007). Value Judgments: The Impact of Perceived Value Violations on American Political Attitudes. *Political Psychology, 28*(3), 273–298.
- Hoffman, S. (2015). *Die neuen Asozialen: Eure Dummheit bringt Deutschland zum Abgrund* [The new antisocials: your stupidity will be Germany's downfall]. Huffington Post. Retrieved from <http://www.huffingtonpost.de>
- Hu, L.-T., & Bentler, P. M. (1999). Cutoff criteria for fit indexes in covariance structure analysis: Conventional criteria versus new alternatives. *Structural Equation Modeling, 6*, 1–55.
- Jones, O. (2011). *Chavs: The Demonisation of the Working Class*. London: Verso.
- Jost, J. T., & Banaji, M. R. (1994). The role of stereotyping in system-justification and the production of false consciousness. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 33*, 1–27.
- Kluegel, J.R., & Smith, E.R. (1986). *Beliefs about inequality: American's view of what is and what ought to be*. Hawthorne, NJ: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Kraus, M.W., Park, J.W., & Tan, J.J.X. (2017). Signs of Social Class: The Experience of Economic Inequality in Everyday Life. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 12*(3), 422–435.
- Kraus, M.W., & Stephens, N.M. (2012). A Road Map for an Emerging Psychology of Social Class. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 6*(9), 642–656.
- Kraus, M.W., & Tan, J.J. (2015). Americans overestimate social class mobility. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 58*, 101–111.

- Lachman, M.E., & Weaver, S.L. (1998). The Sense of Control as a Moderator of Social Class Differences in Health and Well-Being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74(3), 763-773.
- Lindqvist, A., Björklund, F., & Bäckström, M. (2017). The perception of the poor: Capturing stereotype content with different measures. *Nordic Psychology*, 69(4), 231–247.
- Little, A. (2010, August 16). *Fury over £28bn bill for workshy*. Daily Express, p. 1.
- McCoy, S.K., & Major, B. (2007). Priming meritocracy and the psychological justification of inequality. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 43(3), 341–351.
- Muthén, L.K. and Muthén, B.O. (1998-2017). *Mplus User's Guide* (8th ed.). Los Angeles: Muthén & Muthén.
- Oakes, J.M., & Rossi, P.H. (2003). The measurement of SES in health research: Current practice and steps toward a new approach. *Social Science & Medicine*, 56, 769–784.
- OECD (2018). *A Broken Social Elevator? How to Promote Social Mobility*. OECD Publishing.
- OECD (2011). *An Overview of Growing Income Inequalities in OECD Countries: Main Findings*. OECD Publishing.
- Pedersen, A., & Hartley, L.K. (2012). Prejudice Against Muslim Australians: The Role of Values, Gender and Consensus. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 22(3), 239–255.
- Piff, P.K., Kraus, M.W., & Keltner, D. (2018). Unpacking the inequality paradox: The psychological roots of inequality and social class. In J.M. Olson (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology*, Vol. 57. (pp. 53-124). San Diego, CA, US: Elsevier Academic Press.
- Piurko, Y., Schwartz, S.H., & Davidov, E. (2011). Basic personal values and the meaning of left-right political orientations in 20 countries. *Political Psychology*, 32(4), 537–561.
- Reyna, C., Wetherell, G., Yantis, C., & Brandt, M.J. (2014). Attributions for sexual orientation vs. stereotypes: How beliefs about value violations account for attribution effects on anti-gay discrimination. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 44(4), 289–302.
- Saroglou, V., Lamkaddem, B., Van Pachterbeke, M., & Buxant, C. (2009). Host society's dislike of the Islamic veil: The role of subtle prejudice, values, and religion. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 33(5), 419–428.
- Schwartz, S. H. (1992). Universals in the content and structure of values: Theory and empirical tests in 20 countries. In M. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology*, Vol. 25. (pp. 1-65). New York: Academic Press.
- Schwartz, S. H., & Boehnke, K. (2004). Evaluating the structure of human values with confirmatory factor analysis. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 38(3), 230–255.

- Schwartz, S. H., & Bilsky, W. (1987). Toward a universal psychological structure of human values. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 53(3), 550-562.
- Schwartz, S. H., Caprara, G. V., & Vecchione, M. (2010). Basic Personal Values, Core Political Values, and Voting: A Longitudinal Analysis. *Political Psychology*, 31(3), 421–452.
- Sears, D.O., & Henry, P.J. (2003). The origins of symbolic racism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85, 259–275.
- Sherman, S. (2017). *Uneasy Street: The Anxieties of Affluence*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Sidanius, J., & Pratto, F. (1999). *Social dominance: an intergroup theory of social hierarchy and oppression*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Sidel, R. (1996). The enemy within: A commentary on the demonization of difference. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 66(4), 490–495.
- Stephens, N.M., Markus, H.R., & Philips, L.T. (2014), Social Class Culture Cycles: How Three Gateway contexts Shape Selves and Fuel Inequality. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 65, 611-634.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J.C. (1979). An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict. In W.G. Austin, & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (pp. 33-47). Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Tankersley, J. (2016, November 9). *How Trump won: The revenge of working-class whites*. The Washington Post. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com>
- Vecchione, M., Caprara, G., Schoen, H., Castro, J. L. G., & Schwartz, S. H. (2012). The role of personal values and basic traits in perceptions of the consequences of immigration: A three-nation study. *British Journal of Psychology*, 103(3), 359–377.
- Von Collani, G., & Grumm, M. (2009). On the dimensional structure of personality, ideological beliefs, social attitudes, and personal values. *Journal of Individual Differences*, 30(2), 107-119.
- Wetherell, G. A., Brandt, M. J., & Reyna, C. (2013). Discrimination Across the Ideological Divide: The Role of Value Violations and Abstract Values in Discrimination by Liberals and Conservatives. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 4(6), 658–667.
- Wilkinson, R., & Pickett, K. (2009). *The spirit level: Why equality is better for everyone*. London, UK: Allen Lane.
- Wilson, G.D. (1973) (Ed.). *The psychology of conservatism*. London: Academic Press.

Table 1. *Model fit comparisons (Study 1).*

Model	Chi Square	Df	CFI	RSMEA	Comparison	$\Delta$ RMSEA	$\Delta$ Chi Square
M1	79.43 ( $p = .05$ )	60	.990	.035	-	-	-
M2	234.03 ( $p < .001$ )	65	.912	.100	M2 – M1	.065	$p < .001$
M3	100.75 ( $p < .01$ )	64	.981	.047	M3 – M1	.012	$p < .01$
M4	79.43 ( $p = .04$ )	59	.989	.036	M4 – M1	.001	$p < .09$

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (Study 1).*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Political Orientation	-	.44**	.25**	.39**	.30**	.46**	.18**
2 Conservative ST		-	.74**	.95**	.73**	.95**	.66**
3 Progressive ST			-	.67**	.93**	.74**	.95**
4 Conservation ST				-	.67**	.81**	.61**
5 Openness ST					-	.73**	.78**
6 Self-Enhancement ST						-	.66**
7 Self-Transcendence ST							-
Mean	2.88	3.16	3.50	2.94	3.60	3.38	3.41
SD	1.35	1.34	1.33	1.40	1.47	1.43	1.36
$\alpha$	.88	.90	.90	.82	.84	.81	.83

*Note.* ST = Stereotypes, SD = standard deviation,  $\alpha$  = Cronbach's Alpha.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

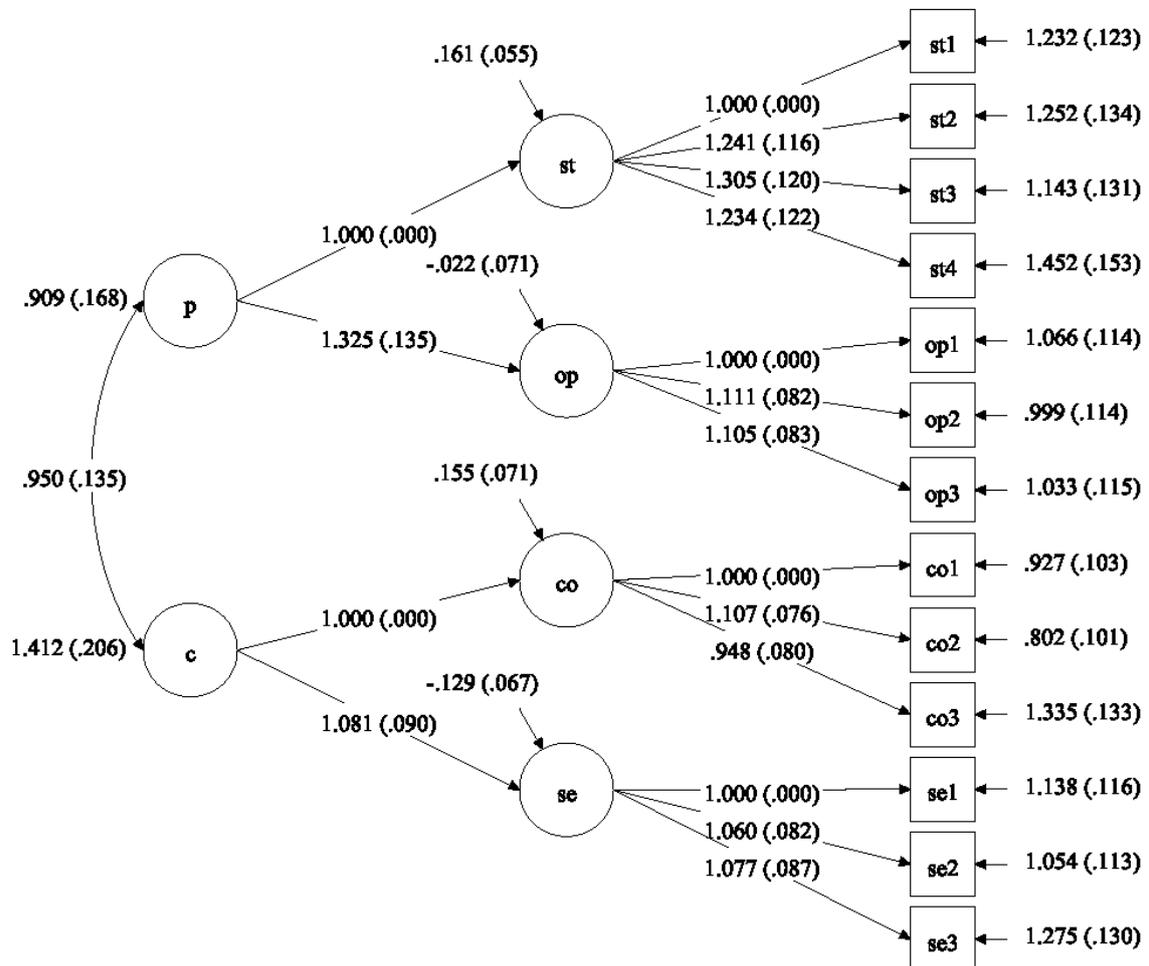
Table 3. *Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (Study 2).*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Mean	SD
1 Pol.	-	.40**	.12	.38**	.15*	.35**	.07	3.12	1.17
2 C ST	.57**	-	.70**	.93**	.62**	.91**	.62**	3.54	1.19
3 P ST	.60**	.84**	-	.59**	.91**	.65**	.95**	3.82	1.10
4 CO ST	.50**	.94**	.76**	-	.53**	.69**	.55**	3.30	1.33
5 OP ST	.58**	.82**	.94**	.77**	-	.62**	.72**	4.02	1.21
6 SE ST	.58**	.95**	.83**	.79**	.78**	-	.60**	3.78	1.26
7 ST ST	.55**	.77**	.97**	.69**	.82**	.77**	-	3.66	1.17
Mean	3.23	2.91	3.73	2.88	3.43	2.96	3.94	-	-
SD	1.31	1.31	1.30	1.34	1.38	1.42	1.37	-	-
$\alpha$	.84	.88	.86	.79	.78	.82	.75	-	-

*Note.* Correlations, means and standard deviations for the lower class condition (N = 183) are presented above the diagonal, and correlations, means and standard deviations for the refugee condition (N = 192) are presented below the diagonal. Pol. = Political Orientation, C ST = Stereotypes violating Conservative Values, P ST = Stereotypes violating Progressive Values, CO ST = Stereotypes violating Conservation Values, OP ST = Stereotypes violating Openness Values, SE ST = Stereotypes violating Self-Enhancement Values, ST ST = Stereotypes violating Self-Transcendence Values, SD = standard deviation,  $\alpha$  = Cronbach's Alpha.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

Figure 1. Results of SEM (Study 1).



Note. C = Stereotypes violating Conservative Values, P = Stereotypes violating Progressive Values, CO = Stereotypes violating Conservation Values, OP = Stereotypes violating Openness Values, SE = Stereotypes violating Self-Enhancement Values, ST = Stereotypes violating Self-Transcendence Values.

Appendix. *Classism Scale Final Items (Studies 1 and 2) and Factor Loadings (Study 2).*

Item	Factor Loadings		Factor Loadings
	Class Condition		Refugee Condition
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 1
Many lower class people (refugees) believe that a woman's place is in the kitchen. (ST1)	.706	.107	.753
Many lower class people (refugees) hold ethnocentric views. (ST2)	.852	-.222	.775
Many lower class people (refugees) don't support equal rights for minorities. (ST3)	.629	.003	.716
Many lower class people (refugees) don't try to reduce their carbon footprint. (ST4)	.444	.243	.686
Many lower class people (refugees) are not open to new ideas and experiences. (OP1)	.703	.039	.788
Many lower class people (refugees) rely on opinions and feelings over facts. (OP2)	.608	.135	.699
Many lower class people (refugees) tend to be closed-minded. (OP3)	.766	.036	.853
Many lower class people (refugees) don't try to create a safe environment for their families. (CO1)	-.042	.837	.696
Many lower class people (refugees) don't spend their money responsibly. (CO2)	.048	.787	.818
Many lower class people (refugees) don't attempt to lead respectable lives. (CO3)	-.199	.929	.644
Many lower class people (refugees) don't take responsibility for their lives. (SE1)	.057	.752	.837
Many lower class people (refugees) lack the ambition to make something of their lives. (SE2)	.163	.678	.822
Many lower class people (refugees) don't take advantage of educational opportunities. (SE3)	.153	.563	.717

## 2.3 Manuscript 2

### **Exposure to Neoliberalism Increases Resentment of the Elite via Feelings of Anomie and Negative Psychological Reactions**

Hartwich, L<sup>1</sup>, & Becker, J. C<sup>1</sup>. (2019). Exposure to Neoliberalism Increases Resentment of the Elite via Feelings of Anomie and Negative Psychological Reactions. *Journal of Social Issues*, 75(1), 113-133.

<sup>1</sup> Social Psychology Unit, Department of Psychology, Osnabrück University, Germany

## Abstract

For several decades now, neoliberalism has been the dominant economic and political ideology throughout large parts of the world. In many places, its rise has gone hand in hand with growing social inequality and a cultural emphasis on individualism and competition. Lately, concerns are being raised about the effects of these developments on politics and societies. The renewed rise of populism in Europe, the United States, and other countries has been attributed to economic insecurity among the working and middle classes by politicians, journalists, and academics alike. Similarly, the spread of nationalist and anti-immigration sentiments is frequently interpreted as a result of fears over job security and perceived competition in a hostile economic climate. We examined the effect of neoliberalism on two types of prejudice (anti-elitism and anti-immigrant prejudice) across two studies in Germany (N = 198) and the UK (N = 173). Results show that priming neoliberalism leads to higher levels of anti-elitism but not anti-immigrant prejudice and that this effect is mediated by anomie and negative psychological reactions (feelings of threat, unfairness, and hopelessness). Thus, our research suggests that while neoliberalism is linked to lower social cohesion and increased outgroup derogation, this is not primarily directed against disadvantaged social groups but against those at the top.

*Keywords:* neoliberalism, anti-elitism, prejudice, anomie, economic threat, social inequality, social cohesion

## Exposure to Neoliberalism Increases Resentment of the Elite via Feelings of Anomie and Negative Psychological Reactions

With neoliberal economics on the rise and social inequality increasing in large parts of the world, the question of how these developments are affecting societies and their political climates is becoming more and more urgent. As Fritsche and Jugert (2017) point out, one common theory among academics and the general public alike seems to be that increasing economic pressures and insecurity often lead people to turn their anger against vulnerable groups and minorities, particularly refugees and immigrants (Butz & Yogeewaran, 2011; Onraet & van Hiel, 2013).

At the same time, the increasingly hostile and individualistic economic climate has been cited as one factor in the renewed rise of populism. Populist movements have been gaining popularity since the 1990s and constitute the most successful new political parties in Western Europe (Mudde, 2007). While populism is not an uncontested concept, at its core is the idea that politics should be an expression of the will of the people. According to recent definitions, the people are viewed as a pure, morally superior, and homogenous group that constitutes the silent majority and the backbone of society (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008) and is contrasted with a corrupt and immoral elite threatening its purity and unity (Akkerman, Mudde, & Zaslove, 2014; Schulz, Müller, Schemer, Wirz, Wettstein, & Wirth, 2017).

Given the steady redistribution of wealth from the bottom towards the top that has taken place in most OECD countries over the last couple of decades (Müller, 2013), it is not surprising that people should turn their anger over their economic circumstances against those who seem to benefit from neoliberal politics. While they may perceive themselves as competing over increasingly insecure and low-paid jobs with immigrants, the larger competition over the collective resources in society is taking place with those owning an increasingly disproportionate share of it.

To date, most of the literature examining the effects of neoliberalism on societal and intergroup conflicts comes from the fields of sociology and political science. Our aim is to expand on this by developing a social psychological view on the relationship between neoliberal politics and anti-elitism. Using the concept of anomie, that is, the perceived disintegration of society, we propose that neoliberal societies are experienced as low in social cohesion and solidarity, which makes people feel a sense of threat, unfairness, and hopelessness resulting in resentment against those who are seen to be profiting from the economic conditions.

### **The Rise of Neoliberalism**

Neoliberalism is a free market ideology that places competition at the center of human relations and economic and political progress. Starting in the United States and the United Kingdom, neoliberal ideas began to replace the social democratic principles of the post-war era as the dominant philosophy during the 1970s. The so-called post-war consensus was

defined by Keynesian economics and Fordist systems of mass production and consumption. During this period, social inequality decreased drastically and in an economic climate where labor was comparatively scarce and full employment almost reached, workers negotiated an unprecedented number of benefits and protections that cumulated in the establishment of social safety nets and welfare states (Nachtwey, 2016).

Neoliberal thinkers on the New Right criticized these social policies for limiting individual freedom and stunting economic growth that, according to the neoliberal doctrine, can only be delivered through competition and deregulation in a free market. The key tenets of the neoliberal approach to organizing economies and societies are centered around efforts to reduce the involvement of governments and states in economic affairs to a minimum and to organize an increasing number of domains, especially in the social realm, along the principles of the free market. Neoliberalism places great emphasis on individualism, entrepreneurship and personal responsibility and proposes that these values can best be achieved within an institutional framework providing and protecting property rights, free markets and free trade (Harvey, 2005).

### **Economic and Societal Consequences of Neoliberalism**

As a consequence of these policies, income inequality has now returned to early twentieth century levels in many Western countries (Piketty, 2015). The rise of neoliberalism has gone hand in hand with an increasing wealth disparity and a redistribution of wealth towards the top as well the decline of well-paid, long-term employment opportunities with social security benefits (Müller, 2013). Increasing job insecurity combined with cuts to welfare and social security programs has put economic pressure on increasing numbers of people in the working and middle classes and has shaped the way societies look and function and the degree to which people feel integrated in them.

American political scientist Robert Putnam (2000) traced the decline of civic engagement in the United States over five decades and showed how membership in organizations, involvement in religious or political institutions and community ties have all been steadily decreasing. Putnam attributed this change in social integration to changing family structures, mass media and technology but also to factors related to work and the economy such as increases in income disparity.

The effect of this latter factor was analyzed in more detail by Wilkinson and Pickett (2009). The authors conducted a large-scale analysis of data from 23 countries, demonstrating the effect of rising inequality on a wide range of outcomes and found negative consequences in many areas such as education, crime and public health. In line with Putnam's findings they were also able to show that higher levels of inequality went hand in hand with lower social cohesion and trust and the decline of community life. An upward trend in gated communities is taken by the authors to suggest that especially privileged groups take even physical measures to segregate themselves. They concluded that inequality does not only affect

people on an individual level but also isolates them from increasingly fragmented and dysfunctional societies.

Oishi, Kesebir and Diener (2011) conducted a longitudinal analysis of happiness and inequality in the United States and came to similar results as Wilkinson and Pickett's cross-country comparisons. Happiness was lower in years with higher social inequality and, among lower and middle income Americans, the relationship between inequality and happiness was explained by lower perceived fairness and general trust rather than lower household income.

Taken together, these findings suggest that high inequality, which is usually one of the consequences of neoliberal policies, causes a deterioration of the social fabric by making people perceive their societies as lacking in fairness and solidarity.

## **Anomie**

The perception of society as lacking trust, cohesion and morals is captured by the concept of anomie which was first coined by sociologist Emile Durkheim (1897) and has received renewed attention from social psychologists in recent years. While definitions have differed across the disciplines and contexts it has been applied to, at its core the concept refers to a perceived disintegration and deregulation of society. This refers to a decline in social cohesion and morals as well as a cultural focus on individualism, materialism, and economic success.

