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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Acknowledging that Men are Moral and Harmed by Gender Stereotypes Increases Men's Willingness to Engage in Collective Action on Behalf of Women

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Abstract

The rise of far-right parties with antifeminist sentiments constitutes a new challenge in the path to gender equality. Here, we aim to identify strategies to promote men's acceptance of social change towards equality. Thus, we first examined key concerns about gender equality held by far-right supporters through a discourse analysis of 120 men. The findings revealed a focus on male victimhood, the negation and only partial recognition of inequality, and the delegitimization of feminism. Given the centrality of victimhood in the discourse of far-right male supporters and its social relevance, we developed several non-confrontational strategies based on men's suffering and supposed (im)morality, and then compared the effectiveness of these strategies for getting men to commit more to gender equality. Two experimental studies ($n = 417$ and 428 men) revealed that recognizing that men are generally moral or that they also suffer because of gender stereotypes led participants to increase their willingness to participate in collective action for women's rights. In contrast, questioning their morality by denouncing men's violence against women had no impact on their intentions. We conclude that non-confrontational strategies that address men's concerns about feminist advancement can prevent potential defensive reactions and make them more receptive to social change towards gender equality.

Keywords Anti-feminist men · Gender equality · Feminism · Gender roles · Gender stereotypes · Moral suffering · Male victimhood · Far-right men · Non-confrontational · Mixed methods · Discourse analysis · Experimental

Inequality between men and women continues to be a major problem that, according to most estimates, will take hundreds of years to eliminate (World Economic Forum, 2021). Although there has been a notable feminist resurgence (Dean & Aune, 2015), the rise of ultrareligious and extreme right parties that proclaim antifeminist messages (Sanders & Jenkins, 2022) and online misogynistic communities (e.g., *Manosphere;* Zuckerberg, 2018) present new obstacles to gender equality. Campaigns and social movements that draw attention to the oppression and discrimination of women (e.g., the #MeToo movement) are perceived as threatening by some traditional men who support the gender status quo (Lisnek et al., 2022). One response from these men is to reject feminist messages and policies and adhere to denialist discourses that present men as the true victims of equality policies.

In the current research, we aim to identify strategies to overcome men's resistance to gender equality, especially among far-right men supporters who are more opposed to social change. We propose that non-confrontational strategies that acknowledge the morality of men and the costs of gender stereotypes for men might be more effective than confrontational strategies in reducing traditional men's opposition to gender equality. To test these ideas, we first conducted a series of brief interviews with far-right men supporters to identify their main fears and concerns regarding gender (in)equality. We then designed two experiments

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based on our analysis of men's discourse around gender equality and examined the effectiveness of different strategies for increasing men's willingness to engage in collective action on behalf of women.

Antifeminism, the Far Right, and the Men's Rights Movement

Ultraconservative and far-right parties and movements that espouse anti-feminist discourses and actions seem to be on the rise (Claus & Virchow, 2017; Kaul, 2021; Keskinen, 2013). Recently, traditional political and religious organizations have coordinated actions against women's rights in several countries with the claim that the traditional family is being deliberately dismantled (Cupać & Ebetürk, 2020). Träbert (2017) states that a prominent idea within antifeminist discourse is male victimhood, which is based on the perception that men are victims of discrimination and disadvantage, the denial of the disadvantages faced by women, a view of feminism as an omnipotent enemy, and glorifying traditional, essentialist gender roles. Consistent with this analysis, Zehnter et al. (2021) found evidence of the belief that sexism has shifted against men and men suffer more discrimination than women.

Far right and men's rights movements share negative beliefs about feminism and a concern about the "crisis of masculinity" (Träbert, 2017). According to integrated threat theory (Rios et al., 2018; Stephan & Stephan, 2000, 2017), women's progress can be interpreted as both a realistic threat to men's privileges and as a symbolic threat to masculine values. Furthermore, denunciation of violence against women can also pose a threat to men's moral self-concept, in that they feel criticized by society as immoral (Kende et al., 2020). In the face of these threats, some men may exhibit defensive reactions as members of advantaged groups tend to do. For instance, the perception of the declining value of traditional masculinity seems to activate different kinds of intergroup threat (i.e., status, realistic, symbolic) among men, which in turn increases their opposition to feminism (Rivera-Rodriguez et al., 2021).

