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Tracking Homo Oeconomicus: Development of the Neoliberal Beliefs Inventory

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Abstract

Researchers across the social sciences are beginning to note that neoliberalism's influence is no longer restricted to macroeconomic and social policies, but can now be detected in individuals' behaviors, relationships, perceptions, and self-concept. However, psychologists lack a means of assessing neoliberal beliefs directly. We collected data from three samples of U.S. undergraduates to develop and test a measure of neoliberal ideology, the Neoliberal Beliefs Inventory (NBI). Using first exploratory and then confirmatory factor analysis, we devised a 25-item measure that is both reliable and valid, at least within a particular demographic (i.e., U.S. traditionally-aged undergraduates). The NBI may help psychologists specify and analyze the role of neoliberal ideology in shaping human behavior and functioning.

Keywords: neoliberal ideology, scale development, individual differences

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Neoliberal Policy and Ideology in the United States

Neoliberalism commonly refers to global and domestic economic and social policies that expand and enrich capital markets while curbing governments' regulatory and social welfare systems. As indicated by the very names of two cornerstones of U.S. neoliberal legislation, the *North American Free Trade Agreement* and the *Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act* (commonly referred to as "welfare reform"), such policies operate under the pretense of promoting free choice and fair consequences. They are founded on an ideology that supposedly neither favors one group over others, nor presumes equal talents or worth among them. Instead, neoliberalism rests on the appealing premise of rational, self-interested systems – ranging from individual actors to entire nations – vying for resources, opportunities, and success on the same, level playing field. Under such conditions, all consequences, whether rewards or losses, are deemed equally deserved (for thorough delineations of neoliberal ideology, see: Brown, 2003; Duggan, 2003; Harvey, 2005).

Neoliberal policies are often transnational in their scope, yet their reception and influence vary widely across nations and constituent communities and therefore require context-specific analysis. In the U.S., the focal point of our research, neoliberal tenets hew close to hallmarks of national identity, such as rugged individualism and the mythic figure of the self-made man. Neoliberalism's resonance with these long-standing and prized values may partially explain why it took hold so rapidly and easily in the U.S. It was first introduced as a concerted movement to reverse, through legislative and rhetorical means, social welfare and economic policies instituted to buffet the Great Depression of the 1930s and prevent its recurrence (Duggan, 2003; Harvey, 2005). Beginning in the 1970s, neoliberal advocates mounted the argument that government oversight was no longer required in order to ensure fair competition, and that its regulatory practices were in fact to blame for the nation's economic stagnation. In the U.S., neoliberalism's economic claims intermingled with objections to domestic social policies and programs, specifically provisions aimed at reducing social inequalities (e.g., affirmative action and means-tested anti-poverty programs such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children; Duggan, 2003). Social welfare expenditures and civil rights protections were cast as antagonistic to a robust work ethic and a functional meritocracy, and therefore fundamentally antithetical to the nation's core values. Through a neoliberal lens, state programs and policies were viewed as threatening citizens' self-determination, whereas previous government interventions (e.g., policies enacted during the Progressive Era and under the New Deal) had been perceived as enabling citizens' liberty by increasing their access to resources (Zucker & Bay-Cheng, 2010). This position was solidified through the 1980s, and by the 1990s saturated dominant discourse in the U.S. (Duggan, 2003; Harvey, 2005). This manifested not only in the common parlance of key neoliberal phrases such as "personal responsibility" but also in the neoliberal cooption of concepts such as "empowerment," which were gradually individualized and dissociated from radical, politicized critique (Bay-Cheng, 2012; Riger, 1993; Simon, 1994).

Brown (2003) saw the ramifications of neoliberalism as so pervasive that it resulted in "human being[s] configured exhaustively as *homo oeconomicus* [such that] all dimensions of human life are cast in terms of a market rationality" (Section 9; see also Harvey, 2005; Stringer, 2014). A growing body of social science research substantiates the cultural suffusion of neoliberal ideology, showing its impact on language (Nafstad, Blakar, Carlquist, Phelps, & Rand-Hendriksen, 2009), social cohesion (Coburn, 2000), and workplace organization (Williams, 2013). Neoliberal ideology also exerts influence on individuals' behavior (e.g., voting [Allen & Ng, 2000], academic cheating [Pulfrey & Butera, 2013]) as well as their identity and reasoning. For example, neoliberal emphases on self-interest, achievement, and personal responsibility are echoed in contemporary constructions of youth (Harris, 2004; Kelly, 2001), sexuality (Adam, 2005; Bay-Cheng & Eliseo-Arras, 2008; Evans & Riley, 2014), response to trauma and victimization (Stringer, 2014), and feminism (Fitz, Zucker, & Bay-Cheng, 2012). Thus while explicit references to neoliberalism may remain tied to debates about finance and markets, it appears that at least in the U.S., neoliberalism has trickled down and out beyond the bounds of economic discourse and policy.

Related but Distinct: Neoliberal Beliefs and Political Attitudes

Despite the empirical evidence and theoretical grounds for neoliberalism's influence on psychology, researchers lack a means for measuring its embrace by individuals. We argue that a distinct, explicit measure of neoliberal beliefs is warranted not only because of its salience in contemporary U.S. discourse and culture, but also because it is easily mistaken for substantively different positions. For instance, neoliberal ideology may appear to be aligned with various forms of conservatism (e.g., right-wing authoritarianism [RWA; Altemeyer, 1981], social dominance orientation [SDO; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994]), but it also differs from these constructs in its prioritization of self-interest over preservation of the status quo, its relative amorality, and its consequent objection to