Anomie is used to describe societies experiencing upheaval and instability as a result of war or revolution (Heydari, Teymoori, Haghish, & Mohamadi, 2014) but also due to rapid economic changes or crises (Messner & Rosenfeld, 2001). Teymoori and colleagues (2016) proposed a conception of anomie as a reflection of the state of society in the minds of individuals, specifically the view that the social and political conditions in society are falling apart and that there is a lack of trust and moral standards. Neoliberal policies often include cuts to social security and benefits and make demands on the flexibility and mobility of the workforce in the name of individual responsibility and self-reliance. It can be argued that these are the kinds of social changes that can undermine social trust and stability.

Merton (1938) suggested that anomie is particularly likely to occur in societies where accepted cultural aspirations are unobtainable through legitimate means for large shares of the population. It has been suggested that this is the case under neoliberalism (Nachtwey, 2016) since the ideology places a high value on the individual's economic and professional success as a measure of their value to society while at the same time concentrating resources in the hands of a small elite and making upward social mobility increasingly difficult to achieve for the majority of people (Müller, 2013; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009).

Anomie has been used by sociologists to explain the devaluation of minorities, ethnic prejudice, and right-wing extremism (Hüpping, 2006; Hüpping & Reinecke, 2007; Kühnel & Schmidt, 2002; Legge & Heitmeyer, 2012). However, the findings on these relationships, especially regarding nationalism and ethnic prejudice, are conflicting (Blank, 2003). Teymoori et al. (2016) found that anomie was linked to disidentification from the superordinate group,

in their case measured as national identification. They concluded that the superordinate group is seen as a source of negative identity because it does not successfully manage social harmony. The authors also suggest that perceived lack of social trust and moral foundations might trigger the view that the leadership is illegitimate, further supporting the idea that frustration over the deterioration of society is likely to be directed at those in power.

### **Neoliberalism and Prejudice Toward Disadvantaged and Privileged Groups**

Economic threat has been linked to prejudice against outgroups, including those who are not or only indirectly involved in economic intergroup struggle such as ethnic or religious minorities (Onraet & van Hiel, 2013). Fritsche and Jugert (2017) call this a palliative response to threat, one that is designed to restore self-esteem and feelings of control but does not identify or combat the actual source of the threat. Which outgroup becomes the target of prejudice seems to depend on the way the threat is framed and attributed. U.S. participants who were primed with an economic threat showed heightened prejudice against Asian Americans, a group stereotyped as economically competitive, but not Black Americans to whom these stereotypes do not apply (Butz & Yogeeswaran, 2011). Becker, Wagner, and Christ (2011) found that in the wake of the recent financial crisis, people responded with heightened ethnic prejudice when immigrants were blamed for the economic downturn but with increased anti-Semitism when the crisis was seen as the fault of bankers and speculators. However, no increase in prejudice occurred when a system-level explanation for the crisis was provided, suggesting that there are alternative outcomes besides displaced intergroup conflict or scapegoating.

If the threat is attributed to the economic system, prejudice against groups like immigrants or refugees is not a response that logically follows from this assessment since these groups usually are not the ones with power over the organization of society. However, resentment against the elite, those in control of the wealth and resources necessary to shape policy and the most likely to benefit from the status quo, would be a likely consequence of threat stemming from the economic system.

Fritsche and colleagues (2017) showed that economic threat was linked to higher trust among the social class ingroup, indicating that in increasingly unequal societies, people may be becoming more aware of wealth and income differences and construing their social identity more strongly in terms of their place on the economic ladder. It is likely that this would also have an impact on their perceptions of outgroups and intergroup conflicts.

These findings highlight the importance of framing when it comes to the effects of economic threat on intergroup relations. They suggest that anti-immigrant prejudice is a consequence of blame for economic problems being attributed to immigration rather than a direct result of economic threat per se. Thus, being threatened by an unequal and competitive economic system such as neoliberalism should not necessarily lead to anti-immigration attitudes unless an explicit connection is drawn (Becker et al., 2011). If it is not and the

problem is framed as more systemic in nature, then there is reason to expect that those in power may be assigned the blame.

### **The Present Research**

Our research aims to test this empirically by examining the relationship between neoliberalism and prejudice, particularly anti-elitist attitudes. Based on the findings and theories reviewed above, we expect that neoliberalism should lead to increased anti-elitism but not increased anti-immigrant prejudice. We further propose that the mechanism through which this occurs is the perception of and reaction to neoliberal societies.

One negative reaction that should occur after being exposed to a neoliberal society including characteristics such as minimal social security is the experience of threat. In line with integrated threat theory (Stephan & Stephan, 2000) and findings on the perception of dominant groups as more threatening (Correnblum & Stephan, 2001), we would expect people to identify those in power as the source of this threat and thus show increased resentment of the elite. Similarly, the high levels of social inequality associated with neoliberalism should create a sense of unfairness for many people. Given that neoliberal ideology encourages ambition and competition while simultaneously making upward mobility difficult, this is likely to increase relative deprivation (Merton, 1938) and anti-elite sentiments.

However, we propose that neoliberalism does not cause these reactions directly but via an increase in anomie, that is, the perception of society as disintegrated and deregulated, which has been shown to result from high inequality and economic insecurity as well as the cultural values of competition and individualism (Messner & Rosenfeld, 2001).

Since anomie has been linked to lower life-satisfaction and hopelessness as well as threat (Teymoori et al., 2016), we included a broad measure of negative reactions including perceived threat and unfairness of a neoliberal society and the corresponding emotions sadness and hopelessness.

Thus, we tested a serial mediation model (Figure 1) in which neoliberalism increases anomie (perceptions of society as fragmented and lacking trust and solidarity), which is linked to negative reactions to this society (feelings of sadness, hopelessness, unfairness and threat), and finally to anti-elitism. The reasoning behind the order of the mediators in our model is based on the idea that the perception of society comes before and causes the reactions participants have to it rather than that reactions to the manipulation should determine its perception.

We conducted two studies in which we exposed participants in Germany (Study 1) and the United Kingdom (Study 2) to the neoliberal ideology and two control conditions and subsequently measured the mediators (anomie and negative reactions) and the dependent variables (anti elitism and anti-immigrant prejudice).

## Study 1

### Method

**Participants.** The sample size was determined a priori using G\*Power (moderate effect size  $f^2 = .25$ , power = .95,  $\alpha = .05$ ). Research assistants recruited 204 participants on the streets of a medium sized German city with the chance of winning vouchers for an online retailer offered as an incentive. Four univariate outliers with z-scores above 3.29 were excluded and Mahalanobi's distance detected two multivariate outliers across the mediators and dependent variables. The final sample consisted of 198 participants (55.6% female,  $M_{age} = 34.0$ ,  $SD = 14.9$ ), almost all of whom were Germans (97.5%). Almost half of the participants (44.5%) were university educated; 15.2% identified as lower middle class, 56.1% as middle class, 27.3% as upper middle class and 1.5% as upper class. Sixty-three participants were randomly assigned to the neoliberal condition, 60 to the social equality, condition, and 75 to the control condition.

**Design and procedure.** Participants were asked to provide information about their gender, age, nationality, education, social class and political orientation before being randomly assigned to one of three conditions. In the experimental conditions, they were given a description of a potential future society and asked to imagine and write down their thoughts on what it would be like to live in this society. In the control condition, no text was provided and participants were asked to imagine what the political, economic, and social situation in Germany might be ten years into the future and then to write down their thoughts about living in the type of society they imagined. The description used in the neoliberalism condition with the changes in the social equality condition in brackets was as follows.

In this future society, flexibility and freedom (equality and justice) are more important than equality and justice (flexibility and freedom). Individual success (public spirit) is valued over public spirit (individual success). Jobs, housing and other resources are distributed according to ability (need). Each (no) individual is left to fend for themselves without (with) a social safety net or the community stepping in to take care of them in times of need. Taxes are low (high) because the government takes on few (many) responsibilities. Private businesses are not (are) regulated by the government and control of the economy is (not) left to the free market. Public services like health care and education are (cannot be) privatized and run for profit and are not (are) free for everyone.

After the manipulation, all participants completed the same measures of mediators and dependent variables. All items were measured on seven-point scales (1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree* unless otherwise stated).

## Measures.<sup>7</sup>

*Political orientation and ideology.* Political orientation was measured before the manipulation with four items ( $\alpha = .76$ ) asking about participants' positions regarding social and economic issues (e.g., "How would you describe your attitude towards social issues, such as the right to abortion or birth control?") with answers measured on a seven-point scale (1 = *liberal/left-wing/socialist* and 7 = *conservative/right-wing/capitalist* depending on the content of the question). SDO was measured using four items from the German translation of the SDO7 (Ho et al., 2015) but was not included in the analysis due to insufficient reliability ( $\alpha = .56$ ).

*Anomie.* We created seven items ( $\alpha = .87$ ) to measure the extent to which participants felt a lack of support and solidarity from society (e.g., "Society fails people in need," "During hard times, there is a community that supports me" [reverse-scored]).

*Negative reactions.* Four items measuring fairness (reverse-scored), hope (reverse-scored), sadness, and threat ( $\alpha = .81$ ) were used to gauge people's reaction to the future society they had read about or imagined in the manipulation.

*Anti-elitism.* Anti-elitism was measured using three items ( $\alpha = .65$ ) one of which was adapted from the anti-elitism sub-scale of Schulz et al.'s (2017) populism scale ("The differences between the common people and the so-called elite are much greater than any differences among the people themselves"). The other two items were newly created ("The German people are honest but the elite is immoral," and "The German people are facing a corrupt elite").

*Anti-immigrant prejudice.* Four items ( $\alpha = .84$ ) adapted from a German right-wing extremism scale (Decker, Hinz, Geißer, & Brähler, 2013) were used to measure anti-immigrant attitudes (e.g., "When there aren't enough jobs for everyone, immigrants should be sent back home").

## Results and Discussion

We used univariate ANOVAs to confirm that there were no differences in age,  $F(2, 193) = .01, p = .994, \eta^2 < .01$ , education,  $F(2, 195) = 2.74, p = .067, \eta^2 = .02$ , social class membership  $F(2, 195) = .83, p = .436, \eta^2 = .01$ , and political orientation  $F(2, 195) = .41, p = .662, \eta^2 < .01$ , between the three conditions. There were significant differences for the mediator variables anomie,  $F(2, 194) = 48.77, p < .001, \eta^2 = .34$ , and negative reactions,  $F(2, 194) = 44.15, p < .001, \eta^2 = .31$ , and the dependent variable anti-elitism,  $F(2, 194) = 3.90, p = .022, \eta^2 = .04$ , as expected (Table 1). Anti-immigrant prejudice was slightly higher in the neoliberalism condition ( $M = 2.59, SD = 1.27$ ) than in the social equality ( $M = 2.39, SD = 1.13$ ) and control conditions ( $M = 2.46, SD = 1.41$ ) but these differences did not approach significance,  $F(2, 193)$

---

<sup>7</sup> For exploratory purposes, national identification, loneliness, need for belonging, loss of control, nationalism, islamophobia, antisemitism, defense of national socialism, support for the right-wing party Alternative for Germany, and group efficacy were also measured. They did not differ between conditions. The first author can be contacted for more information.

= .40,  $p = .670$ ,  $\eta^2 < .01$ .<sup>8</sup> Unlike anti-elitism, anti-immigrant prejudice was strongly correlated with more conservative and right-wing political orientation (see Table 2).

Planned contrasts revealed that participants in the neoliberalism condition scored significantly higher on anomie than those in both the social equality,  $t(194) = 7.99$ ,  $p < .001$ , and control conditions,  $t(194) = 9.08$ ,  $p < .001$ , whereas there was no difference between the social equality and control conditions,  $t(194) = .60$ ,  $p = .551$ . Similarly, those in the neoliberalism condition had significantly more negative reactions than those in the social equality,  $t(194) = 7.12$ ,  $p < .001$ , and control conditions,  $t(194) = 8.92$ ,  $p < .001$ . Again, there was no difference between the latter two conditions,  $t(194) = 1.35$ ,  $p = .179$ . Participants in the neoliberalism condition also showed significantly higher levels of anti-elitism than those in the social equality,  $t(194) = 2.67$ ,  $p = .008$ , and control conditions,  $t(194) = 2.08$ ,  $p = .039$ , but there was no difference between those two conditions,  $t(194) = -.74$ ,  $p = .460$ .

Correlations (Table 2) confirmed the relationships between the mediators and anti-elitism. We tested the serial mediation model using PROCESS (Hayes, 2018, Model 6, 95% confidence intervals, 10,000 bootstrap samples) with condition (neoliberalism vs control, contrast coded: +1/-1) as the predictor, anti-elitism as the outcome, anomie as the first mediator, and negative reactions as the second mediator (Figure 2). In line with our predictions, the effect of neoliberalism on anti-elitism was fully mediated by anomie and negative reactions to the manipulation,  $B = .17$ ,  $SE = .08$ , 95% CI [.02, .33]. To confirm the sequence of the serial mediation, we tested an alternative model where we switched the order of the mediators with negative reactions in first and anomie in second place. The indirect effect for this model was not significant,  $B = .08$ ,  $SE = .07$ , 95% CI [-.06, .23]. The results of Study 1 confirmed our hypotheses about the relationship between neoliberalism and prejudice. We were able to show that participants who were asked to imagine life in a neoliberal future society showed significantly higher levels of anti-elitism but not anti-immigrant prejudice than those in both comparison conditions. We further showed that the effect of neoliberalism on anti-elitism occurred via anomie and resulting negative reactions in a serial mediation model.

## Study 2

Like most of Europe, Germany has adopted neoliberal economic and social policies in many areas. However, it has avoided the severe austerity politics that have been implemented in many European countries after the 2008 financial crisis (Müller, 2013) and some of the elements of the neoliberal society we presented in the manipulation, such as the privatization of education or an end to public healthcare, are not immediate concerns in Germany. This poses the question whether reactions to our manipulation would differ for

---

<sup>8</sup> Because the anti-immigrant prejudice scale contained two items involving perceived economic threat from immigration and two that were focused on cultural threat, we ran separate analyses which showed that there were no effects of condition on either economic,  $F(2, 193) = .26$ ,  $p = .783$ ,  $\eta^2 < .01$ , or cultural threat based prejudice,  $F(2, 193) = .72$ ,  $p = .488$ ,  $\eta^2 < .01$ .

participants who live in more neoliberal countries. We therefore conducted a second study with a sample from the United Kingdom, a country that has been on the forefront of the neoliberal revolution since the era of Margaret Thatcher (Harvey, 2005).

Given that, unlike anti-elitism, anti-immigrant prejudice was linked to more right-wing political orientation in Study 1, an additional goal of Study 2 was to explore the relationship between neoliberalism and anti-immigrant prejudice from a different angle based on this finding. Neoliberalism is an economically right-wing ideology which shares many elements such as the belief in individual responsibility with conservative political views. Social equality on the other hand is at the core of left-wing political orientation. Thus, assuming that the social equality scenario should be more appealing to left-wingers and the neoliberal scenario more appealing to people with conservative views, we added a measure of how desirable participants rated the scenarios as a potential moderator. Accordingly, we expected those in the neoliberal condition who rate the scenario as a more desirable future to show higher anti-immigrant prejudice whereas in the social equality condition, we would expect those who find the scenario more desirable to show less anti-immigrant prejudice.

## Method

**Participants.** The sample size was determined a priori using G\*Power (moderate effect size  $f^2 = .25$ , power = .95,  $\alpha = .05$ ). A total of 173 participants (68.2% female,  $M_{age} = 36.9$ ,  $SD = 11.6$ ) were recruited via Prolific Academic, an online crowdsourcing platform similar to Amazon Mechanical Turk in the United States where participants earn cash rewards for taking part in research studies. All participants were British nationals and identified their ethnicity as White and 54.3% were university educated. A third of the sample (32.9%) identified as working class, 25.4% identified as lower middle class, 37.6% as middle class, and 3.5% as upper middle class. Sixty participants were randomly assigned to the neoliberal condition, 55 to the social equality condition and 58 to the control condition.

**Design and procedure.** The procedure was identical to that in Study 1. All materials were translated into English and verified by native speakers of both languages.

**Measures.** The same measure of political orientation ( $\alpha = .88$ ) as in study one was used. Two more items measuring justice (reverse-scored) and optimism (reverse-scored) were added to the scale assessing negative reactions to the scenario ( $\alpha = .95$ ) in order to balance the number of positively and negatively framed items. The same scales measuring anomie ( $\alpha = .88$ ), anti-elitism ( $\alpha = .69$ ) and anti-immigrant prejudice ( $\alpha = .95$ ) as in Study 1 were used with references to Germany or the German people changed to refer to Britain and the British, respectively. We added an additional measure to assess how desirable participants found the scenarios. This perceived desirability ( $\alpha = .95$ ) was measured with two items (“I would like to live in this society” and “I think this is what society should look like in the future”).

## Results and Discussion

We used univariate ANOVAs to confirm that there were no differences in age,  $F(2, 170) = .10, p = .909, \eta^2 < .01$ , education,  $F(2, 168) = 2.14, p = .121, \eta^2 = .03$ , social class membership,  $F(2, 169) = .93, p = .397, \eta^2 = .01$ , and political orientation,  $F(2, 169) = .77, p = .464, \eta^2 = .02$ , between the three conditions. As expected, there were significant differences for the mediator variables anomie,  $F(2, 166) = 30.68, p < .001, \eta^2 = .27$ , and negative reactions,  $F(2, 170) = 29.42, p < .001, \eta^2 = .27$ , and the dependent variable anti-elitism,  $F(2, 170) = 4.41, p = .014, \eta^2 = .05$ . Desirability of the scenarios also differed significantly,  $F(2, 169) = 20.50, p < .001, \eta^2 = .19$ , across conditions (Table 3). Again, anti-immigrant prejudice was slightly higher in the neoliberalism condition ( $M = 3.26, SD = 1.56$ ) than in the social equality ( $M = 3.14, SD = 1.94$ ) and control conditions ( $M = 3.17, SD = 1.77$ ) but these differences were not significant,  $F(2, 169) = .06, p = .944, \eta^2 < .01$ .

Planned contrasts revealed that participants in the neoliberalism condition had significantly more negative reactions to the scenario than those in the social equality,  $t(170) = 7.12, p < .001$ , and control condition,  $t(170) = 8.92, p < .001$ . Those in the social equality condition had less negative reactions compared to the control condition,  $t(170) = -3.44, p = .001$ . Similarly, those in the neoliberalism condition scored significantly higher on anomie than those in both the social equality,  $t(166) = 7.91, p < .001$ , and control conditions,  $t(166) = 4.50, p < .001$ . Participants in the social equality condition scored lower than those in the control condition,  $t(166) = -3.43, p = .001$ . Participants in the neoliberalism condition also showed significantly higher levels of anti-elitism than those in the social equality,  $t(170) = 2.22, p = .027$ , and control conditions,  $t(170) = 2.93, p = .004$ , but there was no difference between the latter two conditions,  $t(170) = .66, p = .509$ . The neoliberal scenario was rated as significantly less desirable than the social equality scenario,  $t(170) = -6.32, p < .001$ , and the control condition,  $t(170) = -3.98, p < .001$ . The social equality scenario was seen as more desirable than the control condition,  $t(170) = 2.37, p = .019$ .

Correlations (Table 4) confirmed the relationships between the mediators and anti-elitism. We tested the same serial mediation model as in Study 1 using the same procedure (Figure 3). As in the previous study, the effect of neoliberalism on anti-elitism was fully mediated by anomie and negative reactions to the manipulation,  $B = .11, SE = .06, 95\% \text{ CI } [.02, .25]$ .<sup>9</sup>

We conducted a moderated regression analysis with PROCESS (Hayes, 2018, Model 1, 95% confidence intervals, 10,000 bootstrap samples) to test whether participants' perception of the neoliberalism and social equality scenarios as desirable were related to anti-immigrant prejudice. There was a significant interaction between condition and desirability on anti-immigrant prejudice,  $B = .59, SE = .09, t(114) = 6.43, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.41, .77]$ , such that in the neoliberal condition, participants who found the scenario more desirable were higher in

---

<sup>9</sup> Because political orientation was correlated with anti-elitism in Study 2, we added it to the model as a covariate. Full mediation still occurred and there was only a small change in the indirect effect ( $B = .10, SE = .06, 95\% \text{ CI } [.01, .24]$ ).

anti-immigrant prejudice,  $B = .72$ ,  $SE = .14$ ,  $t(114) = 5.11$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.44, .99]. In the social equality condition, those who rated the scenario as less desirable showed higher anti-immigrant prejudice,  $B = -.46$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $t(114) = -3.92$ ,  $p = .002$ , 95% CI [-.69, -.23].

Since unlike in Study 1, there was a significant negative relationship between education and anti-immigrant prejudice in Study 2 (Table 3), we explored whether this effect depended on condition, such that the combination of lower educational level and exposure to neoliberalism may be the source of the resentment toward newcomers. Indeed, moderated regression analysis with PROCESS (Hayes, 2018, Model 1, 95% confidence intervals, 10,000 bootstrap samples) showed a significant interaction,  $B = -.39$ ,  $SE = .18$ ,  $t(112) = -2.12$ ,  $p = .036$ , 95% CI [-.76, -.03]. While there was no effect in the social equality condition,  $B = -.13$ ,  $SE = .29$ ,  $t(112) = -.45$ ,  $p = .652$ , 95% CI [-.70, .44], in the neoliberalism condition, lower educational level was linked to more anti-immigrant prejudice,  $B = -.91$ ,  $SE = .23$ ,  $t(112) = -3.89$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [-1.38, -.45].<sup>10</sup>

The results of Study 2 replicated our main findings from Study 1 in a different societal context. Just like our German sample, British participants who were primed with neoliberalism showed increased prejudice against the elite. Again, this effect was mediated by anomie and negative reactions. Unlike in Study 1, we found differences between the social equality and control conditions, with people primed with social equality reporting less anomie and more positive reactions to the scenario. We were also able to show that participants who rated the neoliberal scenario as more desirable or the social equality scenario as less desirable were higher in anti-immigrant prejudice. We address these findings in the general discussion.