Defensive Reactions in Members of Advantaged Groups

The perception that the value of one's group is being undermined may induce a sense of identity threat (Branscombe et al., 1999). People are extremely sensitive to moral threats because morality constitutes a central part of the ingroup image (Leach et al., 2007). Therefore, when the morality of the ingroup is being questioned, people might exhibit defensive reactions to counter such a threat (e.g., Branscombe et al., 1999; Minson & Monin, 2012; Monin, 2007) and restore their morality. This need for moral restoration tends to be particularly strong among members of advantaged groups (Shnabel & Nadler, 2015), especially when the inequality is perceived as illegitimate (Siem et al., 2013). To downplay their responsibility, members of advantaged groups may engage in defensive reactions like denying inequality or minimizing its severity (Shnabel & Nadler, 2015).

Relatedly, moral threats do not always make members of the dominant group adopt fairer intergroup behaviors. In fact, moral threats *reduce* intentions to redress inequality when members of a dominant group (i.e., Israeli-Jews) feel unfairly accused of harboring racial or ethnic biases (Saguy et al., 2013). Reminders of past injustice towards women raise social identity threats and undermine men's support for employment equity policies by fostering the belief that gender discrimination no longer exists (Hideg & Wilson, 2020). Likewise, feminist denunciations of sex-based violence may be interpreted by men as a moral reproach to their whole group. To deal with such a threat, men could resort to distracting maneuvers such as denying inequality (Hideg & Wilson, 2020), attributing sex-based violence to a few sick individuals, or engaging in competitive victimhood with women (Sullivan et al., 2012).

Feminist discourse also radically questions traditional masculine roles and values that ideologically justify patriarchy (e.g., Glick & Fiske, 2001). Previous research suggests that perceived symbolic threat increases social dominance orientation (Morrison et al., 2010), prejudice (Brambilla & Butz, 2013), and discrimination (Zingora & Graf, 2019) against groups that supposedly endanger prevailing values, especially among those most invested in the relevant values (e.g., Kauff et al., 2013). Therefore, those men who adhere most to masculine roles and values should be especially prone to reject feminist proposals for equality.

Finally, feminism aims to end the current structure that oppresses women and redistribute power equitably. Building on the realistic group conflict theory (Sherif et al., 1961), Esses et al. (1998) suggested that the perception of intergroup competition would promote the use of different strategies (e.g., discrimination, opposition to affirmative action) to remove the source of competition. They also stated that those outgroups that are interested in obtaining similar resources as the ingroup and appear qualified to do so are likely to be considered potential competitors. The growing number of women occupying positions formerly reserved for men could induce competition for scarce resources particularly in those men who prefer an unequal distribution of resources. According to the strategies to remove the source of competition suggested by Esses et al. (1998), men who feel threatened might underestimate the competence of women by resorting to gender stereotypes (e.g., women

are less ambitious), discriminate against them, or oppose equality policies.

In summary, we propose that men's discourse will reflect different defensive reactions (e.g., victimhood, denial of inequality) in the face of the different threats they perceive due to the advancement of women in society and feminist demands. Those defensive reactions will be more pronounced in traditional men who adhere to traditional gender roles and prefer to maintain the gender status quo. Here we explore whether non-confrontational strategies may prevent such defensiveness and make traditional men more committed to gender equality.