regulatory practices (Brown, 2006). The neoliberal position is a meritocratic, post-feminist, post-racial one that presumes institutionalized discrimination to be largely eradicated (Harris, 2004). Thus neoliberal and RWA ideologies may take equally skeptical stances vis-à-vis policies to promote the interests of marginalized groups; however, RWA-based opposition – whether derived from authoritarianism, conservatism, or traditionalism – is likely to be framed in terms of defending existing political and social systems against diverse threats (Duckitt & Bizumic, 2013), whereas from a neoliberal perspective such efforts are unnecessarily meddling at best and obstructions of meritocracy at worst. Neoliberalism also concurs with SDO's endorsement of competition and hierarchy; neither aims to achieve equal outcomes or status among groups or individuals. However, SDO's groupist foundation, that one's own group is inherently superior to others and deserves dominant status, contradicts the strict individualism of neoliberal ideology, which supports hierarchies that result from free and fair competition among individual constituents. SDO is also associated with an adversarial, disparaging disposition toward others (Duckitt & Bizumic, 2013; Duckitt & Fisher, 2003), while neoliberalism assumes a seemingly sympathetic stance: individuals should be free from all external constraints, whether social bias or governmental interference, in order to strive at will and succeed if deserving.

From such a perspective, the U.S. is often cast as a functioning, post-prejudice meritocracy in which individuals may be masters of their own destinies. The outstanding success of gender and/or racial minority individuals (most notably President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama, who are not only racial minorities but also were born without class privilege) is often used to confirm that the U.S. largely operates as an equitable, level playing field. This premise also reveals a critical distinction between neoliberal and libertarian ideologies: whereas the latter is predicated on a singular devotion to “negative liberty” (Iyer, Koleva, Graham, Ditto, & Haidt, 2012), U.S.-based neoliberalism makes some allowance, at least rhetorically, for system intervention. The very title of U.S. welfare reform legislation, the *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act*, exemplifies this state-citizen accord: the government ensures equal access to opportunity and it is then up to individuals either to seize the opportunity and flourish, or miss it and fail. Unlike libertarianism, which opposes policies such as affirmative action and welfare entitlements as a matter of principle, neoliberalism takes the practical position that they are no longer necessary in the contemporary, post-prejudice U.S. (Duggan, 2003).

Related but Distinct: Neoliberal Beliefs and Perceptions of Control

Even when enduring disparities are acknowledged, these are often described as conquerable through focused, strategic, individual effort (e.g., Sandberg's [2013] advice that women ought to “lean in” if they wish to excel in business). Duggan (2003) identified the assertion of “‘multicultural’ neoliberal ‘equality’ politics” (p. xii) as the current front for advancing neoliberal ideology in the U.S. The conceit that individuals in the U.S. are generally free agents operating within a fundamentally equitable social system suggests high degrees of both internal locus of control and environmental mastery. However, measures of these constructs do not capture the dimension of neoliberal ideology that links one's self-concept to views of the social environment. Neoliberal tenets also closely resemble the core constructs of system justification theory (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004) and belief in a just world (Lerner, 1980; Rubin & Peplau, 1975). These theoretical frameworks tap the deep-seated motivational drives and aspects of personality that compel individuals to express faith in a fair and just world (Carney, Jost, Gosling, & Potter, 2008). Despite many parallels, established measures of system justification and just world beliefs are imprecise proxies for neoliberal ideology, which, as a context-specific worldview, should not be equated with underlying traits or dispositions.

Related but Distinct: Neoliberal Beliefs and Feminist Attitudes

Neoliberalism's intersection with various forms of conservative thinking and policy is fairly unsurprising and has been critiqued vigorously (e.g., [Brown, 2003](#); [Duggan, 2003](#); [Harvey, 2005](#)). Far less expected and investigated are points of ideological coincidence between neoliberalism and feminism (for an analysis of feminism's assumption of neoliberal tropes vis-à-vis victims and victimization, see [Stringer, 2014](#)). Many studies of feminist identity reveal that most women endorse feminist positions without explicitly identifying as feminist (for a review, see [Zucker & Bay-Cheng, 2010](#)). These women are often treated as a single group that is inclined toward feminism but wary of being labeled as such. Recent research casts doubt on the presumed ideological comparability among "non-labelers": [Fitz and colleagues \(2012\)](#) discovered that while some appeared feminist in ideology if not in identity, this characterization did not fit a significant proportion. Instead, the authors speculated that this subgroup of non-labelers was best described as neoliberal insofar as they viewed gender equality as a matter of individual freedom and fair competition (i.e., neoliberal principles), not as a feminist or social justice position regarding women's rights. Without explicit attention to neoliberalism, it would have been easy for this ideological diversity among non-labelers to go unnoticed, or for support for gender equality to be misattributed to feminist intentions.

The Need for a Measure of Neoliberal Beliefs

There are compelling theoretical and empirical grounds for believing that neoliberalism has taken hold as a pervasive and influential ideology in the U.S., one that comprises beliefs both about system-level functioning (e.g., as a meritocracy in which government intervention runs counter to the productive and natural momentum of competition) as well as individual-level attributes (e.g., the premium placed on personal responsibility, individual freedom, and self-interest). Despite the apparent salience of neoliberalism to attitudes, behaviors, and relationships, we lack a means of formally testing its psychological impact. Given its manifestation in the U.S. as a widespread and diffuse cultural discourse, one that intermingles with an array of other attitudinal and ideological sets, neoliberalism is not fully or accurately captured by discrete indicators (e.g., political party identification, support for particular policies) or measures of related but non-equivalent psychological constructs. Without a direct measure of individuals' neoliberal beliefs, studies thereof are confined to tentative and impressionistic speculation. We developed the Neoliberal Beliefs Inventory (NBI) as a tool to use in directly studying neoliberal ideology and its psychological impact. Our goal was not to test individuals' conscious endorsement of neoliberal policies or political platform or to label a particular group of individuals as neoliberal. Instead, we focused our efforts on developing a means for detecting the infiltration and manifestation of a U.S.-specific variant of neoliberal ideology in individuals' attitudes and views.