## General Discussion

The aim of our research was to examine more closely the mechanisms by which neoliberalism fuels intergroup conflict. Specifically, we were interested in whether exposure to neoliberalism would lead to prejudice toward privileged or disadvantaged groups. Across two studies in Germany and the United Kingdom, we were able to show that priming people with the idea of living in a neoliberal society led to an increase in anomie, confirming the assumption that neoliberalism with its philosophy of competition and individualism has the potential to atomize societies. Participants exposed to this scenario reported feeling less valued and integrated in the community and felt that they could not expect support or solidarity from society in times of need. This perception of society led them to experience negative emotions, unfairness, and threat which in turn resulted in increased prejudice against the elite but not immigrants.

These findings diverge from previous studies which have found increases in anti-immigrant prejudice as a result of economic threat (Fritsche & Jugert, 2017; Onraet & van Hiel, 2013). One explanation for this divergence is the way the threat was presented. As has been demonstrated in previous research, the way economic threat is framed and attributed

---

<sup>10</sup> We subsequently tested whether this effect was present in the data from Study 1 but found no significant interaction,  $B = .05$ ,  $SE = .17$ ,  $t(124) = .30$ ,  $p = .762$ , 95% CI [-.29, .40].

affects which outgroup is blamed and becomes the target of prejudice. Becker et al. (2011) showed that feeling threatened by the financial crisis of 2008 only led to ethnic prejudice when the economic downturn was attributed to immigration, either by the participants themselves or through experimental manipulation, but not when it was blamed on the economic system.

In our manipulation, no attributions were provided but it could be said that the economic system itself functioned as the source of the threat. Rather than a single event such as a crisis or rise in unemployment, we exposed participants to a society organized along the principles of neoliberalism. Given that its characteristics, such as lower taxes or the privatization of public services, are unlikely to be perceived as caused by or benefitting immigrants, it is perhaps not so surprising that they are not the target of prejudice here. The elite, on the other hand, as the group in charge of and with the power to change the economic system would seem more likely to receive the blame.

The implication is that when people are aware of neoliberalism as an ideology that affects a vast number of areas of political and economic life and reorganizes whole societies, their dissatisfaction with these societies expresses itself as resentment of the elite rather than the scapegoating of minorities. The problem here is that although its ideas dominate our politics, it has been suggested that neoliberalism is not very well known or understood among the general public and many of its key ideas such as the need for low labor costs and cuts to the public sector are framed as non-ideological and without alternative (Monbiot, 2016).

Given that the neoliberal doctrine is based on individualism and competition as the organizing principles of society and human relations, another reason it leads to anti-elitism rather than anti-immigrant prejudice might be the types of stereotypes associated with these groups. Research on the stereotype content model has shown that rich people, the group most similar to the elite, are stereotyped as cold and competent, thus fitting within this ideology. Immigrants on the other hand, when referred to as a generic category rather than specific subgroups for whom different stereotypes exist (e.g., Asians), are viewed as low on the competence dimension (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008). Indeed, the groups that people most strongly associate with the term 'immigrants' are often those who are stereotyped as less competent, for example, Turks in Germany (Asbrock, Lemmer, Becker, Koller, & Wagner, 2014). Thus, immigrants might not be seen as the most likely group to propagate the neoliberal doctrine.

### **Political and Social Implications**

Our manipulation did not contain any references to immigration, globalization or other themes that might link the consequences of neoliberal policies to immigrants or refugees. In reality, of course, these issues are often intertwined in people's minds, be it that unemployment or low wages are blamed on competition between "natives" and immigrants or that cuts to social security benefits are seen as a result of governments providing benefits to asylum seekers. The findings from Study 2 regarding the combined effects of exposure to

neoliberalism and educational levels on anti-immigrant prejudice suggest that this might apply especially to those who are less educated. While this may be due to the fact that individuals with fewer educational qualifications are more likely to experience job insecurity and competition in a neoliberal scenario, another explanation is that they are more susceptible to the kind of rhetoric that links these problems to immigration.

It has been suggested that this constitutes a deliberate strategy by politicians and the elite to use immigration as a distraction from the results of neoliberal politics (Pujol, 2015). For example, with regard to the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom, Dorling (2016) argued that the campaign to leave the European Union successfully stoked fears of immigrants in order to distract from the neoliberal politics of austerity that are actually at the root of the rising inequality and underfunding of public services that were blamed on out-of-control immigration. Similar arguments have been made about the Trump administration's increasingly aggressive anti-immigrant rhetoric and its implementation of tax cuts for America's wealthy and corporations (Paletta & Werner, 2018).

If this is indeed the case, our research suggests that those who aim to advance neoliberal policies have good reason to employ such a strategy, as we have shown that when people are exposed to neoliberalism on its own, they not only react negatively but also show increased resentment of its supposed beneficiaries. Our findings provide support for the argument that anti-immigration attitudes are not a natural consequence of economic threat but the result of a political discourse which directs blame for rising inequality and economic insecurity away from those at the top and toward immigrants.

In Study 2, we were able to show that while neoliberalism leads to perceptions of atomization and low social trust, social equality had the opposite effect. People who were exposed to a highly equal society with a strong social safety net perceived higher social cohesion and solidarity and felt less threatened and hopeless and those who found this scenario desirable also showed less anti-immigrant prejudice. Interestingly, in Study 1 the social equality scenario was not perceived more positively than the control condition. A possible explanation is that in Germany, policies that could be seen as socialist in nature are still strongly associated with the repressive German Democratic Republic and may therefore have negative connotations for participants.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

In the above studies we experimentally manipulated whether participants were exposed to a neoliberal society or a different scenario. However, we did not manipulate anomie or the experience of threat, unfairness, and negative emotions. Therefore, the conclusions we can draw about causality for those steps of the mediation model are only tentative. Future research is needed to test the causal order by manipulating the mediators.

The measure of desirability in Study 2 showed that the society in the social equality condition was evaluated more positively than the neoliberal society which is, in our interpretation, most likely an accurate reflection of people's preferences. However, while we

took care to phrase the descriptions of the scenarios in the manipulation in the most neutral way possible, we cannot completely rule out the possibility that the descriptors chosen for each prime might have influenced participants' judgements and reactions.

In order to expand our understanding of the effects of neoliberalism on anti-elitism, a further avenue for future research would be a closer examination of who people have in mind when they think about the elite in this context, for instance, whether the group is defined in terms of wealth, status, education, political power or other criteria. Furthermore, there are other targets of prejudice that may be of interest in this context, for example the poor or unemployed who according to the neoliberal doctrine have failed at being successful, competitive and self-reliant.

## **Conclusion**

The results of our research suggest that the relationship between neoliberalism and intergroup relations is a complex one. Exposure to our neoliberal scenario caused a range of reactions indicative of social conflict such as higher levels of societal disintegration, lack of trust, threat and unfairness. These effects did not lead to increased anti-immigrant prejudice, which provides support for the idea that there is no inevitable link from threatening economic circumstances to the scapegoating of disadvantaged groups in society. However, unlike in our manipulation, immigration and the economy are rarely treated as separate issues in public discourse nowadays. It has been suggested that this constitutes a deliberate political strategy and this assessment fits our finding that anti-immigrant prejudice goes hand in hand with a preference for a neoliberal future rather than negative reactions to it. Therefore, we propose that the mechanisms by which blame for the negative consequences of neoliberal politics are directed away from those in power and toward immigrants and other minorities warrant more attention.

## References

- Akkerman, A., Mudde, C., & Zaslove, A. (2014). How populist are the people? Measuring populist attitudes in voters. *Comparative Political Studies*, *47*, 1324–1353.
- Albertazzi, D., & McDonnell, D. (Eds.). (2008). *Twenty-first century populism: The spectre of Western European democracy*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Asbrock, F., Lemmer, G., Becker, J. C., Koller, J., & Wagner, U. (2014). “Who are these foreigners anyway?” The content of the term foreigner and its impact on prejudice. *Sage Open*, *4*(2), 1-8.
- Becker, J. C., Wagner, U., & Christ, O. (2011). Consequences of the 2008 financial crisis for intergroup relations. *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations*, *14*, 871-885.
- Blank T. (2003). Determinants of national identity in East and West Germany: An empirical comparison of theories on the significance of authoritarianism, anomie, and general self-esteem. *Political Psychology*, *24*, 259–88.
- Butz, D. A., Yogeewaran, K. (2011). A new threat in the air: macroeconomic threat increases prejudice against Asian Americans. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *47*(1), 22-27.
- Corenblum, B., & Stephan, W. G. (2001). White fears and native apprehensions: An integrated threat theory approach to intergroup attitudes. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science / Revue Canadienne des Sciences du Comportement*, *33*, 251-268.
- Cuddy, A. J. C., Fiske, S. T., & Glick, P. (2008). Warmth and competence as universal dimensions of social perception: The stereotype content model and the BIAS map. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 40, pp. 61-149). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Decker, O., Hinz, A., Geißler, N., & Brähler, E. (2013). Fragebogen zur rechtsextremen Einstellung – Leipziger Form (FR-LF) [A questionnaire for measuring right-wing extremism]. In O. Decker, J. Kiess, & E. Brähler (Eds.), *Rechtsextremismus der Mitte. Eine sozialpsychologische Gegenwartsdiagnose* [Right-wing extremism in the middle classes. A social psychological assessment of the current state of society] (pp. 197-212). Gießen, Germany: Psychosozial-Verlag.
- Dorling, D. (2016) Brexit: The decision of a divided country. *British Medical Journal*, *354*.
- Durkheim E. (1897/1987). *Suicide*. London, UK: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Fritsche, I., & Jugert, P. (2017). The consequences of economic threat for motivated social cognition and action. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *18*, 31–36.

- Fritsche, I., Moya, M., Bukowski, M., Jugert, P., de Lemus, S., Decker, O., Valor-Segura, I., & Navarro-Carrillo, G. (2017). The Great Recession and Group-Based Control: Converting Personal Helplessness into Social Class In-Group Trust and Collective Action. *Journal of Social Issues, 73*(1), 117–137.
- Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Hayes, A. F. (2018). *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Heydari A., Teymoori A., Haghish E., & Mohamadi, B. (2014). Influential factors on ethnocentrism: The effect of socioeconomic status, anomie, and authoritarianism. *Social Science Information, 53*, 240–54.
- Ho, A.K., Sidanius, J., Kteily, N., Sheehy-Skeffington, J., Pratto, F., Henkel, K.E., Foels, R., & Stewart, A.L. (2015). The nature of social dominance orientation: Theorizing and measuring preferences for intergroup inequality using the new SDO 7 scale. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 109*, 1003–1028.
- Hüpping, S. (2006). Anomia. Unsicher in der Orientierung, sicher in der Abwertung [Anomia. Uncertain orientation, certain depreciation]. In W. Heitmeyer (Ed.), *Deutsche Zustände* [The German condition] (Vol. 4, pp. 86-100). Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Suhrkamp.
- Hüpping, S., & Reinecke, J. (2007). Abwärtsdriftende Regionen - Die Bedeutung sozioökonomischer Entwicklungen für Orientierungslosigkeit und Gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit [Declining regions - the role of socioeconomic developments for disorientation and group-focused enmity]. In W. Heitmeyer (Ed.), *Deutsche Zustände* [The German condition] (Vol. 5, pp. 77-101). Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Suhrkamp
- Kühnel, S., & Schmidt, P. (2002). Orientierungslosigkeit – Ungünstige Effekte für schwache Gruppen [Disorientation – adverse effects for low-status groups]. In W. Heitmeyer (Ed.), *Deutsche Zustände* [The German condition] (Vol. 1, pp. 83-95). Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Suhrkamp.
- Legge, S., & Heitmeyer, W. (2012). Anomia and discrimination. In S. Salzborn, E. Davidov, & J. Reinecke (Eds.), *Methods, theories and empirical applications in the social sciences* (pp. 117-125). Wiesbaden, Germany: Springer Fachmedien.
- Merton, R. (1938). Social structure and anomie. *American Sociological Review, 3*, 672–82.
- Messner, S.F., & Rosenfeld, R. (2001). *Crime and the American dream* (3rd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Monbiot, G. (2016). *How did we get into this mess? Politics, equality, nature*. London, UK: Verso Books.

- Mudde, C. (2007). *Populist radical right parties in Europe*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Müller, B. (2013). *Erosion der gesellschaftlichen Mitte* [The erosion of the middle classes]. Hamburg, Germany: VSA Verlag.
- Nachtwey, O. (2016). *Die Abstiegs-gesellschaft: Über das Aufbegehren in der regressiven Moderne* [The declining society. On rising up in the era of regressive modernity]. Berlin, Germany: Suhrkamp.
- Oishi, S., Kesebir, S., & Diener, E. (2011). Income inequality and happiness. *Psychological Science*, 22, 1095–1100.
- Onraet, E., & van Hiel, A. (2013). When threat to society becomes a threat to oneself: Implications for right-wing attitudes and ethnic prejudice. *International Journal of Psychology*, 48, 25-34.
- Paletta, D., & Werner, E. (2018, November 2). *After GOP 2018 tax cut plans fell apart, immigration filled the campaign void*. The Washington Post. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com>
- Piketty, T. (2015). *The economics of inequality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Pujol, M. J. (2015) The neoliberal construction of immigration as crisis. *Online Theses and Dissertations*, 307. <https://encompass.eku.edu/etd/307>
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Schulz, A., Müller, P., Schemer, C., Wirz, D. S., Wettstein, M., & Wirth, W. (2017). Measuring populist attitudes on three dimensions. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 30, 316–326.
- Stephan, W. G., & Stephan, C. W. (2000). An integrated threat theory of prejudice. In S. Oskamp (Ed.), *Reducing prejudice and discrimination* (pp. 23-45). Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Teymoori, A., Jetten, J., Bastian, B., Ariyanto, A., Autin, F., Ayub, N., ... Wohl, M. (2016). Revisiting the measurement of anomie. *PLOS ONE*, 11(7), e0158370.
- Wilkinson, R., & Pickett, K. (2009). *The spirit level: Why equality is better for everyone*. London, UK: Allen Lane.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations by Condition (Study 1).

Measure	Condition	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Anomie	Neoliberalism	63	5.26	1.14
	Social equality	59	3.56	1.11
	Control	75	3.44	1.24
Negative reactions	Neoliberalism	63	5.64	1.25
	Social equality	59	3.98	1.22
	Control	75	3.68	1.38
Anti-elitism	Neoliberalism	63	3.75	1.03
	Social equality	59	3.17	1.16
	Control	75	3.32	1.36
Anti-immigrant prejudice	Neoliberalism	63	2.59	1.27
	Social equality	58	2.39	1.13
	Control	75	2.46	1.41

Table 2. *Correlations Between Variables (Study 1).*

Measure	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age	.40**	.08	-.01	-.13	-.09	-.07	-.09
2. Education		.10	.10	-.05	-.02	-.13	-.09
3. Social Class			.20*	-.08	-.03	-.10	.03
4. Political Orientation				-.07	-.09	.04	.53**
5. Anomie					.79**	.32**	.07
6. Negative Reactions						.34**	.03
7. Anti-Elitism							.35**
8. Anti-immigrant prejudice							-

\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations by Condition (Study 2).

Measure	Condition	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Anomie	Neoliberalism	59	5.04	1.13
	Social equality	54	3.30	1.13
	Control	56	4.06	1.24
Negative reactions	Neoliberalism	60	5.55	1.40
	Social equality	55	3.37	1.54
	Control	58	4.34	1.57
Anti-elitism	Neoliberalism	60	4.82	1.06
	Social equality	55	4.32	1.18
	Control	58	4.17	1.32
Anti-immigrant prejudice	Neoliberalism	60	3.26	2.05
	Social equality	54	3.14	1.83
	Control	58	3.17	1.77
Desirability	Neoliberalism	60	2.08	1.56
	Social equality	55	4.17	1.94
	Control	58	3.38	1.83

Table 4. *Correlations between variables (Study 2).*

Measure	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Age	.07	-.04	.08	.14	.10	.09	.08	-.05
2. Education		.38***	-.08	-.13	-.05	.02	-.23**	.00
3. Social Class			.03	-.11	-.05	-.04	-.13	-.01
4. Pol. Orientation				.07	-.01	-.23**	.57***	-.03
5. Anomie					.74***	.16*	.13	-.64***
6. Neg. Reactions						.22**	.03	-.86***
7. Anti-Elitism							-.07	-.09
8. Anti-Immigration								-.03
9. Desirability								-

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Figure 1. Proposed Mediation Model.

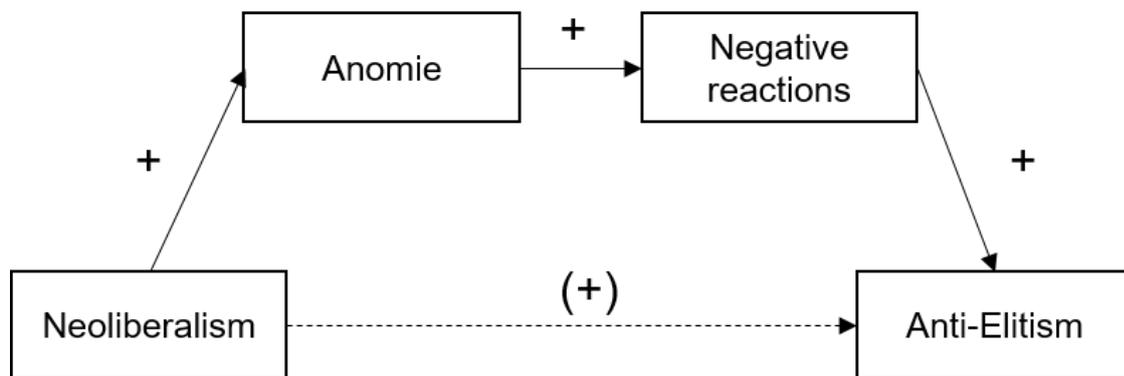
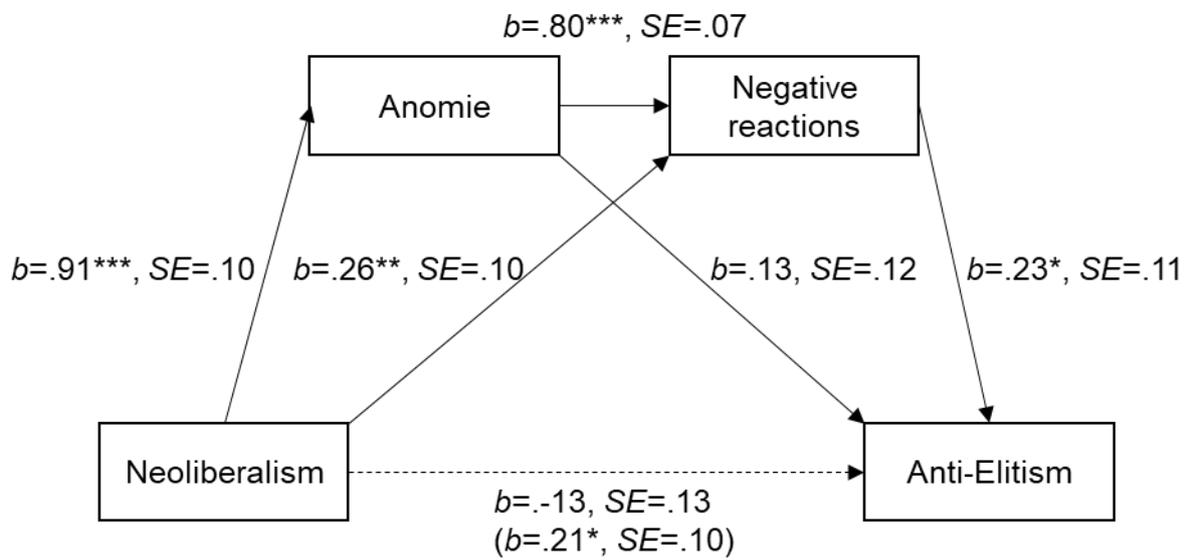
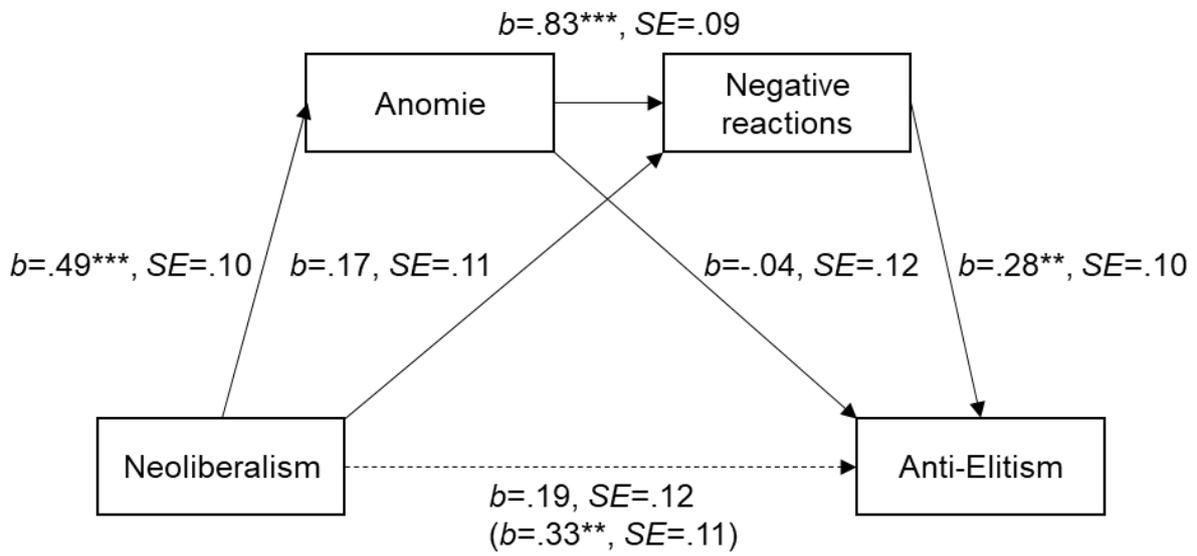


Figure 2. Mediation model illustrating the link between neoliberalism and anti-elitism via anomie and negative reactions (Study 1).