Potential Strategies against Defensiveness

As stated above, moral reproaches tend to induce social identity threat and defensive reactions (e.g., Branscombe et al., 1999; Minson & Monin, 2012; Monin, 2007). In contrast, messages that acknowledge the ingroup's morality can lead members of advantaged groups to develop more positive intergroup attitudes and increase their intentions to lessen inequality (e.g., Shnabel et al., 2013). For instance, verifying the morality of an advantaged group (i.e., Spaniards) improves attitudes towards the disadvantaged group (i.e., immigrants) and fosters willingness to participate in collective action for equality (Vázquez et al., 2022). Applying these results to the relations between men and women, we propose that acknowledging men's morality may increase their acceptance of the feminist narrative on violence against women and their participation in collective action for women's rights.

On the other hand, progress towards equality is hampered by the persistence of gender stereotypes that alleviate the discomfort that men may feel about their advantageous situation (Ellemers, 2018). That is, if one endorses a rigid conception of gender roles, inequality can be attributed to differential characteristics of each gender group rather than structural disadvantages. Those most invested in gender stereotypes should be especially reluctant to accept the feminist discourse that questions those stereotypes. However, emphasizing the negative consequences that gender stereotypes have on men's wellbeing might reduce their rejection of feminist arguments. This message would connect with the victimizing narrative that some men have assumed (Träbert, 2017; Zehnter et al., 2021), but instead of blaming women for the suffering of men, it would focus on a common enemy, that of rigid gender mandates. This strategy would be related to inclusive victimhood (Vollhardt, 2015), since it recognizes that both women and men are harmed by gender stereotypes.

In sum, we propose that verifying men's morality and highlighting the negative consequences of gender stereotypes for men would be more effective in increasing traditional men's commitment to gender equality compared to more direct messages that emphasize the guilt of men or other possible counter-attitudinal persuasive messages.

Research Overview

The current research aims to test several strategies to increase men's commitment to gender equality. We conducted three studies in Spain: one qualitative study and two experiments. In the first study, we analyzed the discourse of male supporters of a far-right party (Vox) about gender equality. Founded at the end of 2013, Vox has become the third political party in Spain (Ministry of Interior, July 2023). Among other controversial social issues, its opposition to feminism seems quite appealing for its supporters. The analysis of the discourse in Study 1 would allow us to understand the essential content of the anti-feminist ideology and identify far-right men's main sources of resistance to gender equality.

Building on these findings, we develop three different strategies for targeting men's resistance to gender equality and test whether these approaches increase men's willingness to support women's rights. The first strategy exploited one of the concerns expressed by men in the interviews (i.e., being treated as sexual aggressors) and consisted of directly questioning the morality of men by using references to violence against women. In contrast, the other two strategies were non-confrontational and tried to address some of the fears expressed in the interviews. These strategies were created to reflect acknowledgement of either the morality or the suffering of men.

Together, the three studies seek to identify the main threats perceived by men in the face of the advancement of women and design and empirically test strategies that allow them to overcome their resistance to feminism and increase their commitment to gender equality (that is, acknowledgement of discrimination against women, willingness to engage in collective action for women's rights, and acceptance of the feminist narrative regarding gender violence). Approval for all studies was obtained prior to data collection by the bioethical board for compliance with standards for the ethical treatment of human participants from the corresponding author's institution.

Study 1

Study 1 was conducted to (a) determine to what extent far-right men use defensive mechanisms (e.g., denial, minimization and justification of inequality, competitive victimhood) previously identified in the literature for members

of high-status/power groups to deny gender inequality and dismiss feminism, (b) examine how those different defensive mechanisms are interrelated to each other in their discourse, and (c) extract the specific arguments they use to explain the situation of women (compared to men) in Western societies. Once revealed, this information was used in the next two studies to design strategies that would increase men's commitment to gender equality.