Method

Participants and Procedure

We collected data during three semesters (Spring 2012, Spring 2013, Fall 2013) to develop and refine the NBI. All three samples comprised distinct groups of undergraduates at a private university in Washington, DC. We provide basic demographic characteristics of each sample in [Table 1](#). All samples were composed predominantly of white women in their 1st or 2nd year of undergraduate studies who averaged between 19 and 20 years old and who came from affluent families. Participants' ages and year in school is typical of those drawn from psychology course subject pools, as in the case of the current research, and their socioeconomic background is reflective of

students at the private university where they studied. Of those participants in each sample who did not identify as white, 5-7% identified as Black; 3-4% identified as Latino/a; 12-18% identified as Asian/Pacific Islander American; 3-5% identified as Middle Eastern; 3-6% identified as biracial or multiracial; and 3-6% did not select any racial or ethnic category. Sample 2 participants only were asked about their political party affiliation, with 52% identifying as Democrat. Of the remainder, 16% identified as Republican, 5% identified as Libertarian, 25% as Independent, and less than 1% of participants identified as members of the Constitution Party and Green Party, respectively.

Table 1

Sample Characteristics

Sample	Stage of Scale Development	Characteristics					
		Age <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	1st or 2nd Year Student	Female	White	Median Income	Democrat
1 (<i>N</i> = 421)	EFA	19.67 (1.72)	67.6%	80.3%	69.4%	\$120,000-\$140,000	NA
2 (<i>N</i> = 446)	CFA & Validity Testing	20.02 (1.95)	61.1%	72.2%	66.4%	\$120,000-\$140,000	52%
3 (<i>N</i> = 148)	Reliability & Validity Testing	19.08 (1.23)	74.0%	76.9%	71.6%	\$120,000-\$140,000	NA

NBI development proceeded in three stages: 1) item pool generation and exploratory factor analysis (EFA; Sample 1); 2) confirmatory factor analysis (CFA; Sample 2); and 3) assessment of the final scale's reliability (Sample 3), internal consistency (all 3 samples), and validity (Samples 2 and 3). At all stages, we collected data using online surveys and participants received course credit. To examine test-retest reliability, Sample 3 participants completed the NBI twice (referred to as Time 1 and Time 2), separated by a two-week interval.

Measures

Item Development (Sample 1)

We began scale development by generating a pool of possible items based on our collective review on the multidisciplinary literature dedicated to neoliberal ideology. In our literature review and consequent item generation, we considered neoliberalism not only as a body of explicit global and domestic policies, but also as an often-implicit cultural discourse in the U.S. Each of the authors individually wrote items based on our respective reading of the literature. We then compared item lists to eliminate redundancy and to identify substantive differences in our interpretations of neoliberal ideology. Such differences were resolved through discussion and reference to existing scholarship. We also consulted a scholar of political identity and a social policy graduate student who favored neoliberal tenets regarding the pool's conceptual comprehensiveness, clarity, and face validity. This critical, iterative, and collaborative process yielded a pool of 83 attitudinal items, to be rated on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) scale. Items appeared to reflect six themes: three related to system functioning (social inequality, government intervention, value of competition); and three related to individuals (personal responsibility, personal freedom, prioritization of self-interest).

Convergent Validity (Sample 2)

In addition to measuring participants' propensity to provide socially desirable responses using Reynolds' (1982) 13-item short form of the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale in Sample 2 (as a measure of discriminant validity), we included several measures to assess the NBI's convergent validity.

Locus of control — We measured participants' locus of control using [Rotter's \(1966\)](#) Internal-External Control (I-E) Scale. This scale includes 23 forced-choice statement pairs, with one statement reflecting internal locus of control beliefs and the other external locus of control beliefs. Sample item pairings include: "In the long run, people get the respect they deserve in this world" or "Unfortunately, an individual's worth often passes unrecognized no matter how hard he or she tries"; "As far as world affairs are concerned, most of us are the victims of forces we can neither understand nor control" or "By taking an active part in political and social affairs, the people can control world events"; "Many times I feel that I have little influence over the things that happen to me" or "It is impossible for me to believe that chance or luck plays an important role in my life." Statements were dummy coded (0 = external control; 1 = internal control) and summed such that higher scores indicated a greater internal locus of control ($\alpha = .68$).

Environmental mastery — [Ryff's \(1989\)](#) Environmental Mastery Scale measures individuals' sense of personal agency. Participants answered 14 items using a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*) scale. Sample items include: "If I were unhappy with my living situation, I would take effective steps to change it"; "I generally do a good job of taking care of my personal finances and affairs"; and "I find it stressful that I can't keep up with all of the things I have to do each day." We computed mean scores, with higher scores indicating greater mastery ($\alpha = .86$).

Belief in a just world — The Belief in a Just World for Others (BJW-O; [Lipkus, Dalbert, & Siegler, 1996](#)) scale consists of 8 items (e.g., "I feel that people earn the rewards and punishments they get," "I feel that the world treats people fairly," "I feel that when people meet with misfortune, they have brought it upon themselves") designed to measure individuals' belief that other people get what they work for and hence, deserve. Participants responded to each item using a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) scale. We averaged responses; higher scores reflect stronger beliefs in a just world ($\alpha = .92$).

Political identity — We asked participants, "If you could select one political party that best represents your political views, which would it be?" Response options included "Democratic Party," "Republican Party," "Constitution Party," "Libertarian Party," "Green Party," "Tea Party or Tea Party Patriots," and "Independent." We reasoned that Libertarians would espouse the strongest neoliberal beliefs of all groups and Democrats the weakest, except for Green Party adherents. However, only 22 participants self-identified as Libertarian and four identified with the Green Party. Given this limited variance by political identity, the four Green Party adherents were excluded from analyses and the remaining participants were divided into dichotomous groups of *Democrat* and *not Democrat*.