\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Figure 3. Mediation model illustrating the link between neoliberalism and anti-elitism via anomie and negative reactions (Study 2).



\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

## 2.4 Manuscript 3

### **Neoliberalism Reduces Well-being by Promoting a Sense of Social Disconnection, Competition and Loneliness**

Becker, J. C.<sup>1</sup>, Hartwich, L.<sup>1</sup>, & Haslam, S. A.<sup>2</sup> (2020). *Neoliberalism Reduces Well-being by Promoting a Sense of Social Disconnection, Competition and Loneliness*. Manuscript submitted for publication.

<sup>1</sup> Social Psychology Unit, Department of Psychology, Osnabrück University, Germany

<sup>2</sup> School of Psychology, The University of Queensland, Australia

Submission date: January 21, 2020, Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin

## Abstract

Neoliberalism has become the dominant ideology in many parts of the world. Yet there is little empirical research on its psychological impact. On the basis of a social identity approach to health, we hypothesize that, by reducing people's sense of connection to others, neoliberalism can increase loneliness and worsen our well-being. Study 1 (N = 946) shows that the more neoliberal people perceive society to be, the worse their well-being, a relationship mediated via social disconnection and loneliness. In two experiments, we showed that exposure to neoliberal ideology increases loneliness (Study 2 N = 204) and, through this, well-being (Study 3, N = 173). In Study 4 (N = 303), we found that exposure to neoliberal ideology increased loneliness by reducing people's sense of connection to others and by increasing perceptions of being in competition with others. We discuss neoliberalism as a contemporary social determinant of loneliness and health problems.

*Keywords:* Neoliberalism, loneliness, well-being, social identity, social cure

## Neoliberalism reduces well-being by promoting a sense of social disconnection, competition and loneliness

One key idea of neoliberal ideology is that economies and societies should be organized along the principles of the free market. The merits and shortcomings of this ideology are routinely debated in fields of political science and economics (e.g., Duménil & Lévy, 2011; Harvey, 2007), but in this paper we explore its implications for health and well-being. Here it could be argued that neoliberalism will generally be beneficial because this ideology encourages individuals' striving for self-actualization, personal growth, and happiness (Adams, Estrada-Villalta, Sullivan & Markus, 2019). However, it can equally be argued that individuals are harmed by neoliberalism because this ideology promotes competition and, in the process, undermines people's sense of solidarity and social security (e.g., Müller, 2013; Piketty, 2015). Research on the social psychological effects of neoliberalism is relatively new (e.g., Betache & Chiu, 2019). Nevertheless, sociologists, psychologists and political scientists have presented correlational data showing that societal systems which create socio-economic inequality (which can be one consequence of neoliberalism) tend to have detrimental effects on citizens' educational achievement, rates of imprisonment, obesity and violence, as well as on their physical and mental health (e.g., Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). However, to our knowledge, there is no evidence pertaining to the effects of neoliberal ideology on variables such as social isolation, loneliness and well-being. The present research fills this gap by exploring whether neoliberal ideology might be a social determinant of loneliness and health-related problems.

In this context, previous research has shown that social factors have an important impact on health. Although lay people believe that lifestyle and environmental factors such as smoking and air pollution are the most important determinants of mortality, recent research suggests that social factors have the same or even a greater impact on health (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010; Holt-Lunstad, Smith, Baker, Harris & Stephenson, 2015). Indeed, while their importance tends to be underestimated (Haslam, et al, 2018), meta-analytic evidence suggests that social isolation, loneliness and living alone are among the most potent determinants of mortality (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015). Loneliness is also related to stress hormones, immune and cardiovascular function (e.g., Cacioppo & Patrick, 2009). In this way, the link between social disconnection and poorer health outcomes has been validated across multiple studies. In the present research, we aim to extend this work by examining social determinants of loneliness. More specifically, we test the novel hypothesis that exposure to neoliberal ideology might increase people's feelings of loneliness and, through this, have a negative impact on their health and well-being.

### **Neoliberalism produces Social Inequality**

Neoliberalism is founded on assertions that human well-being and progress can best be secured by increasing entrepreneurial freedom, individual responsibility, property

ownership, and free trade while at the same time keeping government and state involvement in economic affairs to a minimum (Harvey, 2005). This has become the dominant political-economic ideology in Western countries in recent decades, but, to date, little or no research has examined its impact on health and well-being. This is an oversight that the present paper seeks to address.

Common economic and social consequences of neoliberal policies include reduced access to social security and increased social inequality (Müller, 2013; Piketty, 2015). These, in turn, are related to lower levels of social cohesion and trust and a decline of community life (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). In line with this, researchers have shown that happiness declines as social inequality rises (Oishi, Kesebir & Diener, 2011; but see Li, Zuckerman & Diener, 2019). Importantly, this relationship between inequality and happiness is explained statistically by lower perceived fairness and lower general trust rather than by lower household income (Oishi et al., 2011). Accordingly, there is already evidence that by fostering social inequality neoliberal politics can have a negative impact on well-being at a societal level. In the present analysis, however, we focus on the impact of neoliberalism on the psychology of individuals.

### **Why Should Neoliberalism Elicit Feelings of Loneliness?**

Whereas social isolation can be objectively measured (e.g., as the number of people in a person's social networks, their frequency of social contact) and does not necessarily have negative consequences for a person (e.g., to the extent that they prefer having few friends or being alone), loneliness is the perception of *unwanted* social isolation, and relates to a subjective emotional state of being alone (Holt-Lundstad et al., 2015). In this, it reflects a discrepancy between actual and desired social relationships (Holt-Lundstad et al., 2015; Peplau & Perlman, 1982). As a result, it is not the quantity of a person's social connections that matter for their well-being, but their subjective satisfaction with the connections that they have (e.g., Cacioppo & Patrick, 2009).

Neoliberal systems build on and reinforce specific psychological tendencies of liberal individualism, for instance, an imperative for personal growth and fulfillment, and an emphasis on affect management for self-regulation (Adams et al., 2019). Pursuit of these ideals is argued to make people happy, excited, and enthusiastic, and to help them flourish and self-expand (Adams et al., 2019; Maslow, 1959). So why might this aspiration for personal growth lead to problematic health outcomes? There are at least two inter-related literatures that speak to this question.

The first of these relates to the observation that the neoliberal self ("homo neoliberalus", Teo, 2018) is an entrepreneurial subject whose philosophy recommends that individuals pursue an imperative for personal growth and fulfillment by *competing* with each other (e.g., Scharff, 2016). Here, a growing body of work suggests that this state of interpersonal competition can have a negative impact on psychological experience — especially if it is prolonged and inescapable (e.g., Adams et al., 2019; Teo, 2018; Scharff,

2016). In particular, this is because it places the responsibility for success on people's own shoulders and, in the process, weakens broader solidarities that might otherwise buffer them against failure (Adams et al., 2019; Teo, 2018). This in turn has been linked to feelings of insecurity, anxiety, stress and depression (e.g., Sennett, 1998). For example, research has shown that a neoliberal conception of personal debt as failure is associated with increased anxiety, depression and blood pressure (Sweet, 2018). Further, the neoliberal narrative of personal responsibility has been associated with an increase in shaming (e.g., in discourse on obesity; e.g., Peacock, Bissel, & Owen, 2014).

Relatedly, a second large body of research suggests that neoliberalism can be problematic because the individualism at its core denies people access to group life and its curative potential (Haslam, Jetten, Cruwys, Dingle & Haslam, 2018). In this context, a range of studies have shown that group memberships, and the sense of social identity that they furnish people with, are the basis for a range of health-enhancing social psychological resources — including social connection and social support (Drury, Brown, González, & Miranda, 2016; Haslam, Reicher & Levine, 2012; Hopkins & Reicher, 2017; Hopkins, Reicher, Khan, Tewari, Srinivasan, & Stevenson, 2016; Muldoon & Lowe, 2012; McNamara, Stevenson, & Muldoon, 2013; Muldoon, Schmid, & Downes, 2009), as well as a sense of control (Greenaway et al., 2015), purpose, and meaning (Cruwys et al., 2013). In line with this point, evidence suggests, for example, that joining meaningful groups is an important way for people to stave off depression and overcome social isolation (Cruwys et al., 2013; Haslam et al., 2016, 2019). To the extent, then, that neoliberalism reduces people's capacity to access this 'social cure' it might be expected to have deleterious consequences for health (Jetten, Haslam, Haslam, Dingle, & Jones, 2014).

At the same time, the idea that neoliberalism increases loneliness is seemingly contradicted by research which has found levels of loneliness to be higher in collectivistic than in individualistic societies (Lykes & Kimmelmeier, 2014), given that the former are less likely to be neoliberal (e.g. Adams et al., 2019). However, recent research offers an explanation for this apparent anomaly in showing that what matters when it comes to loneliness (and hence health) is individuals' *internalized* individualism/collectivism: higher internalized collectivism is related to lower loneliness, whereas higher internalized individualism implies lower social embeddedness (Heu, van Zomeren, & Hansen, 2019; Jylhä & Jakela, 1990). These findings suggest that at the individual level of analysis, internalized individualism of the kind promoted by neoliberalism could be a risk factor for loneliness because it encourages competition and reduces social identification (Haslam et al., 2018; Heu et al., 2019). Nevertheless, this is an argument that remains to be properly tested.

## **The Present Research**

The present article provides an experimental test of the above ideas. More specifically, we explore the argument that neoliberalism with its emphasis on personal responsibility and its de-emphasis on social support and solidarity can lead to feelings of loneliness and of being

alone in a highly competitive system in ways suggested by the model presented in Figure 1. This suggests that neoliberalism leads to social disconnection and feelings of competition, both of which increase feelings of loneliness, and, in turn, negatively impact well-being. Our first three studies test different aspects of this model. Specifically, Study 1 uses cross-sectional data to examine whether there is a relationship between perceived neoliberalism and well-being, and whether this is mediated by feelings of disconnection and loneliness (the upper pathway in Figure 1). Study 2 then explores this relationship experimentally by testing whether exposure to neoliberalism leads to increased feelings of loneliness. Study 3 tests whether exposure to neoliberalism leads to lower levels of well-being mediated by feelings of loneliness. Finally, Study 4 tests the full model.

## Study 1

### Method

**Participants.** The sample size was determined a priori using the Monte Carlo power analysis for indirect effects (Schoemann, Boulton, & Short, 2017; correlations among variables = .30, power = .80,  $\alpha = .05$ ) indicating that we needed 238 participants to detect a serial mediation with two mediators. Data were collected at the railway station and on the university campus of a medium-sized town in Germany and advertised via Facebook. Of the 248 people who completed the survey, three did not finish. Most of the final sample of 245 participants were Germans (96%), 70% were female. They were 19-63 years old ( $M = 25.38$ ,  $SD = 7.95$ ). Participants all had the chance to win one of two €50 vouchers.

### Measures.

*Neoliberalism* was assessed with ten self-developed items based on Hartwich and Becker (2019; e.g., “In our society, control over the economy is left to the free market”, for the full scale, see Appendix), one item was deleted to improve reliability,  $\alpha = .78$ . As with all other measures, responses were made on six-point rating scales (where 1 = *do not agree at all*, 6 = *agree completely*).

*Social disconnection* was measured with five items (“I don't feel a sense of belonging”, “I don't feel supported by my social groups”), three of which were reverse-coded (“I belong to a community that supports each other”, “I have social groups that I identify with”, “The social groups I belong to give my life meaning”),  $\alpha = .79$ .

*Loneliness* was assessed with four items, two self-developed items (“I am alone”, “I feel lonely”) and two items from the UCLA Loneliness scale (Russell, Peplau, & Ferguson, 1978: “I feel isolated from others”, “I feel left out”);  $\alpha = .85$ .

*Well-being* was assessed with two items from the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (Demerouti & Bakker, 2008: “I often feel exhausted”, “When I get home at the end of the day I'm too tired to get anything done” [both reverse-coded] and three additional items (“I am satisfied with my physical well-being”, “I feel like I'm not leading a healthy life” [reverse-

coded]; “I often have symptoms such as headache, back pain or stomach pain” [reverse-coded]). Together these created a reliable scale ( $\alpha = .78$ ).

## Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and correlations. In order to test the upper pathway depicted in Figure 1, we conducted a mediation analysis using PROCESS (Hayes, 2018, Model 6, bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals, 10,000 bootstrap samples) with perceived neoliberalism as the predictor, well-being as the outcome, and disconnection, and loneliness as serial mediators. The total effect of exposure to neoliberalism on well-being was significant,  $b = -.43$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $t(244) = -4.65$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [-.60, -.27]. Exposure to neoliberalism was related to feelings of social disconnection,  $b = .33$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $t(244) = 5.71$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.21, .44], which in turn was related to loneliness,  $b = .82$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $t(244) = 9.76$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.65, .98]. Loneliness was, in turn, related to well-being,  $b = -.34$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $t(244) = -4.62$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [-.48, -.19]. When all variables were entered into the model, the total effect of neoliberalism on well-being was reduced to a non-significant direct effect,  $b = -.16$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $t(244) = -1.74$ ,  $p = .082$ , 95% CI [-.35, .02]. As expected, the effect of exposure to neoliberalism on well-being was mediated via social disconnection and loneliness,  $B = -.09$ ,  $SE = .04$ , 95% CI [-.17, -.03], in line with our hypothesis that neoliberalism is related to feelings of social isolation, which are positively linked to loneliness and negatively linked to well-being (see Figure 2). While these findings provided preliminary support for our hypothesis, the study’s correlational design precludes definitive statements about the causal relations between these variables. Accordingly, in the next two studies, we addressed this limitation by exposing individuals to neoliberal ideology and interrogating its causal impact on loneliness (Study 2) and well-being (Study 3).

## Study 2

### Method

**Participants.** The variables included in this study were part of a larger survey that addressed a broad range of consequences of neoliberalism and hence a number of measures not relevant to the present research (Hartwich & Becker, 2019). The sample size was determined a priori using G\*Power (moderate effect size  $f^2 = .25$ , power = .95,  $\alpha = .05$ ). Half of the 204 participants (54%) were female ( $M_{age} = 33.20$ ,  $SD = 17.48$ ) and most were Germans (97.5%).

**Design and procedure.** Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions (exposure to neoliberalism, exposure to social equality, control). In the two experimental conditions, they were provided with a description of a potential future society and asked to imagine and write down their thoughts about what it would be like to live in this society. In the control condition, we did not provide any such text and participants were

simply asked to imagine what the political, economic and social situation in Germany might be ten years into the future and then to reflect on life in the type of society they imagined. The description used in the neoliberalism condition was as follows [with the changes in the social equality condition in brackets]:

In this future society, flexibility and freedom [equality and justice] are more important than equality and justice [flexibility and freedom]. Individual success [public spirit] is valued over public spirit [individual success]. Jobs, housing and other resources are distributed according to ability [need]. Each [no] individual is left to fend for themselves without [with] a social safety net or the community stepping in to take care of them in times of need. Taxes are low [high] because the government takes on few [many] responsibilities. Private businesses are not [are] regulated by the government and control of the economy is [not] left to the free market. Public services like health care and education are [cannot be] privatized and run for profit and are not [are] free for everyone.

**Measures.**<sup>11</sup> *Loneliness* was measured with two items, developed for this study (“In the end, everyone is alone/I feel lonely”);  $\alpha = .72$  on a seven-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*).

## Results and Discussion

An univariate ANOVA with condition as the independent variable and loneliness as the depended variable revealed a significant main effect,  $F(2, 200) = 22.62, p < .001, \eta^2 = .18$ . Post-hoc tests using Bonferroni correction revealed that, as hypothesized, participants in the neoliberalism condition were significantly more lonely ( $M = 4.68, SD = 1.79$ ) than those in the social equality ( $M = 3.28, SD = 1.52$ ),  $p < .001$ , and control conditions ( $M = 2.90, SD = 1.57$ ),  $p < .001$  (while there was no difference between the social equality and control conditions,  $p = .530$ ). This finding is consistent with the correlational patterns observed in Study 1, but provides the first causal evidence that neoliberal ideology can create a sense of loneliness.<sup>12</sup>

### Study 3

Although it was consistent with our model, Study 2 did not include indicators of well-being. To address this lacuna, we conducted a third study in which we tested whether exposure to neoliberalism decreases well-being through increased feelings of loneliness. To increase generalizability, participants in this study were from the United Kingdom, a country whose conservative leaders have played a pioneering role in championing neoliberalism — in

---

<sup>11</sup> We also assessed anomie, negative reactions, anti-elitism, anti-immigrant prejudice (see Hartwich & Becker, 2019) and some further variables. The first author can be contacted for more details.

<sup>12</sup> Results were not moderated by political orientation or social class (assessed via self-categorization as working class, lower middle class, middle class, upper middle class, upper class).

particular, following Margaret Thatcher's (in)famous pronouncement that "there is no such thing as society" (Harvey, 2005).

## Method

**Participants.** The variables we selected in this study were part of a larger survey that was also used to answer a different research question (Hartwich & Becker, 2019). The sample size was determined a priori using G\*Power (moderate effect size  $f^2 = .25$ , power = .95,  $\alpha = .05$ ). A total of 173 participants (68.2% female,  $M_{age} = 36.9$ ,  $SD = 11.6$ ) were recruited via Prolific Academic. Participants were paid two pounds for their participation. All participants were British nationals and identified their ethnicity as White.

**Design and procedure.** The procedure was identical to that of Study 2. All materials were translated into English and verified by native speakers of both languages. Items were assessed on seven-point scales (1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*).

**Measures.**<sup>13</sup> *Loneliness* was assessed with two items from Study 1 ("In the end, everyone is alone", "I feel lonely") and two items from the UCLA Loneliness scale (Russell, Peplau, & Ferguson, 1978: "I feel isolated from others", "I feel left out");  $\alpha = .85$ .

*Well-being* was assessed with four items adapted from the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, Wad, Mendelson, Mock & Erbaugh, 1961: "I feel discouraged about the future", "I feel like a failure", "I am disappointed in myself", "I am worried about my health", all reverse coded) and two additional items ("I am satisfied with my physical well-being", "I feel like I'm not leading a healthy life" [reverse coded]);  $\alpha = .84$ .

## Results and Discussion

Loneliness and well-being were correlated ( $r = -.64$ ,  $p < .001$ ). ANOVAs with condition as a between-subject factor and loneliness, and health as dependent variables revealed significant main effects,  $F(2, 170) = 8.67$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .09$ ,  $F(2, 170) = 7.36$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .08$ , respectively. Post-hoc tests using Bonferroni replicated the finding from Study 2 with participants in the neoliberalism condition being significantly more lonely ( $M = 4.15$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ) than those in the social equality ( $M = 3.20$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ),  $p = .001$ , and control conditions ( $M = 3.31$ ,  $SD = 1.45$ ),  $p < .001$ ; while there was no difference between the social equality and control condition,  $p = 1.000$ ). Moreover, participants in the neoliberalism condition had lower well-being ( $M = 4.02$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ ) than those in both the social equality ( $M = 4.94$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ),  $p = .001$ , and the control condition ( $M = 4.57$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ , although this effect only approached traditional significance levels,  $p < .067$ ; with again there being no difference between the social equality and control conditions,  $p = .395$ ).

As in Study 1, we conducted a mediation analysis using PROCESS (Hayes, 2018, Model 4, bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals, 10,000 bootstrap samples) with condition

---

<sup>13</sup> We also assessed anomie, negative reactions, anti-elitism, anti-immigrant prejudice (see Hartwich & Becker, 2019) and some further variables. The first author can be contacted for more details.

(neoliberalism vs. control, contrast coded: +1/-1) as the predictor, well-being as the outcome, and loneliness as mediator (see Figure 3). The total effect of exposure to neoliberalism on well-being was significant ( $b = -.27$ ,  $SE = .13$ ,  $t(117) = -2.15$ ,  $p = .034$ ). Exposure to neoliberalism predicted loneliness ( $b = .42$ ,  $SE = .13$ ,  $t(117) = 3.32$ ,  $p = .001$ ) and loneliness predicted well-being ( $b = -.62$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $t(117) = -8.34$ ,  $p < .001$ ). When all variables were entered into the model, the total effect of neoliberalism was reduced to a non-significant direct effect ( $b = -0.10$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ ,  $t(117) = -0.13$ ,  $p = .894$ ). As hypothesized, loneliness mediated the effect of exposure to neoliberalism on well-being,  $B = -0.26$ ,  $SE = .09$ , 95% CI [-.11, -.45], suggesting that people who are exposed to neoliberal ideology are have lower well-being because they feel lonelier. These results thus replicate and extend the findings of Study 1 and 2. In line with our primary hypothesis, they point to the capacity for neoliberal ideology to compromise well-being by increasing people's loneliness.<sup>14</sup>

## Study 4

Study 4 was conducted to test the full model depicted in Figure 1, including an increased sense of competition as an additional process variable that was hypothesized to mediate the effect of exposure to neoliberal ideology on loneliness.