To capture the richness of the discourse of far-right men, we interviewed a sample of male supporters of the Spanish party Vox about the situation of women in Spain. The electoral program of this party has made an explicit commitment to abolish a specific law in the Spanish legal system focused on protection against gender violence (Organic Law 1, 2004, of December 28, on Integral Protection Measures against Gender Violence) on the basis that it supposedly discriminates against heterosexual men. However, the Constitutional Court, the supreme interpreter of the Spanish Constitution, upheld the law in its entirety in 2008. This party also seeks the "suppression of subsidized radical feminist organizations" and "effective prosecution of false accusations" of gender violence (Vox, 2018). We examined whether men who feel close to Vox ideals exhibit some of the defensive reactions consistent with neo-sexist and other related ideologies and beliefs touted by men's rights activists. We also explored additional mechanisms of resistance to feminism and analyzed the prevalence of such discourses and potential interrelated mechanisms.

Method

Participants

A total of 120 men from 18 to 70 years old ($M = 31.12$, $SD = 13.72$) were interviewed for this study. They all reported that their political ideals were closest to Vox rather than other political parties. The sample was comprised predominantly of young adults from 18 to 35 years old ($n = 77$, 64.2%), middle-aged adults from 36 to 49 ($n = 24$, 20%), and mature adults from 50 to 70 years old ($n = 19$, 15.8%). Regarding their level of studies, 33.3% ($n = 40$) indicated university studies, 27.5% ($n = 33$) secondary education, 25% ($n = 30$) vocational training, 8.3% ($n = 10$) primary education, and 5.8% ($n = 7$) other level of education not specified. Only two participants reported a nationality different from Spanish (Italian and Argentinian).

Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in Spain between February and March 2021 as part of a broader project. The interviews included 13 questions to explore the social attitudes of Vox supporters across a wide range of social and political issues: the situation of women in Spain (compared to men's), the main problems of Spain, Spanish history and its representation, political adversaries, Muslim immigrants, independence claims of the region of Catalonia, and mass media.

Participants were recruited through the purposive sampling method (guided by the relevance of the subjects to obtain rich information related to the phenomenon of interest) by social psychology students (who acted as research assistants during the process) in a Southeast region of Spain that is home to many supporters of this party. Some interviews were conducted face-to-face, and others were conducted via mediated communication (e.g., online, telephone) due to the contact restrictions established during the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 94 research assistants, who were social psychology students (71 women and 23 men), were trained as interviewers to facilitate access to this relevant sample and stimulate a naturalistic form of interaction (see Knott et al., 2022). They conducted and transcribed the interviews following a script and specific instructions. NVivo software was used to organize and analyze the text of the interviews via matrix coding and cross-tabulation. Respondents consented to the interview and agreed to be recorded.

Analytic Approach

Given that our objective was to analyze the commitment of men to gender equality, only the questions about the situation of women (compared to men's) were relevant to this study and analyzed. To prepare the data, we selected the extracts related to the research questions of interest, specifically two related questions formulated as one: 'What do you think about the situation of women in Spain? Are they treated better or worse than men?' With this formulation, we were interested in eliciting a comparative evaluation of the situation of women and men in the country.

Regarding the analytic approach, we flexibly integrated thematic analysis with interpretative and critical discourse analysis, following an abducting approach that combined inductive and deductive logic as an iterative process in the different phases of the analyses (see Knott et al., 2022). We started with a thematic analysis to organize and systematize the data with the aim of developing themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012), and then performed an interpretative and critical discourse analysis to interrogate how participants construct their reality through the articulation of their language to facilitate the interpretation of their psychological experiences regarding the research topic.

This flexible mixed analytic approach responded to the combined purpose of the study. With a descriptive/exploratory objective, we first conducted a thematic

analysis following an inductive ('bottom-up' or data-driven) approach, without preconceived notions of themes. Then, we related emerging themes to previous theories, refined them, and critically discussed whether our emerging themes reflect the defensive mechanisms previously identified in the literature (e.g., denial, minimization and justification of inequality, competitive victimhood). We also explored how these different defensive mechanisms were interrelated with each other in the discourse of the participants.

Thematic Analysis

We performed a thematic analysis as a basic method to extract and organize themes based on the patterns of meaning found in the data following an adaptation of the recursive six-phase process established by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2012).