Feminist beliefs — Female participants completed three subscales of the Feminist Perspectives Scale ([Henley, Meng, O'Brien, McCarthy, & Sockloskie, 1998](#)): the Liberal subscale captures women's feminist beliefs regarding gender equity and women's rights (e.g., "Social change for sexual equality will best come about by acting through federal, state, and local government"); the Radical subscale measures women's beliefs that sexism is the primary form of oppression, upon which other forms are built (e.g., "Men prevent women from becoming political leaders through their control of economic and political institutions"); and the Women of Color subscale (WOC) assesses women's attention to the intersection of other social identities (e.g., race, class) with gender (e.g., "Racism and sexism make double the oppression for women of color in the work environment"). Each subscale consists of ten items that participants rate using a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) scale. We averaged items within each subscale to create three separate subscale scores. Cronbach's alphas for the Liberal, Radical, and WOC subscales were .79, .82, and .89, respectively.

Convergent Validity (Sample 3)

Social dominance orientation (Time 1) — As noted, SDO refers to the view of social hierarchies as natural and justified. Using Pratto et al.'s (1994) SDO for Others Scale, participants rated their agreement with 16 items (e.g., "It's probably a good thing that certain groups are at the top and other groups are at the bottom," "Some people are just inferior to others," and "To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on others") using a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) scale. We calculated mean scores, with higher scores indicating greater SDO ($\alpha = .90$).

Right-wing authoritarianism (Time 2) — RWA refers to ideological support for established authorities and adherence to traditional norms and conventions. We employed the short form of Duckitt, Bizumic, Krauss, and Heled's (2010) Authoritarianism-Conservatism-Traditionalism (ACT) Scale to measure multiple dimensions of RWA among Sample 3 participants. Participants used a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) scale to rate their agreement with 18 items (e.g., "Our country will be great if we show respect for authority and obey our leaders," "The 'old-fashioned ways' and 'old-fashioned values' still show the best way to live," "Being kind to loafers or criminals will only encourage them to take advantage of your weakness, so it's best to use a firm, tough hand when dealing with them"). ACT items are divided among three subscales: authoritarianism; conservatism; and traditionalism. Although the subscales reflect distinct dimensions of RWA (Duckitt et al., 2010; Duckitt & Bizumic, 2013), we opted to compute a total ACT score across all 18 items, with higher scores indicating stronger RWA ideology. We felt this parsimonious approach was empirically and conceptually acceptable given the internal consistency among all ACT items in the current dataset ($\alpha = .83$) and that we expected all three ACT subscales to be similarly negatively correlated with neoliberal ideology.

Criterion Validity

Collective action — Sample 2 participants completed Foster and Matheson's (1995) Collective Action Scale (CAS), which assesses engagement in 25 different forms of advocacy for women's rights (e.g., "I have discussed women's issues with family or friends, stressing the need to enhance women's position in society," "I will correct other's use of sexist language," "I have participated in protests regarding women's issues") in the past six months. Participants indicated whether they engaged in each behavior (0 = *no*; 1 = *yes*). We computed a composite score by summing responses to all 25 behaviors (range = 0 to 25; $\alpha = .89$).

Rape myth acceptance — We administered McMahon and Farmer's (2011) update of Payne, Lonsway, and Fitzgerald's (1999) Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMA) to participants in Sample 3. The scale's 22 items pertain to common victim-blaming views of sexual violence against women (e.g., "When girls go to parties wearing slutty clothes, they are asking for trouble," "When guys rape, it is usually because of their strong desire for sex," "Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at guys"). Participants are asked to rate their agreement with each statement on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) scale. We averaged responses, with higher scores indicating greater acceptance of rape myths ($\alpha = .92$).

Perception of sexism — Female participants in Sample 3 completed Pinel (1999)'s Stigma-Consciousness Questionnaire (SCQ) for women, which assesses awareness of stigma and discrimination stemming from sexism. Participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with 10 statements (e.g., "Most men have a lot more sexist thoughts than they actually express," "Stereotypes about women have not affected me personally" [reverse scored], "I never worry that my behaviors will be viewed as stereotypically female" [reverse scored]) using a 0 (*strongly*

disagree) to 6 (*strongly agree*) scale. We calculated mean scores, with higher scores indicating greater stigma consciousness ($\alpha = .80$).

Results

Preliminary Item Analysis and Exploratory Factor Analysis (Sample 1)

Initial statistical analyses indicated 21 items with low item-total correlations (i.e., $r_s < .30$); we deleted these items. We deleted two more that were redundant with others, leaving 60 items.

Using IBM SPSS 20.0 (IBM Corporation, 2011), we conducted principal axis factoring with direct oblimin rotation to examine the factor structure of the 60 items. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin's measure of sampling adequacy (MSA) revealed a high level of shared variance (MSA = .92) and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 (1,770) = 9807.93$, $p < .001$), indicating that the data met multivariate normality assumptions and were suitable for factor analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). We based factor retention on eigenvalues, scree plots, and factor interpretability. We retained factors with eigenvalues greater than one and that contained three items or more (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

Six factors had eigenvalues greater than 1. The first factor was comprised of items asserting that discrimination is a thing of the past; however, these items also loaded onto other factors, including one with items related to the prioritization of hard work, not discrimination per se. A second factor included conceptually divergent items, including some linked to competition and others linked to personal responsibility. Many of the competition-related items were also cross loaded on Factor 5, which seemed focused on beliefs about competition. The third and sixth factors both included items pertaining to government interference [e.g., "A problem with government social programs is that they get in the way of personal freedom" (Factor 3); "Social programs sponsored by the government reduce individuals' ambition" (Factor 6)]. In all, the six-factor solution produced considerable conceptual and item redundancy (e.g., between Factors 2 and 5 and between Factors 3 and 6), making it difficult to interpret the individual factors and distinguish among them.