### Method

**Participants.** The sample size was determined a priori using G\*Power (moderate effect size  $f^2 = .25$ , power = .95,  $\alpha = .05$ ). The sample size was determined a priori using the Monte Carlo power analysis for indirect effects (Schoemann, Boulton, & Short, 2017; power = .80,  $\alpha = .05$ ) indicating that we need 238 participants to detect a serial mediation with two mediators. However, because we included a further parallel mediation, we sampled more participants than this. A total of 303 US-American participants (54 % female,  $M_{age} = 33.3$ ,  $SD = 11.0$ ) were recruited via Prolific Academic and were paid £1.50 for participating. A third of the sample (34.4 %) reported having a high school diploma as their highest educational qualification and 64.6 % were university educated. Most participants identified as upper (11.9 %), regular (36.6 %) or lower (20.5 %) middle class, while 23.8 % indicated they belonged to the working class and 7.3 % to the lower class. Ninety-five participants were randomly assigned to the control condition and 105 each to the neoliberalism and social equality conditions.

**Design and procedure.** The procedure was identical to that in Study 2 and 3. All response were made on seven-point scales (where 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*).

---

<sup>14</sup> Results were not moderated by political orientation or social class.

**Measures.**<sup>15</sup> *Competition* was measured with four items (“I am competing with other people”, “I measure my success in life by comparing myself to other people”, “Doing things better than other people is important to me”, “I often compare myself to others”),  $\alpha = .86$ .

*Social disconnection* was measured with seven items (“I don't feel a sense of belonging”, “I feel disconnected from others”, “I don't feel supported by my social groups”, “I don't feel a sense of shared identity”, “I belong to a community that supports each other”, “I have social groups that I identify with”, “The social groups I belong to give my life meaning”; the latter three being reverse-coded),  $\alpha = .90$ .

*Loneliness* was assessed with an expanded scale including four items from the UCLA Loneliness scale (Russell, Peplau, & Ferguson, 1978: “I feel isolated from others”, “I feel left out”, “I feel as if nobody really understands me”, “No one really knows me well”) and two additional items (“I feel lonely”, “I am alone”),  $\alpha = .97$ .

*Well-being* was assessed with the six items from Study 3 plus two newly added items (“All in all, I am happy with who I am”, “I often feel unwell”),  $\alpha = .93$ . A new measure of *Burnout* was added for this study, comprised of six items adapted from the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (Demerouti & Bakker, 2008: “I often feel exhausted”, “I often don't have the energy to do the things I enjoy”, “When I get home at the end of the day I'm too tired to get anything done”, “I often feel like I don't want to go on like this”, “I'm having a hard time relaxing”, “I often feel drained and weary”),  $\alpha = .97$ . Because the two measures were highly correlated ( $r = .80, p > .001$ ), they were combined and recoded into a single measure of *Well-being* ( $\alpha = .96$ ).

## Results and Discussion

Competition, disconnection, loneliness, and negative well-being were all intercorrelated (Table 2). ANOVAs with condition as a between-subject factor and competition, disconnection, loneliness, and well-being as dependent variables revealed significant main effects for all three outcome variables,  $F(2, 286) = 16.96, p < .001, \eta^2 = .11$ ,  $F(2, 286) = 10.21, p = .001, \eta^2 = .07$ ,  $F(2, 286) = 13.07, p < .001, \eta^2 = .08$ , and,  $F(2, 286) = 17.40, p < .001, \eta^2 = .11$ , respectively. Post-hoc test using Bonferroni indicated that participants in the neoliberalism condition reported higher levels of competition ( $M = 4.73, SD = 1.51$ ) than those in the social equality ( $M = 3.62, SD = 1.60$ ),  $p < .001$ , and control conditions ( $M = 3.64, SD = 1.45, p < .001$ ); whereas there was no difference between participants in the social equality and control conditions,  $p = 1.000$ ). Similarly, participants in the neoliberalism condition reported being significantly more disconnected ( $M = 4.15, SD = 1.35$ ) than those in both the social equality ( $M = 3.46, SD = 1.31$ ),  $p = .001$ , and the control conditions ( $M = 3.32, SD = 1.45, p < .001$ ); with there being no difference between the social equality and control conditions,  $p = 1.000$ ). Participants in the neoliberalism condition also reported being significantly more lonely ( $M = 4.25, SD = 1.87$ ) than those in the social equality ( $M = 3.17, SD$

---

<sup>15</sup> We also assessed fairness threat, individualism, and some further variables. The first author can be contacted for more details.

= 1.72),  $p < .001$ , and the control conditions ( $M = 3.10$ ,  $SD = 1.76$ ),  $p < .001$ ; with again there being no difference between the social equality and control conditions,  $p = 1.000$ ). Finally, participants in the neoliberalism condition had significantly lower well-being ( $M = 3.60$ ,  $SD = 1.59$ ) than those in the social equality ( $M = 4.71$ ,  $SD = 1.47$ ),  $p < .001$ , and the control conditions ( $M = 4.72$ ,  $SD = 1.52$ ,  $p < .001$ ; whereas once more there was no difference between the social equality and control conditions,  $p = 1.000$ ).

In order to test our dual-pathway model (Figure 4), we conducted a mediation analysis using PROCESS (Hayes, 2018, Model 80, bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals, 10,000 bootstrap samples) with condition (neoliberalism vs. control, contrast coded: +1/-1)<sup>16</sup> as the predictor, well-being as the outcome, and competition, disconnection, and loneliness as mediators. The total effect of exposure to neoliberalism on negative well-being was significant,  $b = -.56$ ,  $SE = .11$ ,  $t(186) = -4.90$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [-.79, -.34]. Exposure to neoliberalism predicted competition,  $b = .54$ ,  $SE = .11$ ,  $t(186) = 4.99$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.33, .76], and disconnection,  $b = .42$ ,  $SE = .10$ ,  $t(186) = 4.06$ ,  $p = .001$ , 95% CI [.21, .62], which in turn predicted loneliness,  $b = .19$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $t(186) = 3.05$ ,  $p = .003$ , 95% CI [.07, .32], and,  $b = .90$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $t(186) = 13.46$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.78, 1.03], respectively. Loneliness in turn predicted well-being,  $b = -.61$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $t(186) = -9.78$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [-.74, -.49]. With these variables included, the total effect of neoliberalism on well-being was reduced to a non-significant direct effect,  $b = -.15$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $t(186) = -1.75$ ,  $p = .082$ , 95% CI [-.32, .02]. As expected, the effect of exposure to neoliberalism on well-being was mediated via both competition and loneliness,  $B = -.06$ ,  $SE = .03$ , 95% CI [-.12, -.01], and disconnection and loneliness,  $B = -.23$ ,  $SE = .06$ , 95% CI [-.36, -.11], in line with our hypothesis that neoliberalism increases loneliness and health problems by pitting individuals against each other in a competitive environment and eroding social connections between them (see Figure 5)<sup>17</sup>.

## General Discussion

This article sought to address the question of whether, and how, neoliberal ideology might affect individuals' well-being and psychological health. More specifically we tested a model in which neo-liberalism compromises well-being by increasing a sense of competition and lack of connection between people in ways that increase their sense of loneliness (see Figure 1). In providing support for this model, to our knowledge, this is the first experimental research to show that exposure to neoliberal ideology can indeed be bad for people's health and well-being.

---

<sup>16</sup> If we used the social equality condition as comparison group, the effects were similar, other than that the direct effect remained significant and we thus find partial, not full mediation.

<sup>17</sup> We tested three alternative models. In model 1, we changed the positions of well-being and loneliness. Although we still find the two indirect effects concerning the overall model, we do not find full mediations of the effect of exposure to neoliberalism on well-being via disconnection and competition. In model 2, we tested whether exposure to neoliberalism has an impact on loneliness, which further predicts disconnection and competition, which, in turn, predict well-being. The indirect effects were not significant. In model 3, we tested model 2 but changed the positions of loneliness and well-being. The indirect path via disconnection was significant, whereas the indirect path via competition was not.

We garnered support for our theoretical model in one correlational and three experimental studies and across three national contexts (Germany, UK, USA). In this, the research contributes to a broader literature on the capacity for social factors to shape individual well-being in three key ways. First, it adds to previous work on the social determinants of health which highlights the ways in which neoliberalism (and its effects, e.g., inequality) can be bad for health and well-being (e.g., Putnam, 2000; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Second, it contributes to the ‘social cure’ literature by providing evidence for the importance of social connections and social identities as buffers against negative health outcomes (e.g., Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008; Drury et al., 2016; Haslam et al., 2014, 2018; Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010; Hopkins & Reicher, 2017; Muldoon & Lowe, 2012). Third and most importantly, it brings these two lines of enquiry together to show for the first time that the deleterious consequences of neoliberalism for health flow in part from the fact that it promotes a sense of social disconnection, competition and loneliness.

### **Social Implications**

We started the manuscript by noting that neoliberalism might be expected to make people happy because it provides them with the motivation to grow and expand as individuals. Against this, however, we noted that it may actually prove problematic for mental health in ways suggested by social determinants and social cure research. Our findings support the latter position and suggest that there might be at least two key reasons for this.

First, people often “fail” to be happy and to continuously achieve personal growth. To the extent that this is the case, it makes sense that mandatory striving for self-growth and happiness can be very stressful (Adams et al., 2019). In line with this suggestion, recent meta-analytic evidence indicates that negative attitudes towards one’s own emotional experience is related to greater depression severity (Yoon, Dang, Metz, & Rottenberg, 2018). Moreover, within a neoliberal system the pursuit of individual self-expansion can only be achieved through competition with others and this competition can itself be a significant cause of psychological ‘wear and tear’ (e.g., Adams et al., 2019; Teo, 2018; Scharff, 2016).

Second, promoting the neoliberal idea that individuals need to fend for themselves in pursuing success and happiness reduces their access to the curative potential of group life (Haslam et al., 2018; Hopkins et al., 2016; Jetten et al., 2015; McNamara et al., 2013). Here a large body of ‘social cure’ research informed by a social identity approach to health has shown that group memberships and related social identities are the source of a range of health-enhancing social psychological resources — including social connection and social support (Haslam et al., 2012) — and through this help people to stave off social isolation and depression (Cruwys et al., 2013; Haslam et al., 2016). Relatedly, the expectation that the neoliberal self should be mobile (e.g., in terms of residence and social relations), leads people to change relationships in order to find satisfying social connections. Yet this relational mobility can encourage conditional group identification in which individuals remain committed to the group only for so long as the group is perceived to meet their reputational

needs (Adams et al., 2019; Oishi, Ishii, & Lun, 2009). This in turn can undermine solidarity and community participation (Oishi et al., 2009; Sennett, 1998) and lead to feelings of loneliness and associated health problems.

Of course, neoliberal politics can also be a direct cause of poor health. This is because under neoliberalism, politicians often support tax cuts for the wealthy while withdrawing support for public services (e.g., in areas of health care and education) — notionally to encourage self-reliance and individual responsibility (which is closely linked to political ideology; see Azevedo, Jost, Rothmund, & Sterling, 2019). The present research thus suggests that alongside this direct material pathway there may also be an indirect psychological one, that compounds its negative effects.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

In the present work we examined the effects of neoliberalism and social inequality on individuals' health and wellbeing in Germany, the UK and USA. Although we found no evidence of this in our data, on the basis of our theoretical analysis one might expect that the harmful effects of neoliberalism might be felt less keenly by those whose backgrounds (e.g., as middle class or conservative) make this ideology more appealing. This is a possibility that future research might seek to explore more forensically.

For similar reasons, in future research, it would be interesting to examine whether people are more vulnerable to the negative effects of neoliberalism at particular points in the life span. For instance, although older people are generally happier than those who are younger (Cacioppo, Berntson, Bechara, Tranel, & Hawkley, 2011), they might be particularly vulnerable to loneliness because they are more likely to lose partners and friends (Hawkley, Burleson, Berntson & Cacioppo, 2003). On the other hand, young people might be more exposed to pressures to be competitive and flexible in the contemporary workplace. For example, 25% of young employees in the US have worked five different jobs by age 35 (CareerBuilder, 2014) and in 2017, 45.3% of American 25-34 year-olds had lived in their current home for less than two years compared to 33.8% in 1960 (Mikhitarian, 2019). They are also often removed from their support systems, especially before they start families on their own. Such observations suggest that there would be merit in future work to explore the effects of neoliberalism in different social and age groups and this might also help therapists, teachers and practitioners to identify those who are most vulnerable to its problematic effects.

### **Concluding comment**

Our goal in this paper has been to provide a preliminary exploration of the impact of neoliberalism on individuals' health and well-being. Despite suggestions that this political philosophy might promote individual well-being because it encourages people to strive for personal growth, we found that it actually appears to be deleterious to health because it creates

a sense of being disconnected from, as well as in competition with, others, in ways that feed feelings of loneliness and social isolation. Elsewhere, of course, in critiquing neoliberalism commentators have tended to point mainly to its social and economic consequences (e.g., Pickety, 2015; Sennett, 1998). However, in a world where people are becoming increasingly aware of the health-related costs of a mounting 'loneliness epidemic' (Holt-Lunstad, 2017; Murthy, 2017; Snell, 2017), it may be time to broaden our critical gaze and reflect on the extent to which this too is a consequence of rampant neoliberalism. At the very least, as we attempt to tackle this epidemic, we need to be mindful of the fact that its causes can be political as much as social and psychological.

## References

- Adams, G., Estrada-Villalta S., Sullivan, D., & Markus, H. R. (2019). The psychology of neoliberalism and the neoliberalism of psychology. *Journal of Social Issues, 75*, 189-216.
- Azevedo, F., Jost, J. T., & Rothmund, T. (2019). Neoliberal ideology and the justification of inequality in capitalist societies: Why social and economic dimensions of ideology are intertwined? *Journal of Social Issues, 75*, 49–88.
- Beck, A.T., Ward, C. H., Mendelson, M., Mock, J., & Erbaugh, J. (1961) An inventory for measuring depression. *Archives of General Psychiatry, 4*, 561-571.
- Bettache, K., & Chiu, C-Y. (2019). The invisible hand is an ideology: Toward a social psychology of neoliberalism. *Journal of Social Issues, 75*, 1-12.
- Cacioppo, J.T., & Patrick, W. (2009). *Loneliness: Human nature and the need for social connection*. Norton: New York.
- Cacioppo, J. T., Berntson, G. G., Bechara, A., Tranel, D., & Hawkley, L. C. (2011). Could an aging brain contribute to subjective well-being? The value added by a social neuroscience perspective. In A. Todorov, S. T. Fiske, & D. A. Prentice (Eds.), *Oxford series in social cognition and social neuroscience. Social neuroscience: Toward understanding the underpinnings of the social mind* (pp. 249-262). New York, NY, US: Oxford University Press.
- CareerBuilder (2014, May 15). *Nearly One-Third of Employers Expect Workers to Job-Hop*. Retrieved from <http://www.careerbuilder.com>
- Cruwys, T., Haslam, S. A., Dingle, G. A., Haslam, C., & Jetten, J. (2014). Depression and social identity: An integrative review. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 8*, 215-238.
- Cruwys, T., Haslam, S. A., Dingle, G. A., Jetten, J., Hornsey, M. J., Chonga, E. M. D., & Oeia, T. P. S. (2014). Feeling connected again: Interventions that increase social identification reduce depression symptoms in community and clinical settings. *Journal of Affective Disorders, 159*, 139-146.
- Demerouti, E., & Bakker, A. B. (2008). The Oldenburg Burnout Inventory: A good alternative to measure burnout and engagement. In J. Halbesleben (Ed.), *Stress and burnout in health care* (pp. 65–78). Hauppauge, NY: Nova Sciences.
- Drury, J., Brown, R., González, R., & Miranda, D. (2016). Emergent social identity and observing social support predict social support provided by survivors in a disaster: Solidarity in the 2010 Chile earthquake. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 46*, 209-223.
- Duménil, G., & Lévy, D. (2011). *The crisis of neoliberalism*. Harvard University Press.

- Greenaway, K. H., Haslam, S. A., Branscombe, N. R., Cruwys, T., Ysseldyk, R., & Heldreth, C. (2015). From "we" to "me": Group identification enhances perceived personal control with consequences for health and well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 109*, 53-74.
- Hartwich, L., & Becker, J. C. (2019). Exposure to neoliberalism increases resentment of the elite via feelings of anomie and negative psychological reactions. *Journal of Social Issues, 75*, 113–133.
- Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Harvey, D. (2007). Neoliberalism as creative destruction. *The annals of the American academy of political and social science, 610*(1), 21-44.
- Haslam, C., Cruwys, T., Chang, M. X. -L., Bentley, S. V., Haslam, S. A., Dingle, G. A., & Jetten, J. (2019). Groups 4 Health reduces loneliness and social anxiety in adults with psychological distress: Findings from a randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 87*, 787-801.
- Haslam, C., Cruwys, T., Haslam, S. A., Dingle, G., & Chang, M. X.-L. (2016). Groups 4 Health: Evidence that a social-identity intervention that builds and strengthens social group membership improves mental health. *Journal of Affective Disorders, 194*, 188-195.
- Haslam, C., Jetten, J., Cruwys, T., Dingle, G. A., & Haslam, S. A. (2018). *The new psychology of health: Unlocking the social cure*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Haslam, S. A., McMahon, C., Cruwys, T., Haslam, C., Jetten, J., & Steffens, N. K. (2018). Social cure, what social cure? The propensity to underestimate the importance of social factors for health. *Social Science & Medicine, 198*, 14-21.
- Haslam, S. A., Reicher, S. D., & Levine, M. (2012). When other people are heaven, when other people are hell: How social identity determines the nature and impact of social support. In Jetten, J., Haslam, C., & Haslam, S. A. (Eds.), *The social cure: Identity, health, and well-being* (pp.157-174). Hove, UK: Psychology Press.
- Hawkey, L. C., Burleson, M. H., Berntson, G. G., & Cacioppo, J. T. (2003). Loneliness in everyday life: Cardiovascular activity, psychosocial context, and health behaviors. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 85*, 105-120.
- Hayes, A. F. (2018). *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Heitmeyer, W. (2002). *Deutsche Zustände. Folge 1* [The German condition, volume 1]. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Heitmeyer, W. (2009). *Deutsche Zustände. Folge 8* [The German condition, volume 8]. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

- Heu, L. C., van Zomeren, M., & Hansen, N. (2019). Lonely Alone or Lonely Together? A Cultural-Psychological Examination of Individualism–Collectivism and Loneliness in Five European Countries. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 45*, 780–793.
- Holt-Lunstad, J. (2017). The potential public health relevance of social isolation and loneliness: Prevalence, epidemiology, and risk factors. *Public Policy & Aging Report, 27*, 127-130.
- Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T.B., & Layton, J.B. (2010). Social relationships and mortality risk: a meta-analytic review. *PLoS Med. 7*, 2–20.
- Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T.B., Baker, M., Harris, T., & Stephenson, D., (2015). Loneliness and social isolation as risk factors for mortality: a meta-analytic review. *Perspectives in Psychological Science, 10*, 227–237.
- Holzkamp, K. (1992). On doing psychology critically. *Theory and Psychology, 2*, 193-204.
- Hopkins, N., & Reicher, S. D. (2017). Social identity at mass gatherings: Bi-directional and paradoxical effects on health. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 47*, 867-877.
- Hopkins, N., Reicher, S. D., Khan, S. S., Tewari, S., Srinivasan, N., & Stevenson, C. (2016). Explaining effervescence: Investigating the relationship between shared social identity and positive experience in crowds. *Cognition and Emotion, 30*, 20-32.
- Jetten, J., Haslam, C., Haslam, S. A., Dingle, G., & Jones, J. J. (2014). How groups affect our health and well-being: The path from theory to policy. *Social Issues and Policy Review, 8*, 103-130.
- Jylhä, M., & Jokela, J. (1990). Individual experiences as cultural: A cross-cultural study on loneliness among the elderly. *Ageing and Society, 10*, 295-315.
- Lykes, V.A. & Kimmelmeier, M. (2014). What predicts loneliness? Cultural difference between individualistic and collectivistic societies in Europe. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 45*, 468-490.
- McNamara, N., Stevenson, C., & Muldoon, O. T. (2013). Community identity as resource and context: A mixed method investigation of coping and collective action in a disadvantaged community. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 43*, 393-403.
- Maslow, A. H. (Ed.). (1959). *New knowledge in human values*. Oxford, England: Harper.
- Mikhitarian, S. (2019, October 3). *On the Move: Why Young Adults Today Are More Mobile Than Previous Generations*. Retrived from <http://www.zillow.com>
- Müller, B. (2013). *Erosion der gesellschaftlichen Mitte* [The erosion of the middle classes]. Hamburg, Germany: VSA Verlag.
- Muldoon, O. T., & Lowe, R. D. (2012). Social identity, groups, and post-traumatic stress disorder. *Political Psychology, 33*, 259-273.
- Muldoon, O. T., Schmid, K., & Downes, C. (2009). Political violence and psychological well-being: The role of social identity. *Applied Psychology, 58*, 129-145.