As a first step, the first two authors read the responses independently to get familiarized with the data. Separately, they generated initial codes that reflected important features of the data according to the research question. Based on the distinction of Braun and Clarke (2006), the authors generated *semantic* (descriptive) codes that were closely linked to the content of the data, but also *latent* (interpretative) codes identifying underlying ideas that influenced the semantic data content. Then, they met and discussed the initial codes, with a special focus on the latent ideas. Together, they identified similarities and overlaps between codes and broader patterns of meaning and embarked on a search for themes in an active process of generation and construction (see Braun & Clarke, 2012). The second author explored the relations between themes generating a preliminary hierarchical codebook and reviewed potential themes in relation to the dataset, named the themes, and established a definition. The themes and definitions were then discussed with the first author, generating a codebook with the structure and definition of (sub)themes. The second author categorized the whole data according to that codebook.

Code assignment was based on semantic and interpretative data content relevant to specific subthemes. The response of each participant was defined as a coding unit and was allowed to be assigned to more than one subtheme. That is, several subthemes could potentially be identified in each response. This procedure allowed us to search for interrelations between subthemes. The assignment of coding categories was validated by including a research assistant not familiar with the purpose of the study, who independently categorized the data using the same codebook. Disagreements were discussed allowing the refinement of each subtheme definition and the generation of the final codebook that was used for achieving agreements. When discrepancies were not resolved, the response was not categorized in that specific subtheme.

Interpretative and Critical Discourse Analysis

Although we reported the frequency and proportion of participants that referred to specific themes, it is important to note that the quantification of qualitative data was not the main objective of the study. We searched for psychological processes based on participants' interpretative repertoires to understand their constructive process of the world and their experiences (Smith et al., 2009). We integrated the phenomenological interpretative analysis with a critical discourse analysis, aiming at identifying strategies in the men's talk that reproduce the power and dominance dynamics that are characteristics of gender inequality (van Dijk, 2001). In the process of interpreting the discourse of the participants, we considered different epistemological stances and personal reflexivity. Regarding the design, the formulation of the research question aimed to generate a comparative evaluation of the situation of women and men in society that influenced the discourse of the participants, which reflected constant comparisons between women and men. We cannot dismiss, of course, that other questions could have motivated a different articulation of the discourse and then a different interpretation.

Concerning the procedure, the interviews were intended to take place in an informal setting to facilitate a naturalistic interaction. The personal characteristics of the interviewers (including their gender) and their relationship with the interviewee may have included alterations in the discourse of the participants. Although research assistants were instructed to follow a protocol, each interaction is unique and may introduce variables that interact with the generated discourse and, consequently, the interpretation. As for the context, interviews were conducted between February and March, a crucial date for the topic of interest, as feminist protests take place every year in Spain on March 8.

As for the analysis, we were genuinely interested in the meaning that the participants ascribed to their experiences and how they articulated them through language to ultimately understand the underlying psychological resistances to feminism and the rationalization of the status quo. We did not flee from our role in the interpretation and construction of meanings in the process, as this is inherent to critical discourse analysis. As van Dijk (2001) states, "critical discourse analysts (…) want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality" (p. 352). That is why the description and interpretation of the discourse in our study were "socio-politically *situated*" and we did not merely describe discourse structures but tried to explain how they legitimate and reproduce gender relations of power and dominance (see van Dijk, 2001).

Results

The thematic analysis revealed four broad themes related to participants' perception of the situation of women in Spain compared to men: male victimhood, negation of the existence of gender inequality, partial recognition of gender inequality, and delegitimization of feminism, in line with the narrative of men's rights activists (Träbert, 2017). Table 1 provides a summary of the themes. Below, we describe and discuss each of the themes along with their subthemes, as well as the relations among them. We present evidence of the interpretations through quotes and extracts to allow readers to evaluate how the interpretations were grounded in the data (see Knott et al., 2022).