We therefore pursued additional approaches for determining factor retention. Following O'Connor's (2000) model syntax, we conducted parallel analysis using randomly generated data and a principal components approach. We also specified the parameters of 1,000 iterations and a 95% eigenvalue percentile. Results suggested that six factors be retained. However, we also examined the scree plot of the data, which indicated a four-factor solution. These four factors were conceptually discrete and there were fewer cross loadings than among the possible six factors. On these grounds, we adopted a four-factor solution, retaining items with factor loadings of .50 or greater. We discarded items that loaded onto multiple factors if the difference between loadings was less than .10 (Kahn, 2006). To complement these statistical criteria, we examined the conceptual meaningfulness and integrity of the factors and constituent items. Based on this, we eliminated one item ("People need to learn from their mistakes") that did not cohere with other factor items and opted to retain four items with factor loadings of .49 and that aligned conceptually with other items on their respective factors.

The resulting scale included 27 items loading on four factors, which we dubbed: *Social Inequality* (i.e., beliefs regarding the existence and implications thereof); *Natural Competition* (i.e., the belief that competition is fair, natural, and beneficial); *Personal Wherewithal* (i.e., the belief that personal attributes of strength and skill yield success);

and *Government Interference* (i.e., the belief that state intervention violates personal freedom and meritocratic principles). These factors closely resemble the themes identified in our literature review. System Inequality accounted for 28.81% of the data's variance. The Competition, Personal Wherewithal, and Government Interference factors accounted for 6.16%, 5.05%, and 4.60% of the variance, respectively. Altogether, these four factors explained 44.62% of the data's variance.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (Sample 2)

We used Lisrel 9.1 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2012) to conduct CFA of the 27 retained items using Sample 2 participant responses. Consistent with EFA results, we hypothesized a model with four latent factors representing the four subscales. Sample 2's size ($n = 446$) exceeded the recommended minimum for CFA (e.g., MacCallum, Browne, & Sugawara, 1996), thus increasing the accuracy of models and fit indices. Additionally, data met univariate and multivariate normality assumptions (Weston & Gore, 2006): Tolerance scores $\geq .10$; VIF scores ≤ 10 ; skew values ≤ 3 ; and kurtosis values ≤ 8 .

We determined absolute model fit using the root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) and the standardized root-mean residual (SRMR). We also tested incremental model fit with the comparative fit index (CFI). We did not employ chi-square since it is less discerning in models with more than 400 cases (Kenny, 2014). Following Weston and Gore (2006), we used RMSEA and SRMR $\leq .10$ and CFI $\geq .90$ as standards of acceptable fit.

To evaluate the four-factor structure, we specified that items would load onto their appropriate factors (based on EFA results) and we allowed the four factors to correlate. The CFA demonstrated that the four-factor model provided an acceptable fit to the data, RMSEA = .07; SRMR = .06; CFI = .96. However, based on modification indices and factor loadings, we deleted two additional items whose loadings were .50 and below and allowed two error variances (between Item 1, "Affirmative action is an outdated policy now that people are generally treated as equals" and Item 2, "Discrimination does not exist today to such a degree that affirmative action policies are necessary," and between Item 3, "Affirmative action does not help eradicate discrimination. Instead it exacerbates it by promoting people on the basis of minority status instead of merit" and Item 4, "Affirmative action is a problem because it treats people unequally") to co-vary. This yielded the best fit: RMSEA = .07; SRMR = .06; CFI = .97. We also examined a unidimensional model wherein all items loaded on a single latent factor. This was a poor fit, RMSEA = .13; SRMR = .11; CFI = .87, suggesting the modified four-factor model was superior. See Table 2 includes the final set of 25 items and their respective CFA loadings.

Table 2
EFA (Principal Components Analysis; Sample 1) and CFA (Sample 2) Results

Item	EFA Factor Loadings				CFA Results	
	1	2	3	4	Loading	Uniqueness
Factor 1: System Inequality						
Affirmative action is an outdated policy now that people are generally treated as equals.	.64	.03	-0.08	.07	.77	.71
Discrimination does not exist today to such a degree that affirmative action policies are necessary.	.76	.12	-0.06	-0.08	.75	.71
Affirmative action does not help eradicate discrimination. Instead it exacerbates it by promoting people on the basis of minority status instead of merit.	.72	.25	.07	.10	.77	.80
Affirmative action is a problem because it treats people unequally.	.73	.18	.07	.08	.77	.73
People who complain about discrimination are often just blaming other people for their own problems.	.43	-0.08	-.18	.16	.87	.56
I think people imagine more barriers, such as discrimination, than actually exist.	.45	.00	-0.36	-0.03	.94	.51
Based on my own experience and the people around me, it's hard for me to feel sorry for people who complain about discrimination.	.46	-0.07	-0.38	.10	.92	.48
Factor 2: Competition						
People should be allowed to compete to ensure that the best person wins.	.05	.49	.07	.07	.78	.56
Being competitive is part of human nature.	.03	.65	-0.02	-0.01	.74	.34
Competition is a good way to discover and motivate the best people.	.04	.46	-0.21	-0.02	.77	.35
Shielding children from competition does not prepare them for adulthood.	.04	.70	.13	.01	.66	.42
Fairness means letting people have equal opportunity, not guaranteeing equal outcome.	.05	.50	-0.08	-0.05	.61	.70
*To get ahead in the world, people have to depend on themselves more than anyone else.	-0.02	.49	-0.16	.05	-	-
Factor 3: Personal Wherewithal						
Anybody can get ahead in the world if they learn to play the game.	-0.07	.14	-0.57	.11	.70	.80
Any goal can be achieved with enough hard work and talent.	-0.21	.12	-0.49	.11	.77	.80
Right now, pretty much all Americans are free to live any kind of life they want.	.15	-0.07	-0.50	-0.13	.73	.71
When it comes to challenges like discrimination, individuals just have to be tough enough to overcome them.	.22	-0.07	-0.55	.07	.84	.63
I've benefited from working hard, so there's no reason others can't.	-0.02	.19	-0.57	.09	.95	.51
If you're smart and strong enough, discrimination won't hold you back.	.23	.02	-0.61	-0.01	.96	.58
A person's success in life is determined more by his or her personal efforts than by society.	.08	.21	-0.51	.05	.78	.66
Anyone who is willing to work hard can be successful in America.	.08	-0.02	-0.69	.09	.90	.63
Factor 4: Government Interference						
A problem with government social programs is that they get in the way of personal freedom.	.03	.07	-0.03	.68	.87	.45
The government is inefficient, and therefore should not interfere in the private sector.	.11	-0.06	.01	.67	.79	.43
The government often hurts individual ambition when it interferes.	.22	.11	.01	.55	.82	.36
The government does not have a right to take what I earn and give it to someone else.	-0.02	.01	-0.36	.47	.92	.59
Social programs sponsored by the government provide false incentives and unearned rewards.	.41	-0.12	-0.08	.48	.93	.39
*It's right for the government to get involved in individuals' lives. (R)	-.11	.03	.02	.52	-	-