- Murthy, V. (2017). Work and the loneliness epidemic. *Harvard Business Review*, 9.
- Oishi, S., Ishii, K., & Lun, J. (2009). Residential mobility and conditionality of group identification. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 45, 913–919.
- Oishi, S., Kesebir, S., & Diener, E. (2011). Income inequality and happiness. *Psychological Science*, 22, 1095–1100.
- Peacock, M., Bissell, P., & Owen, J. (2014) Dependency denied: health inequalities in the neoliberal era. *Social Science and Medicine*, 118, 173-180.
- Peplau, L. A., & Perlman, D. (1982). Perspective on loneliness. In L. A. Peplau & D. Perlman (Eds.), *Loneliness: A sourcebook of current theory, research and therapy* (pp. 1-18). New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Piketty, T. (2015). *The economics of inequality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Russell, D., Peplau, L. A., & Ferguson, M. L. (1978). Developing a measure of loneliness. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 42, 290-294.
- Scharff, C. (2016). The psychic life of neoliberalism: Mapping the contours of entrepreneurial subjectivity. *Theory, Culture, & Society*, 33, 107–122.
- Schoemann, A. M., Boulton, A. J., & Short, S. D. (2017). Determining power and sample size for simple and complex mediation models. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 8(4), 379-386.
- Sennett, R. (1998). *The corrosion of character. The personal consequences of work in the new capitalism*. Norton: New York.
- Snell, K. D. M. (2017). The rise of living alone and loneliness in history. *Social History*, 42, 2-28.
- Sweet, E. (2018). “Like you failed at life”: Debt, health, and neoliberal subjectivity. *Social Science & Medicine*, 212, 86–93.
- Teo, T. (2018). Homo neoliberalus: From personality to forms of subjectivity. *Theory & Psychology*, 28, 581–599.
- Wilkinson, R., & Pickett, K. (2009). *The spirit level: Why equality is better for everyone*. London, UK: Allen Lane.
- Yoon, S., Dang, V., Mertz, J., & Rottenberg, J. (2018). Are attitudes towards emotions associated with depression? A conceptual and meta-analytic review. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 232, 329–340.

Table 1. Means (*M*), Standard Deviations (*SD*), and Correlations among Variables (Study 2).

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	2	3	4
1 Neoliberalism	3.68	.68	.34**	.40**	-.29**
2 Social Disconnection	3.16	.65	-	.60**	-.36**
3 Loneliness	1.83	1.03	-	-	-.46**
4 Well-being	4.77	1.03	-	-	-

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

Table 2. Means (*M*), Standard Deviations (*SD*), and Correlations among Variables (Study 4).

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	2	3	4
1 Competition	4.00	1.60	.14*	.29**	-.34**
2 Disconnection	3.67	1.41	-	.73**	-.54**
3 Loneliness	3.52	1.87	-	-	-.72**
4 Negative Well-being	4.32	1.61	-	-	-

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Figure 1. Proposed Mediation Model.

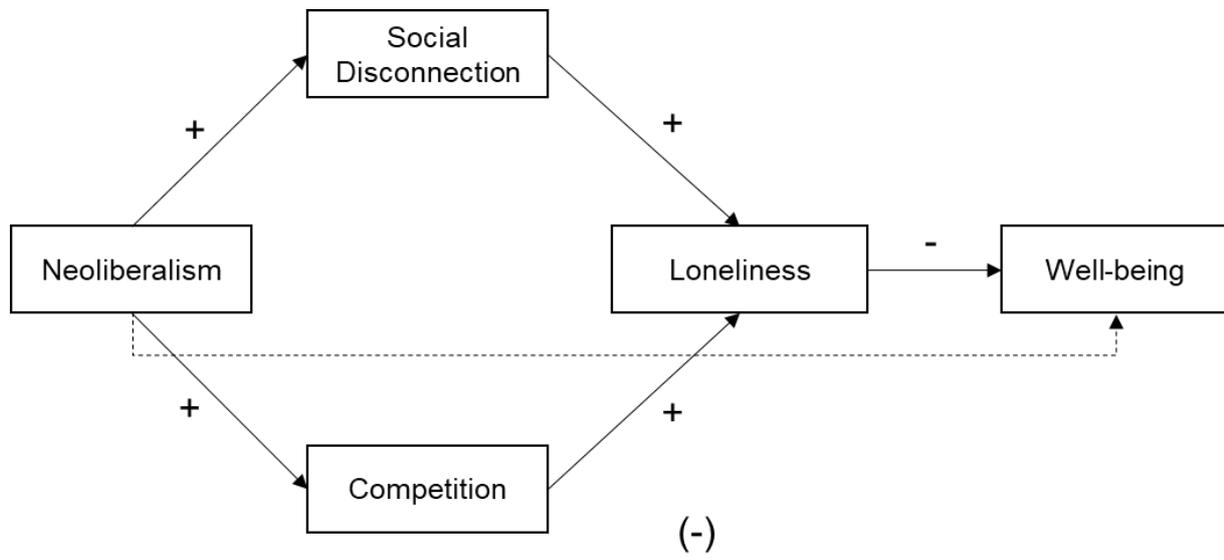
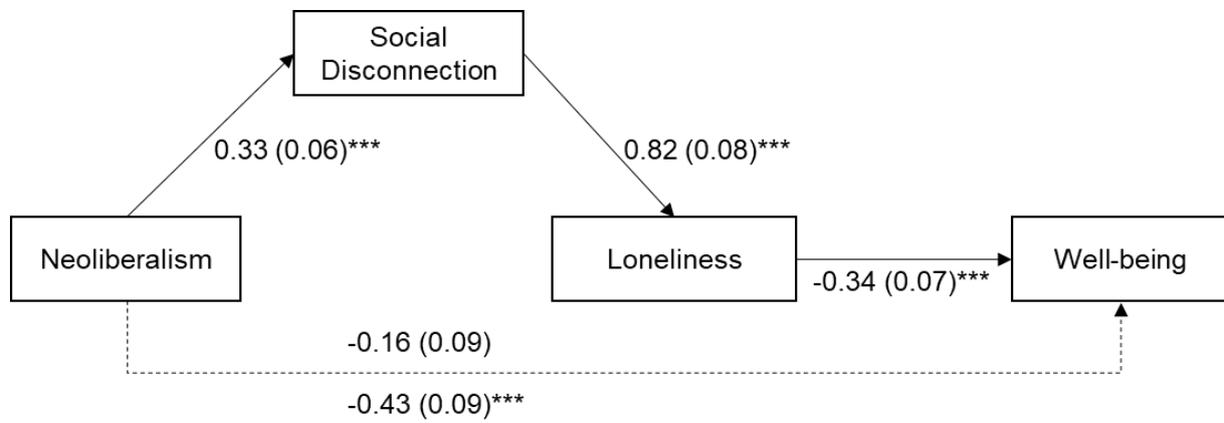


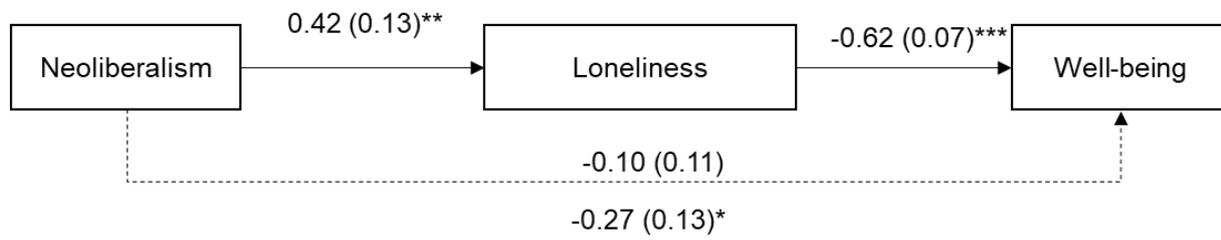
Figure 2. Social disconnection and loneliness mediated the effect of neoliberalism on well-being (Study 1).



Note. Unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in the brackets. The direct effect is reported above the line, the total effect below the line.

\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

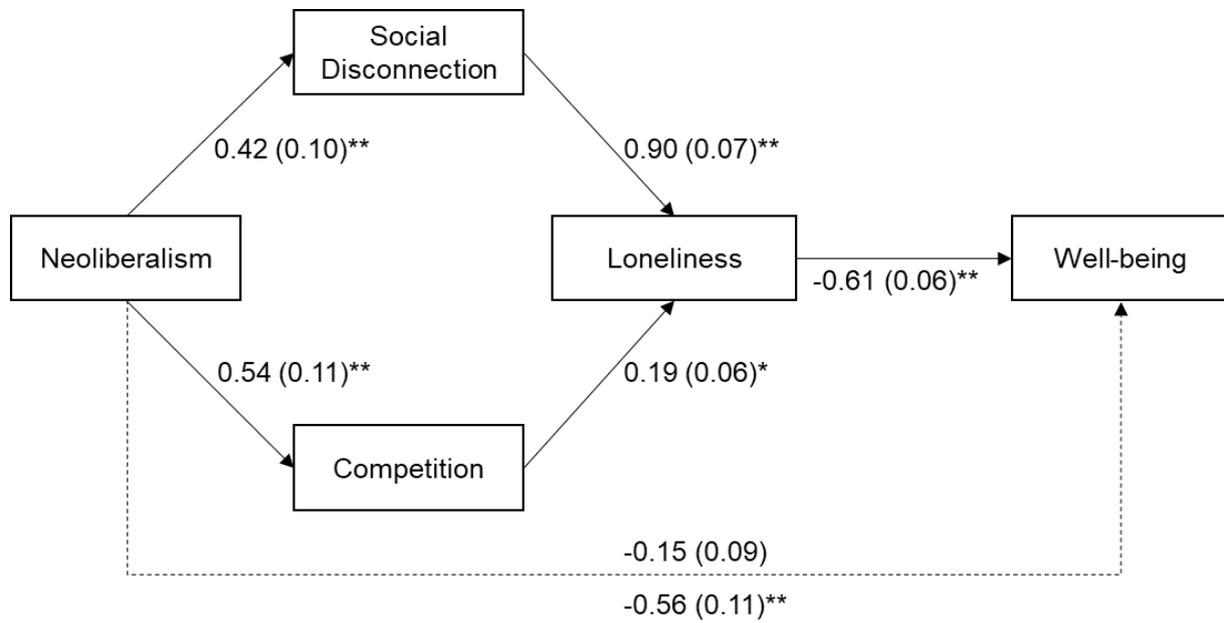
Figure 3. Loneliness mediated the effect of neoliberalism on health problems (Study 3).



Note. Unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in the brackets. The direct effect is reported above the line, the total effect below the line.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Figure 4. Competition, social disconnection, and loneliness mediated the effect of neoliberalism on well-being (Study 4).



Note. Unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in the brackets. The direct effect is reported above the line, the total effect below the line.

\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

## Appendix

### **Neoliberalism scale used in Study 1:**

1. Flexibility and freedom are very important in our society. (this item was excluded)
2. Equality and fairness are not very important in our society.
3. Our society highly values individual success.
4. Our society does not place great value on the collective good.
5. In our society, jobs and housing are allocated according to ability rather than need.
6. In our society, everyone is responsible for themselves without the community stepping in to take care of individuals in times of need.
7. In our society, the government takes on few responsibilities.
8. In our society, private businesses are not strongly regulated by the government.
9. In our society, control over the economy is left to the free market.
10. In our society, more and more public services like health care and education are privatized and run for profit.

### 3. General Discussion

#### 3.1 Summary of Findings and Implications for Research and Theory

Neoliberal philosophy affects the way our societies look and function and thereby shapes how individuals live, feel, and interact within them (Teo, 2018). The aim of the research presented in the manuscripts above was to investigate how these effects manifest in three different domains: individual health and well-being, social connection, and intergroup relations, particularly class-based stereotyping and attitudes. Based on previous research on the manifold negative consequences of values, beliefs, and policies associated with neoliberalism, the assumptions were that all three areas would be adversely affected, that well-being would suffer and group relations deteriorate as a result of eroding social cohesion. In the studies presented here, both actual and imagined neoliberal societies were investigated with samples from three different countries (Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States) which have adopted neoliberal policies to varying degrees. The hypotheses were confirmed for all three domains examined and the studies contribute to filling gaps in the emerging social psychological study of neoliberalism (Kashima, 2019) as well as the literatures on social class and classism (Markus & Stephens, 2017) and anomie (Teymoori et al., 2016), and the growing field of social cure research (Jetten et al., 2012). They also seek to provide a multi-level perspective that combines societal configurations on the macro-level with intergroup processes on the meso-level and individual outcomes on the micro-level, bringing together elements that are often studied separately (Pettigrew, 2006).

Manuscript 1 provides the first empirical evidence for the existence of distinct dimensions of classist stereotypes and their relationships with political orientation. It examines a phenomenon that has received some attention from social commentators (Baron, 2016; Eribon, 2018; Jones, 2012) but not, to date, in social psychological research, that is, the theory that the (white) lower and working classes are a group that appears to lack allies across the political spectrum, including in progressive movements which are usually sympathetic to the cause of disadvantaged groups. This research adopted a justification-suppression approach to the expression of prejudice (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003) and introduced a framework for understanding classist stereotypes as value violations. Based on Schwartz's (Schwartz, 2012) two value dimensions and their relationship with political orientation, a model with two main dimensions, stereotypes of the lower class as violating conservative and progressive values, and their respective sub-dimensions, violations of conservation and self-enhancement, and openness to change and self-transcendence values was developed and confirmed. The results suggest that the interesting difference between conservative and progressive middle class individuals may not be so much whether they agree with negative stereotypes of the lower class, but which stereotypes they are most likely to agree with. While endorsement of the conservative value violating dimension of classism, which portrays the lower class as lacking respectability and work ethic, was linked to more conservative political orientation, the reverse applies to the other end of the political spectrum. Progressives were

more likely to agree with stereotypes painting the lower class as in violation of their own openness and self-transcendence values, for example by viewing them as intolerant or ethnocentric. Importantly, this pattern did not extend to a different target group of prejudice, refugees. When applied to this group, stereotype endorsement was one-dimensional and strongly linked to conservative political orientation.

While the studies in this manuscript did not experimentally manipulate neoliberalism, their results lend themselves to an interpretation based on its prevailing doctrine of meritocracy and equality of opportunity within a free market framework. Neoliberalism's identity blind and individualistic belief system does not advocate or require social hierarchies based on categories like race, gender, sexuality or even social class background. To the neoliberal narrative, it is largely irrelevant whether those at the top are straight white middle class men or queer working class women of color, as long as they are seen to have arrived there on the basis of individual merit. As a matter of fact, individual success stories of people from disadvantaged backgrounds can actually serve to legitimize neoliberal systems because they bolster the claim that social mobility is possible for everyone as long as they are competitive and hard-working enough. Therefore, there is no reason to expect generally egalitarian-minded progressives to show ethnic prejudice, even if they have internalized the prevailing values of the neoliberal society they live in. People's current socio-economic status, on the other hand, is a highly relevant category within this system because it directly reflects how well they are performing by neoliberal standards. Thus, if it can be assumed that people's ideas of merit and fairness are shaped by the societal values they are exposed to (Teo, 2018), even progressives should be motivated at least to some degree to legitimize inequality when it is framed in these terms. This would explain the finding that they endorse specific negative stereotypes about the lower class that serve to maintain their own egalitarian credentials while denying the moral deservingness of those with low socio-economic status.

This apparent difference between socio-economic status and other categories in the context of intergroup attitudes in neoliberal societies is further substantiated by the findings of Manuscript 2 which discovered a similar pattern with regard to anti-elitism and anti-immigration attitudes. While anti-immigration attitudes were strongly predicted by conservatism, anti-elitism was mostly unrelated to political views. Instead, it varied considerably depending on the societal configurations people were exposed to. The neoliberal future that participants were asked to imagine triggered an overall negative response whereby social cohesion and trust were seen as lacking which was reflected in higher levels of anomie. As a result, this scenario was perceived as unfair and threatening. These factors mediated neoliberalism's effect on anti-elitism which was significantly higher in this condition, confirming the hypothesis that exposure to neoliberalism results in negative attitudes toward those seen to be benefiting from its policies rather than alternative targets. On the flip side, the results indicate that not only are levels of anomie lower and people's experiences more positive in more equal societies but the leadership is seen as less corrupt and different from the rest of the population.

The results of Manuscript 2 contribute to as yet inconclusive lines of research investigating the relationships between anomie and economic threat and intergroup relations. As has been pointed out, the neoliberal period has seen the renewed rise of right-wing populism with its nationalistic and anti-immigration rhetoric (Mudde, 2007) and previous research has shown that anomie (Hövermann, Groß, Zick, & Messner, 2015) and economic threat and hardship often go hand in hand with the scapegoating of vulnerable groups and newcomers (Fritsche et al., 2017). One reason for this may be that in the current political climate, connections between political and demographic trends are often made that encourage these conclusions. As has been shown before, attributions for the economic threats they experience shape people's resulting intergroup attitudes (Becker, Wagner, & Christ, 2011). The way the manipulation used here presents neoliberal principles and policies supports a more systemic attribution, thus it makes sense that it would result in anti-elitism, because the elite rather than lower status groups are likely to be seen as the ones controlling the political economy. Similarly, with regard to anomie, these results suggest the possibility that its intergroup consequences might also vary as a result of different attributions. This would explain why, for example, studies have found unexpected and seemingly contradictory effects on nationalism and ethnic prejudice (Blank, 2003). In the case of this research, anomie occurred as a result of neoliberalism and is therefore likely to be attributed to a lack of solidarity and social security and an emphasis on individual and material success. This then results in collapsing confidence in the leadership's ability to achieve social cohesion (Teymoori et al., 2016) which is expressed as anti-elitism. However, when no such unambiguous source is presented, people might instead attribute perceptions of societal disintegration to increasing diversity, for example as a result of immigration, and therefore blame minorities and newcomers rather than those in power. Thus, rather than being contradictory, these diverging results might point to the existence of more complex processes linking the causes of anomie to its intergroup consequences. On a smaller note, these results also illustrate the importance of differentiating between right-wing and left-wing populism, which share their disdain for the elite but differ with regard to many other political positions (Otjes & Louwerse, 2015). Crucially, right-wing populism includes anti-immigration attitudes as a key element whereas left-wing populism does not.

The findings from Manuscripts 1 and 2 highlight the importance of socio-economic status when it comes to considering intergroup relations in the context of neoliberalism and suggest that compared to other types of group-based attitudes, those directed at both the lower class and the elite seem to be less related to political views and more influenced by the prevailing societal conditions. Relatedly, they also indicate that the attitudes associated with endorsement of neoliberalism need to be distinguished from those linked to exposure to the ideology. Previous research has shown that endorsement of neoliberal and free market beliefs is positively associated with a wide range of other attitudes justifying various forms of inequality (Azevedo et al., 2019) and forms part of a larger conservative worldview (von Collani & Grumm, 2009; Wilson, 1973). This was confirmed by the findings in Manuscript 1 which found that conservatism, including pro-capitalist views, predicted negative

representations of refugees. Evens stronger support comes from the results in Manuscript 2 which showed that anti-immigrant prejudice was not only linked to more conservative political orientation but was directly predicted by rating the neoliberal society as desirable. It appears that there exists an interesting contradiction within the right-wing belief system given that resenting immigrants for allegedly increasing competition for jobs or social security benefits is antithetic to the neoliberal doctrine of free competition and equal opportunities for all. However, if one takes the view that ideological purity is less important to the neoliberal agenda than advancing the interests of the economic elite (Chomsky, 1999), there is little incentive for advocates of neoliberalism to resolve this inconsistency which is likely beneficial to their cause. It has even been suggested that blaming immigration for the consequences of neoliberalism such as rising inequality or underfunded public services is a deliberate ploy by conservative media and political actors to distract from the role of their policies in these developments (Dorling, 2016; Pujol, 2015). After all, the results of the experimental studies presented here indicate that when people are exposed to neoliberal ideology purely in the form of a society organized along its principles and without providing an alternative narrative, their dissatisfaction turns into resentment against the elite.

Manuscript 2 provides initial support for the idea that at least part of this dissatisfaction comes from a perceived lack of social connection and a resulting decrease in individual well-being, measured here in the form of anomie and lower levels of happiness, optimism, and hope respectively. Manuscript 3 expands on this by developing a multi-step model of how the social conditions under neoliberalism affect health outcomes which brings together a number of factors that have only been studied separately before. The results not only deliver further evidence for the detrimental impact of loneliness on mental and physical well-being (Haslam et al., 2018), but directly implicate neoliberalism in the so-called loneliness epidemic (Holt-Lunstad, 2017) by showing how its ideology creates a social world dominated by competition and individualism where people feel increasingly isolated from each other. This goes beyond previous research by providing evidence for the idea that it is not only the consequences, most importantly social inequality (Burns, Tomita, & Kapadia, 2014; Buttrick & Oishi, 2017; Pickett & Wilkinson, 2015; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2017), of neoliberal policies which pose a risk to societal functioning and public health. Instead, these findings suggest that the ideology itself and the values and principles it advocates negatively affect societies and individuals as evidenced by the fact that merely imagining life in a neoliberal future lead to increased perceptions of being in competition with and isolated from others, resulting in loneliness and worsened self-reported well-being.