Theme 1: Male Victimhood

Participants expressed a wide range of ideas around the narrative of male victimhood ($n = 66$, 55% of the participants). The discourse around this theme was consistent with a belief in a "sexism shift" (Zehnter et al., 2021), which asserts that men are now the authentic victims and the primary target of gender discrimination. Three subthemes emerged. Male victimhood was expressed through discourse structures concerning experiences of moral reproach and the vindication of male suffering, but also with a generalized and stable idea about the superiority and overprotection of women justified by the Gender Violence Law and the existence of different standards favorable to women.

Subtheme 1: Experienced Moral Reproach

Some participants ($n = 12$, 10%) complained about the *moral reproach* they face, being judged as assassins and abusers, and even being humiliated by feminists. The feminist discourse was often interpreted by these participants as a direct attack on the figure of the man and there was a prevalent argument of men being criminalized and stigmatized. Participant 89 (45 years old) explained the current situation that men are living: "What is happening is that men are being criminalized more, with everything about the LGTBI and all that. Man is being criminalized a lot."

This narrative revealed a negative meta-perception, a perception of a generalized and unfair criminalization of men, and even a kind of meta-dehumanization, with metaphors comparing men with the devil, that generated great indignation. Some participants lamented that now there is no distinction between good and bad men. We can appreciate the indignation by the intensity and the highly ironic tone of the language around this subtheme, for example, in the following quote from Participant 110, a 52-year-old man:

> What [ultra-feminists] seek is the extinction of man. The man is very bad, the man is a murderer, the man is an abuser, but just from being born. I mean, when you are born, they don't tell you «You have had a son», they tell you «You have had an abuser» Why? Because he has a d*[slang word for man's penis], he has a d*, he's bad, he's the devil. There is no longer a distinction between good men and bad men (…).

This moral reproach can be understood as a source of identity threat (Branscombe et al., 1999) that questions ingroup morality, an important part of the self-concept (Leach et al., 2007). We noted a common defense against the moral reproach of the ingroup, as when Participant 3 (18 years old) stated that, "because there are two or three people per city who treat women like scum, they don't have to encompass all men as if we were like them." Participant 8 (18 years old) claimed: "(…) it cannot be generalized, and it cannot be said that all men are murderers because a man is not a murderer, nor is a man a rapist (…)."

Part of this male victimhood was based on underlying zero-sum beliefs and a latent fear that women's rights could entail some loss for men. Participant 26 (19 years old) claimed: "Lately, there is a lot in mind that women have to be respected. (…) but many times, many men have felt disrespected because of women, but no one sees that kind of thing." There was an explicit demand to achieve equality without the devaluation of men as exemplified in the words of Participant 7 (18 years old): "I also think that this could be solved without having to create this war and making people see that the man is bad, simply for being a man (…)."

Subtheme 2: Vindication of Male Suffering

In the interviews, men were also presented as victims in other aspects of life, acknowledging that they also suffer, but no one cares ($n = 7$, 5.8%). They explained that men also face specific difficulties that tend to be less recognized. Participant 29 (19 years old) stated:

> It has been shown that, as I have said, men are also more extremist. That is to say, the greatest number of people who are on the street are men, the greatest number of suicides are men...We could say that, although they do murder women, they murder men just the same.

Participant 69 (26 years old) established a paragon between men's and women's experiences: "I am afraid on the street just like a woman, I cannot go to certain places at certain hours, like any other citizen (…)." Sometimes, men

Table 1 (Sub)Themes, Examples from Interviews, Intercoder Rate, and Frequencies, Study 1