Note. * Indicates item was removed from the final 25-item version of the NBI based on CFA results. (R) = reverse-scored item.

Internal Consistency, Reliability, and Validity (Samples 1-3)

We assessed internal consistency for the NBI by calculating Cronbach's alphas for the 25-item scale and its subscales for each of the samples. All alphas were acceptable (see Table 3), falling within the fair to excellent range (Ponterotto & Ruckdeschel, 2007).

Table 3

Internal Consistency of the NBI and Subscales Across Samples

Sample	Cronbach's alpha (α)				
	NBI Overall	SI	C	PW	GI
Sample 1	.91	.87	.71	.84	.79
Sample 2	.93	.89	.84	.89	.89
Sample 3 (Time 1)	.93	.87	.79	.88	.86
Sample 3 (Time 2)	.95	.90	.87	.91	.90

Note. SI = System Inequality subscale. C = Competition subscale. PW = Personal Wherewithal subscale. GI = Government Interference subscale.

Based on Sample 3, two week test-retest reliability for the NBI and subscales were: overall NBI, $r(146) = .84$, $p < .001$; System Inequality subscale, $r(146) = .83$, $p < .001$; Competition, $r(146) = .62$, $p < .001$; Personal Wherewithal, $r(146) = .79$, $p < .001$; and Government Interference, $r(146) = .83$, $p < .001$.

Descriptive statistics and correlations among the NBI subscales are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

NBI and Subscales' Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Measure	Descriptives		Correlations				
	Sample 2	Sample 3	NBI Overall	SI	C	PW	GI
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)					
NBI	3.02 (.68)	3.13 (.68)	--	.84**	.61**	.85**	.76**
SI	2.64 (.90)	2.72 (.85)	.87**	--	.37**	.58**	.57**
C	3.93 (.78)	4.05 (.65)	.64**	.42**	--	.37**	.34**
PW	2.91 (.88)	3.05 (.87)	.90**	.70**	.48**	--	.51**
GI	2.85 (.92)	2.93 (.89)	.79**	.62**	.39**	.60**	--

Note. All measures had a rating range of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating stronger endorsement of neoliberal beliefs. Correlations above the diagonal are derived from Sample 2. Correlations below the diagonal are derived from Sample 3, Time 1. SI = System Inequality subscale. C = Competition subscale. PW = Personal Wherewithal subscale. GI = Government Interference subscale.

** $p < .001$.

NBI scores and socially desirable responding were unrelated, $r(443) = -.03$, $p = .48$. Indicating convergent validity, Sample 2 participants' NBI scores correlated significantly with an internal locus of control, $r(441) = .26$, $p < .001$, greater environmental mastery, $r(438) = .11$, $p = .02$, and stronger belief in a just world, $r(438) = .53$, $p < .001$. Additionally, an independent samples t-test showed Democratic participants ($M = 2.79$, $SD = .60$) reported significantly lower NBI scores than the other participants ($M = 3.29$, $SD = .67$), $t(436) = -8.16$, $p < .001$. NBI scores

were also significantly ($p < .001$) inversely correlated with all three scales of feminist beliefs: Liberal, $r(317) = -.39$; Radical, $r(318) = -.33$; and WOC, $r(317) = -.53$. Furthermore, Sample 3 NBI scores, measured at Time 1, correlated positively with SDO, $r(176) = .51$, $p < .001$, and ACT scores, $r(146) = .37$, $p < .001$.ⁱⁱ Lending support for criterion validity, NBI scores were negatively related to collective action on behalf of women, $r(314) = -.35$, $p < .001$, and stigma consciousness, $r(107) = -.34$, $p < .001$, and positively related to rape myth acceptance, $r(178) = .52$, $p < .001$. Table 5 includes descriptive and correlational data for the NBI and measures of validity.