There appears to be a growing concern among researchers and practitioners that the prevailing social and economic conditions of our time are ill-suited to advancing human health and happiness because relentless competition is bound to wear people down and undermine solidarity (Adams et al., 2019; Teo, 2018) while the focus on individualism and self-reliance reduces their access to social support (Greenaway, Cruwys, Haslam, & Jetten, 2016) and relational and spatial mobility discourage community integration (Oishi, Ishii, & Lun, 2009). The results presented here provide further proof that this concern is founded and, most

importantly, point to an underlying ideology at the root of this societal malaise. Neoliberalism set out with the bold promise that a free market system would improve living conditions for all by bringing progress, growth, and unconstrained possibilities but the research presented here and elsewhere suggests that it is failing to deliver. It would appear that the concept of *homo neoliberalis* (Teo, 2018) in which freedom trumps all other desires, particularly that for community (Beattie, 2019), is based on a glaring oversight of the social nature and needs of human beings. Conversely, imagining life in a future society with a reliable social safety net, redistributive policies, and a needs-based approach to the distribution of resources lead to more social cohesion and well-being and a more positive view of the leadership in line with the theory that egalitarianism, rather than inequality and competition, is the configuration better suited to human collective life (Boehm, 2012; Richerson & Boyd, 2005). This suggests that a social cure may exist not only in the form of social relationships, group memberships, and identities but also in the form of a society built around solidarity and equality.

Together, these findings indicate that societies shaped by the neoliberal priorities of individualism and competition create an environment detrimental to social trust and cohesion and that this lack of connection leads not only to increased feelings of loneliness but has negative effects on mental and physical health beyond social isolation. They also show how, on the one hand, the societal atomization and discontent caused by neoliberal policies is linked to populist resentment of the elite whose interests are perceived to be at odds with those of the so-called common people, while on the other hand, its propagation of merit-based inequality is reflected in the stigmatization of the lower social class.

### 3.2 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This thesis project identified three novel areas of interest in the context of the neoliberal reorganization of societies and provides preliminary evidence for neoliberalism's detrimental influence across these domains. However, the findings presented above can only constitute a first step toward a more comprehensive understanding of well-being, social cohesion, and intergroup attitudes in a world dominated by the free market doctrine of competitive individualism. Besides the specific limitations of each individual manuscript, a number of broader caveats in the context of the overarching research questions will be addressed here.

For one, as mentioned above, neoliberalism was neither manipulated nor measured in Manuscript 1. Therefore, even though the interpretation that the discovered pattern of classist stereotype endorsement reflects the effects of a dominant societal ideology on intergroup attitudes fits both the data and theoretical reasoning, more evidence is needed to strengthen this claim. One avenue would be for future studies to use the manipulation from Manuscripts 2 and 3 to confirm the influence of neoliberal ideology on classism. Based on the findings and theories presented here, exposure to the scenarios should primarily affect reactions from progressives who, when imagining the more egalitarian future society, would have less motivation to justify social inequality and feel less of a threat to their positive

identity. Therefore, their perceptions of the lower social class should be more in line with their attitudes toward other disadvantaged groups, such as refugees in the studies in Manuscript 1. For conservatives, their general inclination to legitimize group-based hierarchies would not be expected to change significantly, but the interesting question remains whether differences in their levels of stereotyping might be observed between the two conditions nonetheless. Another pathway for experimental follow-ups to the studies from Manuscript 1 would be to focus more strongly on the assumed motivation behind the stereotyping, again particularly with regard to the progressive middle class. The hypotheses that these studies investigated were built on a social identity approach which assumed that the combination of neoliberal ideology and progressive egalitarian values creates a conflict that poses a threat to their positive identity. Thus, the expectation was that progressives would seek to reconcile the conflicting influences of not wanting to support inequality on the one hand, and being exposed to a societal belief system that propagates merit-based social stratification on the other hand, by finding a way to deny the deservingness of individuals with lower socio-economic status that is compatible with their values. More robust support for this theory could be obtained by experimentally manipulating the threat to participants' positive identity, for example by increasing the salience of their relatively privileged position within an unequal society and calling into question the degree to which it is truly due to merit. Alternatively, assessing their belief that the current system is meritocratic or the centrality of their socio-economic status group to their identity as possible moderators may shed more light on the underlying processes that lead to their endorsement of classist stereotypes.

Manuscripts 2 and 3 did manipulate neoliberalism, however the other components of the mediation models were not experimentally altered. Thus, in order to be more certain about the assumed causality, further studies might look at individual relationships between the constructs more closely and confirm their causal direction. One such connection that might be of interest is that between the neoliberal principles of competition and individualism and loneliness. While the results of Manuscript 3 as well as the theories and previous research findings cited above suggest that it is likely that neoliberal societies produce increasingly isolated individuals, it is also conceivable that those who are already feeling lonely would view their relationships with others as more competitive and society as more individualistic. Therefore, instead of measuring perceived individualism and competition as a consequence of neoliberalism, an altered manipulation that focuses more on these components could provide a more definite answer to this question. Similarly, manipulating levels of perceived societal disintegration and threat and unfairness respectively would solidify the sequential order of the mediators that are part of the model in Manuscript 2.

The manipulation developed for these studies shows strong and consistent effects in the expected direction not only on a range of outcomes but also in different national contexts which constitutes a major strength of this research. However, there are still reasons for wanting to corroborate these findings. While the goal was for the scenario to encompass as many elements of neoliberal ideology as possible, this had to be balanced against the need to make the text short enough to be accessible and hold participants' attention. Thus, it might

be interesting to examine whether a description of different neoliberal policies and principles might result in weaker, stronger, or even entirely divergent effects. Additionally, there is a notable difference between the narrative that is frequently used to make neoliberal policies appealing to the population and the actual outcomes of these policies. For example, reducing government intervention in the economy and lowering taxes for the wealthy and corporations is usually justified because it is supposed to result in so-called trickle-down economics that benefit everyone rather than in increasing levels of inequality as it actually does (Holt & Greenwood, 2012; Ostry et al., 2016). In a similar vein, cutting back the welfare state is meant to motivate people to find jobs and increase empowerment and self-reliance rather than poverty. Therefore, comparing the effects of the manipulation used here to one that is based on the way neoliberal ideas are advertised might be illuminating and helpful in trying to explain why neoliberal politics continue to be popular enough for their advocates to be re-elected despite the unpopularity of at least some of their consequences, such as rising inequality (Orton & Rowlingson, 2007).

A limitation of experimental designs such as this one is that they remain artificial situations. One way this might be reflected in these results has to do with the previously mentioned observation that many people seem to be relatively unaware of neoliberalism as an overarching philosophy (Monbiot, 2016). Thus, it cannot necessarily be assumed that they react to seeing the policies and developments associated with it listed comprehensively in a compact scenario exactly the same way as they react to experiencing them disjointedly in day-to-day life. This is less problematic in the context of Manuscript 3 because it can be argued that the effects of living in a neoliberal society on loneliness and well-being remain the same whether people are aware of the role of neoliberalism as a cause of these experiences or not. Some support for this reasoning comes from the results of the first study in this manuscript which measured rather than manipulated the perception of neoliberalism and found the same effects, although the questions could still be seen as priming similar elements of neoliberalism. More importantly though, it might affect and explain some of the results in Manuscript 2 and their discrepancies from what can be observed in reality. As has been discussed above, the contradictory findings regarding the effects of anomie and economic threat on intergroup relations may actually point to a more nuanced picture which it would be of interest to examine further. Future research might be able to do this experimentally by comparing different scenarios that capture possible sources of anomie besides neoliberalism and compare the effects on intergroup relations. It might also go beyond artificial future societies and examine anomie and intergroup attitudes in countries that differ with regard to their diversity and implementation of neoliberal policies.

Another way for future studies to provide further insight into intergroup attitudes in neoliberal societies, particularly directed toward those at the top, would be to compare perceptions of the dominant socio-economic stratum depending on how their position is framed. Generally speaking, neoliberal ideology has a positive view of power, wealth, and status and the individuals who successfully compete for them. In this case however, the term elite, besides potentially carrying negative connotations, refers to a group rather than

individuals and leaves open whether this group attained its powerful position through effort and merit or not. The conclusions drawn here could be further strengthened if similar results were found when those at the top are described in terms more closely related to the neoliberal ideal of self-made success and entrepreneurship.

On a more general note, generalization of these results needs to be approached with caution because all data was collected in western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (so-called WEIRD) countries which differ from other populations in numerous ways, including some that might be relevant here such as fairness, cooperation, and self-concept (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). Replicating these findings in societies that are not WEIRD and also differ more widely with regard to the extent to which they have implemented neoliberal policies would allow for more confident conclusions to be drawn and might also make it possible to separate the effects of living in an already neoliberal society, which all the current participants did, from those of the manipulation. Relatedly, a longitudinal investigation of the effects of growing neoliberal influences would constitute an important addition to the cross-sectional and experimental designs employed here. Previous research investigating the consequences of increasing individualization in the context of a collectivistic culture provides initial reasons to expect a confirmation of these results, at least when it comes to deteriorating social connections (Ogihara & Uchida, 2014), while the trends associated with growing inequality point in a similar direction with regard to public health (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2017). A longitudinal design would be of particular interest in the context of neoliberalism's impact on well-being because it would allow for more reliable assessments, especially of physical health, than the ones used here. If it were empirically demonstrated that a measurable deterioration of health outcomes occurs when countries become more competitive and individualistic this would provide more convincing evidence that should be relevant to decision-makers regardless of political affiliation, particularly if, as in the case of social inequality, neoliberalism was shown to have a negative effect on everyone regardless of socio-economic status (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009).

As with any relatively new area of research, the studies presented here can be seen to raise more questions than they provide answers and there are many directions for future research to clarify or corroborate these results. For the time being, however, they provide sufficient initial support to raise concerns about the impact of neoliberal ideology on individual and societal conditions.

### 3.3 Social and Political Implications

#### 3.3.1 We the Corporations? Democracy in a Marketized World

It can be argued that in its adverse effects on the majority of the people it governs, neoliberalism does not actually differ from any other form of global order that came before it. What does set this ideology apart is that while it has been enforced upon numerous populations in the so-called less developed world without much of a choice (Grandin, 2006;

Klein, 2007), it also continues to dominate democratic countries whose governments have not had their hands forced by Western investment interests or international financial institutions (Chomsky, 1999). Despite the widespread unpopularity of many of its policies and consequences (Pew Research Center, 2009), especially with regard to increasingly insecure and precarious employment and rising inequality (Orton & Rowlingson, 2007), parties and leaders with neoliberal platforms are being elected and re-elected in many countries the world over. While feudalism was never voted into power by the peasantry, neoliberalism somehow manages to retain the support of a majority of the ninety-nine percent who do not benefit from it (Thompson, 2017). Of course, given that its platform has been adopted and declared common sense by parties across the political spectrum (Coates, 2018), voters are often left with little choice.

But neoliberalism poses a threat to democratic politics even beyond successfully establishing the assumption that it is without alternative. In fact, it has been argued that “the very design of neoliberal principles is a direct attack on democracy” (Chomsky, 2010, p. 89). Few of its advocates express their ambivalence toward democratic rule as openly as Friedman and Hayek themselves (Friedman, 1962; Hayek, 1969), but its priorities, though obscured behind the narrative of individual freedom from government interference, are clear enough. After all, at least in democratic countries, rejection of government interference by extension means rejection of the interference of the majority of the population (Chomsky, 1999). It is no coincidence that neoliberal ideology considers political freedom secondary to economic freedom (Grandin, 2006). In the language of neoliberalism, freedom means that the wealthy are free from taxation, employers are free to hire and fire people at will and do away with workers’ protections, and their employees are free to go somewhere else if they are not satisfied with their current conditions (Monbiot, 2016), conveniently assuming that more desirable alternatives are available and unemployment is not a looming threat in the absence of a social safety net.

Positive freedoms such as guaranteed food, housing, health care, or a safe work environment and a living wage, on the other hand, are considered oppressive under the neoliberal doctrine because they infringe on the freedom of those who are required to provide them (Friedman, 1976). According to supporters of neoliberal economics, providing people in need with the bare necessities when they have not earned them constitutes a moral failure on the part of society (Cohen, 2017), whereas tolerating hunger or homelessness in the midst of abundance does not. Given the increasing power of large corporations to influence government policy through lobbying (Thompson, 2017) and trade agreements (Monbiot, 2013) combined with their status as “too big to fail” (Judt, 2010), far from ensuring individual freedom for all, neoliberalism actually poses a direct threat to it (Caterino & Hansen, 2019) and limits people’s possibilities to make changes to a political economy when it arguably does not serve their interests. Thus, the pessimistic conclusion is that neoliberal ideology and policies not only negatively affect individual well-being and the functioning of societies, they are also making it increasingly difficult for people to conceive of and enact alternatives to the current system (Crouch, 2012).

### 3.3.2 Divided We Fall? Collective Solutions in an Atomized World

The neoliberal threat to democracy is exacerbated by the way its ideology shapes people's attributions for their societal and personal discontents and the solutions they turn to. Individualism and competition limit people's access to social support and solidarity because the more individuals compete with others and feel solely responsible for their own fate, the more inward their gaze tends to turn. Thus, they focus on their own perceived flaws over those inherent in political and economic systems (Allsop, Briggs, & Kisby, 2018) and prefer individual solutions when they are dissatisfied with their situation. Indeed, it has been argued that within the neoliberal framework, our very understanding of well-being has shifted away from long-term collective welfare and toward short-term advances on the individual level (Adams et al., 2019). Personal improvement, reflected in the constant impetus to be one's best self and the rising popularity of self-care and positive thinking approaches to mental health (Teghtsoonian, 2009) are part of this paradigm shift. And when external change does become necessary, neoliberalism encourages individuals to make use of the increased flexibility and short-term nature of the working world and simply leave their current environment behind.

These social mobility focused approaches to improving one's circumstances (Ellemers, van Knippenberg, & Wilke, 1990) place a heavy burden of responsibility on people, especially those facing systemic disadvantages. Under neoliberalism, the narrative of the heroic individual overcoming structural barriers through superhuman effort is held up as the only aspirational way out of an oppressive situation (Adams et al., 2019), glossing over the fact that this strategy effectively leaves the oppressive system in place. As has been pointed out above, individual success stories of people from underprivileged backgrounds are not incompatible with the neoliberal doctrine. Collective struggles against inequality like the Black Lives Matter movement, a feminism that calls for affirmative action rather than for individual women to lean in, or trade unions using their powers of collective bargaining, on the other hand, are diametrically opposed to the neoliberal idea of empowerment. That is why neoliberalism has done everything in its power to undermine collective action, be it by colonizing feminism (Rottenberg, 2014) or by directing the blame for racial economic inequality away from systemic racism and toward the failure of individual families, most famously by conjuring up the stereotype of the so-called welfare queen (Bullock et al., 2001). One of Margaret Thatcher's first moves as prime minister was to declare war on unionized workers who knew all too well that no "force on earth is weaker than the feeble strength of one" (Chaplin, 1915). By the end of its tenure, her government had drastically curbed the unions' influence and painted them as enemies of economic growth and outdated restraints on individual workers' aspirations and freedom (Jones, 2012), strategies that are still used and built upon by big corporations in their union-busting efforts today (Logan, 2002; Royle, 2002).

But its often violent opposition to solidarity-based movements points to the fact that just like neoliberalism threatens the interests of democracy, democratic participation in the form of collective action may end up threatening the interests of neoliberalism in turn. Core

predictors of collective action include the existence of grievances or perceived injustice, efficacy, and identity (van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). The results presented here suggest that while grievances and perceptions of injustice may be there, collective efficacy and shared identification are likely to pose more of an obstacle as a result of increasing atomization and the focus on individual coping strategies. Additionally, the question remains what form a potential collective mobilization against the neoliberal system might take, and this will not only be determined by the preconditions for engagement but also by the available movements and how successfully they are able to communicate their narratives with regard to the problems and solutions they advocate (Klandermans & van Stekelenburg, 2013). As this research shows, populist sentiments are likely to increase in reaction to neoliberalism's increasingly hostile economic and social climate. Current trends suggest that one outcome of people's grievances with regard to these developments is a growing popularity of right-wing populist movements that rally around race or nationality as a shared identity and blame not only elites but also vulnerable groups for their discontent. These movements have the advantage that they have not only chosen a very tangible and, for those involved, positive social identity, there is also a likely benefit to collective efficacy, both in selecting this identity and in using less powerful groups besides the elite as targets of collective anger. However, while the leaders of these campaigns usually pay lip-service to critiques of global capitalism, they often simultaneously support neoliberal policies such as tax cuts for the wealthy, and have been accused of using anti-immigration politics to distract from this discrepancy (Paletta & Werner, 2018). But while they may dominate the news, right-wing populist groups are not the only ones emerging in reaction to neoliberal politics. There are also recent examples that may provide templates for more left-wing populist movements, most notably the anti-austerity campaigns in Southern Europe which united demographic groups by successfully fashioning solidarity and a collective identity around the more inclusive, though abstract, idea of shared citizenship and reclaiming democracy from oligarchic power (Gerbaudo, 2017).

### 3.4 Conclusion

This doctoral thesis set out to make headway toward a more integrated understanding of the way neoliberalism shapes individual and collective life in the societies it transforms. The research that makes up this work confirms that the influence of neoliberal ideology and policies can be detected in all three areas investigated. From intergroup relations to social connection to individual well-being, the negative effects of a doctrine of competitive individualism can be observed in the erosion of the social fabric, reduced health and happiness, and increasing social tensions. While these findings provide further evidence for the rising concern that we live in a social, economic, and political system that is detrimental to human well-being, progress, and social justice, they also give tentative cause for optimism by showing that a growing awareness of the existence of this system and its workings may eventually lead to the blame for its consequences being attributed to its beneficiaries rather than newcomers or marginalized groups that serve as scapegoats.

#### 4. References

- Adams, G., Estrada-Villalta, S., Sullivan, D., & Markus, H. R. (2019). The Psychology of Neoliberalism and the Neoliberalism of Psychology. *Journal of Social Issues, 75*(1), 189–216. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12305>
- Adorno, T. (1950). *The Authoritarian personality*,. New York: Harper.
- Allsop, B., Briggs, J., & Kisby, B. (2018). Market Values and Youth Political Engagement in the UK: Towards an Agenda for Exploring the Psychological Impacts of Neo-Liberalism. *Societies, 8*(4), 95. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc8040095>
- Azevedo, F., Jost, J. T., Rothmund, T., & Sterling, J. (2019). Neoliberal Ideology and the Justification of Inequality in Capitalist Societies: Why Social and Economic Dimensions of Ideology Are Intertwined. *Journal of Social Issues, 75*(1), 49–88. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12310>
- Bailey, D. J. (2018). Neoliberalism and the Left: Before and After the Crisis. In D. Cahill, M. Cooper, M. Konings, & D. Primrose (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Neoliberalism* (pp. 631–643). <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526416001.n48>
- Baron, C. (2016). *Proleten, Pöbel, Parasiten Warum die Linken die Arbeiter verachten*. Berlin: Das Neue Berlin.
- Bartling, B., Weber, R. A., & Yao, L. (2015). Do markets erode social responsibility? *Quarterly Journal of Economics, 130*(1), 219–266. <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qju031>
- Bay-Cheng, L. Y., Fitz, C. C., Alizaga, N. M., & Zucker, A. N. (2015). Tracking homo oeconomicus: Development of the neoliberal beliefs inventory. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology, 3*(1), 71–88. <https://doi.org/10.5964/jssp.v3i1.366>
- Beattie, P. (2019). The Road to Psychopathology: Neoliberalism and the Human Mind. *Journal of Social Issues, 75*(1), 89–112. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12304>
- Becker, J. C., Wagner, U., & Christ, O. (2011). Consequences of the 2008 financial crisis for intergroup relations: The role of perceived threat and causal attributions. *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations, 14*(6), 871–885. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430211407643>
- Berg, L. D., Huijbens, E. H., & Larsen, H. G. (2016). L'anxiété suscitée par l'université néolibérale. *Canadian Geographer, 60*(2), 168–180. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cag.12261>
- Berlin, I. (1969). Two concepts of liberty. In *Four essays on liberty* (pp. 118–172). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bettache, K., & Chiu, C. Y. (2019). The Invisible Hand is an Ideology: Toward a Social Psychology of Neoliberalism. *Journal of Social Issues, 75*(1), 8–19. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12308>
- Blank, T. (2003). Determinants of National Identity in East and West Germany: An Empirical Comparison of Theories on the Significance of Authoritarianism, Anomie, and General Self-Esteem. *Political Psychology, 24*(2), 259–288. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0162-895x.00328>
- Boehm, C. (2012). *Moral origins : the evolution of virtue, altruism, and shame*. Basic Books.