Table 5

Validity Measures' Descriptive Statistics and Correlations With the NBI

Measures (range)	Descriptives		Correlations				
	Sample 2	Sample 3	NBI	SI	C	PW	GI
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)					
MCSDS (0-13)	10.45 (2.10)	--	-.03	-.09	.09	-.04	-.02
I/E (0-23)	10.13 (3.79)	--	.26**	.19**	.09	.34**	.12*
EMS (1-6)	3.89 (0.68)	--	.11*	.04	.23**	.08	.04
BJW-O (1-7)	3.27 (1.15)	--	.53**	.44**	.18**	.55**	.40**
FPS-LIB (1-7)	5.45 (0.95)	--	-.39**	-.36**	.05	-.40**	-.39**
FPS-RAD (1-7)	3.81 (1.09)	--	-.33**	-.29**	-.26**	-.27**	-.20**
FPS-WOC (1-7)	4.58 (1.22)	--	-.53**	-.55**	-.14*	-.44**	-.40**
SDO (1-7)	--	2.72 (1.05)	.51**	.48**	.22*	.42**	.49**
ACT (1-5)	--	2.56 (0.51)	.37**	.38**	.04	.40**	.26**
CAS (0-25)	6.92 (5.65)	--	-.35**	-.32**	-.27**	-.28**	-.17*
IRMA (1-5)	--	2.02 (0.69)	.52**	.46**	.21**	.52**	.43**
SCQ (0-6)	--	4.50 (0.96)	-.34**	-.33**	-.15	-.35**	-.20*

Note. MCSDS = Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale. I/E = Internal-External Control Scale. EMS = Environmental Mastery Scale. BJW-O = Belief in a Just World for Others. FPS = Feminist Perspectives Scale. LIB = Liberal subscale. RAD = Radical subscale. WOC = Women of Color subscale. SDO = Social Dominance Orientation Scale. ACT = Authoritarianism-Conservatism-Traditionalism Scale. CAS = Collective Action Scale. IRMA = Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale. SCQ = Stigma-Consciousness Questionnaire. SI = System Inequality subscale. C = Competition subscale. PW = Personal Wherewithal subscale. GI = Government Interference subscale.

* $p < .02$. ** $p < .001$.

To explore the distinctiveness of the NBI, particularly in relation to social dominance and right-wing authoritarianism, we compared the NBI's correlations with stigma consciousness, and rape myth acceptance to SDO and ACT correlations with the same two measures. Collective action was not included since it was used with a different sample of participants than the SDO and ACT. Correlational analyses indicated that although the respective associations of the NBI, SDO, and ACT with the criterion validity constructs resemble one another, there are also some differences. Specifically, SDO was uncorrelated with stigma consciousness, $r(107) = -.17$, $p = .09$, whereas the NBI and ACT were negatively correlated with it: $r(92) = -.24$, $p = .02$ and $r(92) = -.32$, $p = .002$, respectively. The NBI and ACT were similarly correlated with rape myth acceptance: $r(148) = .43$, $p < .001$ and $r(148) = .48$, $p < .001$, respectively. SDO was also positively associated with rape myth acceptance, but at approximately half the magnitude of the NBI and ACT: $r(178) = .20$, $p = .008$.

Discussion

We created the NBI over a three-step process, beginning with item pool generation and gradually winnowing items based on factor analyses. We also tested the measure's validity and reliability to ensure that it was conceptually meaningful, distinct, and stable. This multi-stage process yielded a 25-item measure that comprised four central U.S.-based neoliberal beliefs: that state action to counter discrimination is unnecessary; that competition and hard work are primary components of merit-based success; and that the government should refrain from socioeconomic intervention. The correlational patterns between the NBI – as a single measure and when divided into standalone subscales – and measures of feminist beliefs, social dominance, and right-wing authoritarianism offer support for its construct validity: neoliberal beliefs are inversely related to feminist perspectives but align with, without completely overlapping, social dominance and authoritarian ones. Endorsement of neoliberal ideology was also correlated with a sense of control and mastery, in terms of one's self (i.e., internal locus of control) and the social environment (i.e., environmental mastery and belief in a just world).

Taken together, these findings reflect the neoliberal tenor of contemporary U.S. discourse: that in our supposedly post-prejudice, meritocratic state and given adequate effort and skill, individuals can be the makers of their own fortune; on the flipside, misfortune and failure are therefore attributed to personal inadequacies rather than structural injustices. This is exemplified by the tendency of participants' neoliberal beliefs to be associated with both victim-blaming positions vis-à-vis rape and doubts regarding the existence and personal salience of sexism (as measured by the SCQ). Belief in the promise of personal effort and the non-necessity of social intervention may also be reflected in the inverse relation between neoliberal beliefs and collective action.

Brown's (2003) sardonic reference to *homo oeconomicus* captures how the macro-level social, political, and economic climate may trickle down and manifest in micro-level relationships, perceptions, and self-concept. Careful attention to the imprint of neoliberalism on individual psychology is especially important because it may result in behaviors commonly attributed to diverse and even fundamentally divergent ideological positions, whether socially conservative (e.g., RWA or SDO) or progressive (e.g., feminism). To avoid overlooking or misattributing neoliberal ideology, it is critical for psychologists to assess it as a distinct set of beliefs, despite its relation to and occasional intersection with other ideologies. Indeed, a key to neoliberalism's success (i.e., its thorough and pervasive naturalization; Harvey, 2007) in the U.S. has been its cooperation with psychologically motivated beliefs (e.g., system justification) and culturally prevalent attitudinal sets (e.g., social dominance, authoritarianism).

Taking the Protestant work ethic (PWE) as an example of a correlated, but not identical construct, PWE, like neoliberal ideology, proposes that anyone can succeed if they work hard enough. As Levy, West, Ramirez, and Karafantis (2006) pointed out, PWE can be viewed as fundamentally egalitarian in this regard. However, PWE is not predicated on particular social conditions; it is, in this sense, an ahistorical and essentialist view of humans and how the world operates. Neoliberalism champions hard work, but does so while acknowledging that systems have not always operated equitably. Embedded in this recognition is the simultaneous claim that such injustices and biases are things of the past. Thus unlike common political psychological constructs, the premise of neoliberal ideology is specifically situated in time and place: a post-industrial, globalized, supposedly post-prejudice and meritocratic U.S.