- Brown, W. (2015). *Undoing the demos: neoliberalism's stealth revolution*. New York: Zone Books.
- Bullock, H. E., Williams, W. R., & Limbert, W. M. (2003). Predicting support for welfare policies: The impact of attributions and beliefs about inequality. *Journal of Poverty*, 7(3), 35–56. [https://doi.org/10.1300/J134v07n03\\_03](https://doi.org/10.1300/J134v07n03_03)
- Bullock, H. E., Wyche, K. F., & Williams, W. R. (2001). Media images of the poor. *Journal of Social Issues*, 57(2), 229–246. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0022-4537.00210>
- Burns, J. K., Tomita, A., & Kapadia, A. S. (2014). Income inequality and schizophrenia: Increased schizophrenia incidence in countries with high levels of income inequality. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 60(2), 185–196. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020764013481426>
- Buttrick, N. R., & Oishi, S. (2017). The psychological consequences of income inequality. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 11(3), e12304. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12304>
- Caterino, B., & Hansen, P. (2019). Critical theory, democracy, and the challenge of neoliberalism. In *Critical Theory, Democracy, and the Challenge of Neoliberalism*. <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781487532147>
- Chaplin, R. (1915). Solidarity Forever. Retrieved from <http://unionsong.com/u025.html>
- Cheung, F., & Lucas, R. E. (2016). Income inequality is associated with stronger social comparison effects: The effect of relative income on life satisfaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 110(2), 332–341. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000059>
- Chomsky, N. (1999). *Profit over people: neoliberalism and global order*. New York: Seven Stories Press.
- Chomsky, N. (2010). *Hopes and prospects*. London: Haymarket Books.
- Coates, D. (2018). Progressive Politics Under Neoliberalism. In D. Cahill, M. Cooper, M. Konings, & D. Primrose (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Neoliberalism* (pp. 359–369). <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526416001.n29>
- Cohen, P. (2017, May 17). On Health and Welfare, Moral Arguments Can Outweigh Economics. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/07/business/economy/congress-benefits-fairness.html>
- Crandall, C. S., & Eshleman, A. (2003, May). A Justification-suppression Model of the Expression and Experience of Prejudice. *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 129, pp. 414–446. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.129.3.414>
- Crouch, C. (2012, June 27). There is an alternative to neoliberalism that still understands the markets. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/jun/27/alternative-neoliberalism-still-understands-markets>
- Curran, T., & Hill, A. P. (2019). Perfectionism is increasing over time: A meta-analysis of birth cohort differences from 1989 to 2016. *Psychological Bulletin*, 145(4), 410–429. <https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000138>

- Dorling, D. (2016). Brexit: The decision of a divided country. *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 354. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.i3697>
- Durkheim, E. (1897). *Suicide (1952 edition)*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Dutt, A., & Kohfeldt, D. (2019). Assessing the Relationship between Neoliberal Ideology and Reactions to Central American Asylum Seekers in the United States. *Journal of Social Issues*, 75(1), 134–152. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12312>
- Ellemers, N., van Knippenberg, A., & Wilke, H. (1990). The influence of permeability of group boundaries and stability of group status on strategies of individual mobility and social change. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 29(3), 233–246. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8309.1990.tb00902.x>
- Ergül, H., & Coşar, S. (2017). Universities in the Neoliberal Era. In H. Ergül & S. Coşar (Eds.), *Universities in the Neoliberal Era*. <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-55212-9>
- Eribon, D. (2018). *Returning to Reims*. London: Allen Lane.
- Fiske, A. P. (1991). *Structures of social life: The four elementary forms of human relations: Communal sharing, authority ranking, equality matching, market pricing*. New York: Free Press.
- Foucault, M. (2008). *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979. Edited by Michel Senellart. Translated by Graham Burchell*. <https://doi.org/10.22439/fs.v0i7.2640>
- Friedman, M. (1962). *Capitalism and Freedom*. Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press.
- Friedman, M. (1976). The Fragility of Freedom. In M. Feldberg, K. Jowell, & S. Mulholland (Eds.), *Milton Friedman in South Africa* (pp. 3–10). Cape Town and Johannesburg: Graduate School of Business of the University of Cape Town.
- Fritsche, I., & Jugert, P. (2017, December 1). The consequences of economic threat for motivated social cognition and action. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, Vol. 18, pp. 31–36. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsy.2017.07.027>
- Fritsche, I., Moya, M., Bukowski, M., Jugert, P., de Lemus, S., Decker, O., ... Navarro-Carrillo, G. (2017). The Great Recession and Group-Based Control: Converting Personal Helplessness into Social Class In-Group Trust and Collective Action. *Journal of Social Issues*, 73(1), 117–137. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12207>
- Gerbaudo, P. (2017). The indignant citizen: anti-austerity movements in southern Europe and the anti-oligarchic reclaiming of citizenship. *Social Movement Studies*, 16(1), 36–50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2016.1194749>
- Grandin, G. (2006, November 17). The Road from Serfdom. *Counterpunch*. Retrieved from <https://www.counterpunch.org/2006/11/17/the-road-from-serfdom/>
- Greenaway, K. H., Cruwys, T., Haslam, S. A., & Jetten, J. (2016). Social identities promote well-being because they satisfy global psychological needs. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 46(3), 294–307. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2169>
- Habermas, J. (1981). *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns: Zweiter Band*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

- Hackworth, J. R. (2012). *Faith based : religious neoliberalism and the politics of welfare in the United States*. University of Georgia Press.
- Hampson, L. (2019, June 18). 6 loneliness charities you can volunteer for. *London Evening Standard*. Retrieved from <https://www.standard.co.uk/lifestyle/london-life/how-to-volunteer-for-loneliness-charity-uk-london-a3869876.html>
- Harcourt, B. E. (2010). *The Illusion of Free Markets*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Haring, M., Hewitt, P. L., & Flett, G. L. (2003). Perfectionism, coping, and quality of intimate relationships. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 65(1), 143–158. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2003.00143.x>
- Harvey, D. (2005). *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Haslam, C., Jetten, J., Cruwys, T., Dingle, G. A., & Haslam, S. A. (2018). *The New Psychology of Health*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315648569>
- Hayek, F. A. (1944). *The road to serfdom*. London: Routledge.
- Hayek, F. A. (1960). *The constitution of liberty*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Hayek, F. A. (1969). The Principles of a Liberal Social Order. In *Studies In Philosophy, Politics and Economics* (Vol. 31, pp. 160–177). <https://doi.org/10.2307/43206528>
- Henrich, J., Heine, S. J., & Norenzayan, A. (2010). The weirdest people in the world? *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 33(2–3), 61–83. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X0999152X>
- Hobbes, T. (1651). *Leviathan or the Matter, Forme, & Power of a Common-wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civill*. London: Andrew Crooke.
- Hogg, M. A., & Williams, K. D. (2000, January 1). From I to we: Social identity and the collective self. *Group Dynamics*, Vol. 4, pp. 81–97. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2699.4.1.81>
- Hoksbergen, R., & Espinoza Madrid, N. (1997). The Evangelical Church and the Development of Neoliberal Society: A Study of the Role of the Evangelical Church and Its NGOs in Guatemala and Honduras. *The Journal of Developing Areas*, 32(1), 37–52.
- Holt-Lunstad, J. (2017). The Potential Public Health Relevance of Social Isolation and Loneliness: Prevalence, Epidemiology, and Risk Factors. *Public Policy & Aging Report*, 27(4), 127–130. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ppar/prx030>
- Holt-Lunstad, J., Robles, T. F., & Sbarra, D. A. (2017). Advancing social connection as a public health priority in the United States. *American Psychologist*, 72(6), 517–530. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000103>
- Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T. B., Baker, M., Harris, T., & Stephenson, D. (2015). Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality: A Meta-Analytic Review. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 10(2), 227–237. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691614568352>
- Holt, R., & Greenwood, D. (2012). Negative trickle-down and the financial crisis of 2008. *Journal of Economic Issues*, 46(2), 363–370. <https://doi.org/10.2753/JEI0021-3624460211>
- Hövermann, A., Groß, E. M., Zick, A., & Messner, S. F. (2015). Understanding the devaluation of vulnerable groups: A novel application of Institutional Anomie Theory. *Social Science Research*, 52, 408–421. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2015.03.001>

- Jetten, J., Haslam, C., & Haslam, S. A. (2012). *The Social Cure. Identity, Health and Well-Being*. London: Psychology Press.
- Jones, D. S. (2014). *Masters of the universe: Hayek, Friedman, and the birth of neoliberal politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Jones, O. (2012). *Chavs : the demonization of the working class*. London: Verso.
- Judt, T. (2010). *Ill fares the land*. London: Penguin Press.
- Kant, I. (1785). *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*. Riga: J. F. Hartknoch.
- Kashima, Y. (2019, March 1). Neoliberalism and Its Discontents: Commentary on Social Psychology of Neoliberalism. *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 75, pp. 350–355. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12314>
- Kasser, T. (2002). *The high price of materialism*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Keay, D. (1987, October 31). Aids, education and the year 2000! *Woman's Own*, pp. 8–10. Retrieved from <https://www.margarethatcher.org/document/106689>
- Klandermans, B., & van Stekelenburg, J. (2013). Social Movements and the Dynamics of Collective Action. In L. Huddy, D. O. Sears, & J. S. Levy (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of political psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 774–811). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Klein, N. (2007). *The shock doctrine: the rise of disaster capitalism*. London: Allen Lane.
- Kulik, C. T., & Li, Y. (2015). The Fork in the Road: Diversity Management and Organizational Justice. In R. S. Cropanzano & M. L. Ambrose (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Justice in the Workplace* (pp. 561–575). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Leyva, R. (2019). Experimental insights into the socio-cognitive effects of viewing materialistic media messages on welfare support. *Media Psychology*, 22(4), 601–625. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2018.1484769>
- Logan, J. (2002). Consultants, lawyers, and the ‘union free’ movement in the USA since the 1970s. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 33(3), 197–214. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2338.00230>
- Markus, H. R., & Stephens, N. M. (2017, December 1). Editorial overview: Inequality and social class: The psychological and behavioral consequences of inequality and social class: a theoretical integration. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 18, iv–xii. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2017.11.001>
- Merton, R. K. (1938). Social Structure and Anomie. In *Sociological Review* (Vol. 3).
- Metcalf, S. (2017, August 18). Neoliberalism: The Idea That Swallowed The World. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/aug/18/neoliberalism-the-idea-that-changed-the-world>
- Mirowski, P. (2014). *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste: How Neoliberalism Survived the Financial Meltdown*. London: Verso.
- Moffit, R. E. (2019). No Choice, No Exit: The Truth About “Medicare for all” Proposals. Retrieved from The Heritage Foundation website: <https://www.heritage.org/medicare/commentary/no-choice-no-exit-the-truth-about-medicare-all-proposals>

- Monbiot, G. (2013, November 4). This transatlantic trade deal is a full-frontal assault on democracy. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/nov/04/us-trade-deal-full-frontal-assault-on-democracy>
- Monbiot, G. (2014, October 14). The age of loneliness is killing us. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/oct/14/age-of-loneliness-killing-us>
- Monbiot, G. (2016, April 15). Neoliberalism – the ideology at the root of all our problems. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/15/neoliberalism-ideology-problem-george-monbiot>
- Mudde, C. (2007). Populist radical right parties in Europe. In *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511492037>
- Mudge, S. L. (2008). What is neo-liberalism? *Socio-Economic Review*, 6(4), 703–731. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwn016>
- Müller, B. (2013). *Erosion der gesellschaftlichen Mitte : Mythen über die Mittelschicht, Zerklüftung der Lohnarbeit, Prekarisierung & Armut, Abstiegsängste*. Hamburg: VSA-Verlag.
- Nachtwey, O. (2016). *Die Abstiegs-gesellschaft: über das Aufbegehren in der regressiven Moderne*. Berlin: Suhrkamp.
- Nishi, A., Shirado, H., Rand, D. G., & Christakis, N. A. (2015). Inequality and visibility of wealth in experimental social networks. *Nature*, 526(7573), 426–429. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nature15392>
- Ogihara, Y., & Uchida, Y. (2014). Does individualism bring happiness? Negative effects of individualism on interpersonal relationships and happiness. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5(MAR), 135. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00135>
- Oishi, S., Ishii, K., & Lun, J. (2009). Residential mobility and conditionality of group identification. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 45(4), 913–919. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2009.04.028>
- Oishi, S., & Kesebir, S. (2015). Income Inequality Explains Why Economic Growth Does Not Always Translate to an Increase in Happiness. *Psychological Science*, 26(10), 1630–1638. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797615596713>
- Oishi, S., Kesebir, S., & Diener, E. (2011). Income inequality and happiness. *Psychological Science*, 22(9), 1095–1100. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797611417262>
- Orton, M., & Rowlingson, K. (2007). *Public attitudes to economic inequality*. Retrieved from <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/2080-attitudes-economic-inequality.pdf>
- Ostry, J. D., Loungani, P., & Furceri, D. (2016). Neoliberalism: Oversold? *Finance & Development*, 53(2).
- Otjes, S., & Louwerse, T. (2015). Populists in Parliament: Comparing Left-Wing and Right-Wing Populism in the Netherlands. *Political Studies*, 63(1), 60–79. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.12089>

- Paletta, D., & Werner, E. (2018, November 2). After GOP 2018 tax cut plans fell apart, immigration filled the campaign void. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/how-republicans-grand-2018-tax-ambitions-shrived-down-to-a-press-release/2018/11/02/ff3b9ed4-de06-11e8-b732-3c72cbf131f2\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/how-republicans-grand-2018-tax-ambitions-shrived-down-to-a-press-release/2018/11/02/ff3b9ed4-de06-11e8-b732-3c72cbf131f2_story.html)
- Palley, T. I. (2004). *From Keynesianism to Neoliberalism: Shifting Paradigms in Economics*.
- Panno, A., Carrus, G., & Leone, L. (2019). Attitudes towards Trump Policies and Climate Change: The Key Roles of Aversion to Wealth Redistribution and Political Interest. *Journal of Social Issues, 75*(1), 153–168. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12318>
- Peck, J. (2001). *Workfare states*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Peck, J. (2010). Zombie neoliberalism and the ambidextrous state. *Theoretical Criminology, 14*(1), 104–110. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480609352784>
- Perez, M. J., & Salter, P. S. (2019). Trust, Innocence, and Individual Responsibility: Neoliberal Dreams of a Colorblind Peace. *Journal of Social Issues, 75*(1), 267–285. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12317>
- Pettigrew, T. F. (2006, September). The advantages of multilevel approaches. *Journal of Social Issues, Vol. 62*, pp. 615–620. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2006.00477.x>
- Pew Research Center. (2009). Independents Take Center Stage in Obama Era. Retrieved from <https://www.people-press.org/2009/05/21/independents-take-center-stage-in-obama-era/>
- Pickett, K. E., & Wilkinson, R. G. (2015, March 1). Income inequality and health: A causal review. *Social Science and Medicine, Vol. 128*, pp. 316–326. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2014.12.031>
- Piff, P. K. (2014). Wealth and the Inflated Self: Class, Entitlement, and Narcissism. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 40*(1), 34–43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167213501699>
- Piketty, T. (2015). *The Economics of Inequality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Piketty, T., & Saez, E. (2014). Inequality in the long run. *Science, 344*(6186), 838–843. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1251936>
- Pujol, M. J. (2015). *The Neoliberal Construction of Immigration as Crisis*. Retrieved from <https://encompass.eku.edu/etd/307>
- Ratcliffe, S. (2016). *Oxford Essential Quotations* (4th ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Richard, P., Walker, R., & Alexandre, P. (2018). The burden of out of pocket costs and medical debt faced by households with chronic health conditions in the United States. *PLoS ONE, 13*(6). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0199598>
- Richerson, P. J., & Boyd, R. (2005). *Not by genes alone : how culture transformed human evolution*. University of Chicago Press.
- Robinson, N. (2013, March 7). There is no alternative (TINA) is back. *BBC News*. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-21703018>

- Rottenberg, C. (2014). The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism. *Cultural Studies*, 28(3), 418–437. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2013.857361>
- Royle, T. (2002). Just vote no! Union–busting in the European fast–food industry: the case of McDonald’s. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 33(3), 262–278. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2338.00234>
- Schram, S. F. (2018). Neoliberalizing the Welfare State: Marketizing Social Policy/Disciplining Clients. In D. Cahill, M. Cooper, M. Konings, & D. Primrose (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Neoliberalism* (pp. 308–322). <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526416001.n25>
- Schram, S. F., Soss, J., Houser, L., & Fording, R. C. (2010). The third level of US welfare reform: governmentality under neoliberal paternalism. *Citizenship Studies*, 14(6), 739–754. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2010.522363>
- Schulz, A., Müller, P., Schemer, C., Wirz, D. S., Wettstein, M., & Wirth, W. (2018). Measuring Populist Attitudes on Three Dimensions. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 30(2), 316–326. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edw037>
- Schwartz, S. H. (2012). An Overview of the Schwartz Theory of Basic Values. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1116>
- Schwartz, S. H., & Boehnke, K. (2004). Evaluating the structure of human values with confirmatory factor analysis. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 38(3), 230–255. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0092-6566\(03\)00069-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0092-6566(03)00069-2)
- Shahar, G., Blatt, S. J., Zuroff, D. C., Krupnick, J. L., & Sotsky, S. M. (2004). Perfectionism impedes social relations and response to brief treatment for depression. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 23(2), 140–154. <https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.23.2.140.31017>
- Shim, S. S., & Fletcher, K. L. (2012). Perfectionism and social goals: What do perfectionists want to achieve in social situations? *Personality and Individual Differences*, 52(8), 919–924. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2012.02.002>
- Soss, J., Fording, R. C., & Schram, S. (2011). *Disciplining the poor: neoliberal paternalism and the persistent power of race*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Stiglitz, J. E. (2016). Inequality and Economic Growth. *The Political Quarterly*, 86(1), 134–155. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-016-0049-x>
- Stoeber, J. (2015). How Other-Oriented Perfectionism Differs from Self-Oriented and Socially Prescribed Perfectionism: Further Findings. *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment*, 37(4), 611–623. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10862-015-9485-y>
- Sugarman, J. (2015). Neoliberalism and psychological ethics. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, 35(2), 103–116. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038960>
- Tajfel, H. (1970). Experiments in intergroup discrimination. *Scientific American*, 223(5), 96–102. <https://doi.org/10.1038/scientificamerican1170-96>
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.

- Teghtsoonian, K. (2009). Depression and mental health in neoliberal times: A critical analysis of policy and discourse. *Social Science and Medicine*, 69(1), 28–35. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2009.03.037>
- Teo, T. (2018). Homo neoliberalus: From personality to forms of subjectivity. *Theory and Psychology*, 28(5), 581–599. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354318794899>
- Teymoori, A., Jetten, J., Bastian, B., Ariyanto, A., Autin, F., Ayub, N., ... Wohl, M. (2016). Revisiting the measurement of anomie. *PLoS ONE*, 11(7). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0158370>
- Thompson, D. (2017, December 7). The Long Game of Republican Economics. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/12/the-long-game-of-republican-economics/547721/>
- Turner, J. C. (1975). Social comparison and social identity: Some prospects for intergroup behaviour. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 5(1), 1–34. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2420050102>
- Twenge, J. M., & Kasser, T. (2013). Generational Changes in Materialism and Work Centrality, 1976-2007: Associations With Temporal Changes in Societal Insecurity and Materialistic Role Modeling. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 39(7), 883–897. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167213484586>
- van Zomeren, M., Postmes, T., & Spears, R. (2008). Toward an Integrative Social Identity Model of Collective Action: A Quantitative Research Synthesis of Three Socio-Psychological Perspectives. *Psychological Bulletin*, 134(4), 504–535. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.134.4.504>
- VicHealth. (2018). Loneliness: a new public health challenge emerges. Retrieved February 22, 2020, from VicHealth website: <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/letter/articles/vh-letter-47-loneliness>
- von Collani, G., & Grumm, M. (2009). On the Dimensional Structure of Personality, Ideological Beliefs, Social Attitudes, and Personal Values. *Journal of Individual Differences*, 30(2), 107–119. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1614-0001.30.2.107>
- Wacquant, L. (2009). *Punishing the poor: the neoliberal government of social insecurity*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
- Wilkinson, R. G., & Pickett, K. (2009). *The spirit level: why greater equality makes societies stronger*. London: Allen Lane.
- Wilkinson, R. G., & Pickett, K. E. (2017). The enemy between us: The psychological and social costs of inequality. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 47(1), 11–24. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2275>
- Wilson, G. D. (Ed.). (1973). *The psychology of conservatism*. London: Academic Press.

## Anlage

### Erklärung über die Eigenständigkeit der erbrachten wissenschaftlichen Leistung

Ich erkläre hiermit, dass ich die vorliegende Arbeit ohne unzulässige Hilfe Dritter und ohne Benutzung anderer als der angegebenen Hilfsmittel angefertigt habe. Die aus anderen Quellen direkt oder indirekt übernommenen Daten und Konzepte sind unter Angabe der Quelle gekennzeichnet.

Die präsentierten Manuskripte sind unter der Mitwirkung von Ko-Autoren entstanden, welche im Folgenden in der korrekten Reihenfolge ihrer Autorenschaft angegeben sind.

#### Manuskript 1:

**Lea Hartwich:** Entwicklung des Studiendesigns, Datenerhebung, Konzeption und Durchführung der Auswertung, Manuskripterstellung

**Julia C. Becker:** Mitwirkung beim Studiendesign, Feedback zur Manuskripterstellung

#### Manuskript 2:

**Lea Hartwich:** Entwicklung des Studiendesigns, Datenerhebung, Konzeption und Durchführung der Auswertung, Manuskripterstellung

**Julia C. Becker:** Mitwirkung beim Studiendesign, Feedback zur Manuskripterstellung

#### Manuskript 3:

**Julia C. Becker:** Entwicklung des Studiendesigns, Datenerhebung (Studie 1), Konzeption und Durchführung der Auswertung, Manuskripterstellung

**Lea Hartwich:** Mitwirkung beim Studiendesign, Datenerhebung (Studien 2, 3, 4), Durchführung und Verschriftlichung der Auswertung (Studie 4)

**S. Alexander Haslam:** Mitwirkung beim Studiendesign, Feedback zur Manuskripterstellung

Weitere Personen waren an der inhaltlichen materiellen Erstellung der vorliegenden Arbeit nicht beteiligt. Insbesondere habe ich hierfür nicht die entgeltliche Hilfe von Vermittlungs- bzw. Beratungsdiensten (Promotionsberater oder andere Personen) in Anspruch genommen. Niemand hat von mir unmittelbar oder mittelbar geldwerte Leistungen für Arbeiten erhalten, die im Zusammenhang mit dem Inhalt der vorgelegten Dissertation stehen.

Die Arbeit wurde bisher weder im In- noch im Ausland in gleicher oder ähnlicher Form einer anderen Prüfungsbehörde vorgelegt.

Osnabrück, 01.03.2020

.....  
(Ort, Datum)

.....  
(Unterschrift)