Given the preliminary nature and attendant design limitations of our efforts to develop a measure of neoliberal ideology, we view the current study as a foundation from which to launch a longer process of vetting and refining the NBI. Although we expect neoliberal beliefs to share common conceptual ground with other political attitudinal sets and see such commonality as key to its cultural assimilation, a critical next step will be extending the investigation of the measure's discriminant and predictive validity. It will be important to specify the ways in which neoliberal beliefs diverge from social dominance and authoritarianism, for instance. This is also true of neoliberal and libertarian ideologies, which we believe to be convergent but not equivalent. The NBI Government Interference subscale is likely to have an especially strong association with libertarianism, for instance. We had neither a measure of libertarian ideology nor a sufficient number of self-identified libertarians in any of the current samples to test this empirically. Future studies should also examine the overlap and distinctions between neoliberal beliefs and the PWE. Our tests of the NBI's criterion validity were also circumscribed by our limited number of constructs (i.e., collective action, rape myths, and perceptions of sexism), that two measures (i.e., CAS and SCQ) were relevant only to female participants, that the measures were used with different samples and therefore limited testing of some relations, and that our cross-sectional data collection bars any examination of causality. Future tests of the NBI must include a broader range of constructs and a more sophisticated design in order to establish the measure's true predictive validity.

Several other design factors both limit the implications of our current findings and also point the way for future study. The NBI is comprised almost exclusively of positively-keyed items. We acknowledge concerns that this may lead to acquiescence bias, but also note that the odds and magnitude of this threat to validity are contested (e.g., [Barnette, 2000](#); [Mavor, Louis, & Sibley, 2010](#); [Schriesheim & Hill, 1981](#)). With regard to sampling, our use of undergraduate participants is conceptually justified given the relatively recent emergence of neoliberalism ([Brown, 2003](#); [Harvey, 2005](#)) and its influence on the current cohort of emerging adults ([Harris, 2004](#)). Nevertheless, the study samples' demographic homogeneity (e.g., age, student status, race, socioeconomic status) and predominantly female composition precludes testing of the NBI's utility with different populations or exploration of possible group differences.ⁱⁱ Such examinations could yield useful insight into the contextual specificity of neoliberal ideology and its influence (e.g., variations by gender, generation, socioeconomic status, race), as in the case of [Hagan and colleagues' \(1999\)](#) comparison of hierarchic self-interest among East and West German youth. Given such potential context dependence, we caution against the unstudied application of the NBI to non-U.S. samples. Not only was our empirical examination of the NBI based on a U.S. sample, but more substantially, we view neoliberalism as a culturally variable construct. The explicit policies it advances may cross national borders, but its rhetorical and values foundation within countries reflect their respective norms and inclinations. In the U.S., neoliberal ideology is indivisible from social identities derived from race, gender, and class, among other groupings ([Duggan, 2003](#)). This may explain the relevance of affirmative action to the NBI, a facet of neoliberal ideology that may be U.S.-specific. The salience of affirmative action to the NBI may also be linked to our engagement of an undergraduate sample, since contemporary affirmative action discourse concentrates so heavily on university admission policies.

Additional substantiation of the NBI and its subscales is certainly needed. For instance, the Competition subscale also followed a different pattern of associations from other NBI subscales (e.g., it was unrelated to authoritarianism), a finding that may warrant more targeted examination. Nevertheless, we are excited by the potential opened up by the NBI to study neoliberal ideology, at least as it manifests in the U.S., in an intentional and explicit way. This work could include examining the relation of NBI and individual subscales to personal experiences (e.g., related to discrimination), attributes (e.g., the relation of Personal Wherewithal to resilience or the PWE), and attitudes

and behaviors vis-à-vis social justice issues (e.g., support for social welfare programs). Future work might discern the relation of neoliberalism, which we posit to be highly context-dependent, to the core political ideologies of liberalism, conservatism, and even libertarianism (Iyer et al., 2012). These comparative analyses might explore whether neoliberal ideology has a distinct dispositional basis or is adequately captured by the dispositional profiles that have been generated for liberals, conservatives, and libertarians (Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008; Iyer et al., 2012). Indeed, we see a multitude of possibilities for future research using the NBI as psychologists work to understand how neoliberalism has transformed from a discrete body of social and economic policies into such a pervasive component of contemporary discourse and individual psychology in the U.S.

Notes

i) We examined correlations of the ACT subscales (authoritarianism, conservatism, traditionalism) with the NBI to ensure that our decision to use a single total ACT score was empirically sound. Positive correlations for all three subscales with the NBI were statistically significant ($ps < .001$): $r(148) = .27$ (conservatism); $r(148) = .29$ (traditionalism); $r(148) = .33$ (authoritarianism).

ii) Despite the demographic homogeneity of our samples, we conducted exploratory post-hoc comparisons of participants' NBI endorsement based on income (median split) and race (white or person of color). We identified two group differences with regard to income. In both Sample 1 and Sample 2, higher income participants' NBI scores (Sample 1, $M = 3.23$; Sample 2, $M = 3.12$) were significantly higher than their lower income peers (Sample 1, $M = 3.10$; Sample 2, $M = 2.94$). These findings are unsurprising given the relative affluence of the study participants. We reason that wealthier individuals are more likely to see their success as the product of their own strengths (e.g., personal wherewithal) and fair competition on a level playing field and to view external regulation (e.g., government interference) as unnecessary and undesirable. Similarly, male privilege may explain why male participants in Samples 2 and 3 (at Time 1) had significantly higher NBI scores (Sample 2, $M = 3.21$; Sample 3, $M = 3.34$) than their female counterparts (Sample 2, $M = 2.96$; Sample 3, $M = 3.06$). The existence and explanation of such demographic group differences warrants more thorough investigation in future work.

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Competing Interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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