Themes & Subthemes Definition	Example quote	Kappa (κ)	*n* (%)
Theme 1: Male Victimhood			**66 (55)**
Experienced moral reproach Men express facing a moral reproach and direct attacks to the figure of man, being unfairly criminalized	"The man is very bad, the man is a murderer, the man is an abuser (…) he's bad, he's the devil. There is no longer a distinction between good men, bad men (…)." [P110, 52-years-old]	1	12 (10)
Vindication of male suffering Men vindicate the suffering of men as they also face violence, and other circumstances that affect men	"(…) Well, yes, there are many men who mistreat, but also many women who do not physically mistreat, but mentally mistreat the man very much, which does more damage than a slap." [P80, 40-years-old]	1	7 (5.8)
Women superiority &over-protection A perception that men are legally mistreated compared to women who are overprotected	"Better treated than men, no matter how much they say no, legally they are much better treated." [P57, 22-years-old]	1	52 (43.3)
a) Gender Violence Law Perception of injustice and feelings of vulnerability among men associated to the Gender Violence Law	"(…) the Gender Violence Law puts women at a higher point than men, then (…) there is no equality with that law. (…)." [P117, 55-years-old]	1	27 (22.5)
b) Different standards favorable to women Interpretation of the establishment of different criteria or quotas favorable to women as paternalistic and as a clear violation of meritocratic values	"(…) to access to the police. there are also men who could enter into the police force getting a good grade in the women's [proofs]; however, in men's [proofs] they get a very bad grade. (…) I believe that men are being discriminated against (…)." [P34, 20-years-old]	.95	11 (9.2)
Theme 2: Negation of the Existence of Gender Inequality			**83 (69.2)**
Legal gender equality Existence of gender equality, with women and men having the same rights and opportunities	"Nowadays, a woman is not discriminated in any position, in any company, because she is a woman (…). I think that today, both women and men have the same opportunities (…)." [P3, 18-years-old]	1	70 (58.3)
Advantageous comparison Considering that the situation of women is better than in the past or in other contexts	"(…) in Spain, there is not as much violence as in other countries. (…) In Spain, it is very little compared to Mexico. (…)." [P90, 45-years-old]	1	28 (23.3)
Exaggeration of gender inequality Inequality is exaggerated by the media or other movements, but it is not such a social problem	"(…) Men don't say anything because it's not the Boom, the Boom is for women since there is a lot of talk about this topic in the news." [P50, 21-years-old]	1	9 (7.5)
Inequality justified by merit/effort Inequality between women and men is due to a difference in effort or merits	"(…) the salary that you receive is directly proportional to the level of physical effort that you actually do. (…). Their level of effort is much lower than the one man does (…)." [P66, 24-years-old]	.85	3 (2.5)
Inequality justified by gender differentiation Inequality is explained by the real (biological or social) differences between men and women	"(…) before the law, we are equal. (…) it is normal that in certain sectors, it is clear that men are stronger, since more men predominate, but I do not see any problem with that, because if a woman wants to work on the construction, then she should come and work (…)." [P24, 19-years-old]	.83	11 (9.2)
Theme 3: Partial Recognition of Gender Inequality			**71 (59.2)**
Recognition of inequality Acknowledgement of the unequal (and worst) treatment of women	"(…) a woman is much more prone to be raped than a man -that is not debated- (…)." [P34, 20-years-old]	1	30 (25)
Domain specificity Gender inequality is not generalized, but only present in specific life domains (e.g., sexual abuse)	"(…) maybe you go down the street and there are guys who say things to girls and that's true. (…)." [P32, 20-years-old]	1	34 (28.3)
Exceptionality Gender inequality is not the norm, but the exception, only residuals from the past	"Man, there is still some machismo in Spain among some men, but in reality, women today have as many or more rights than men." [P116, 55-years-old]	1	19 (15.8)

Table 1 (Continued)

Themes & Subthemes Definition	Example quote	Kappa (κ)	*n* (%)
Denounce inequality Motivation to trust the system and denounce discrimination or abuse when inequality is detected	"(…) the truth is that women are below men. So, in these cases, it would be necessary to denounce, (…) with the well-known wage gap, that is an aspect that is already contemplated in the Constitution and equal rights by sex must be the same, so these cases should be denounced." [P11, 18-years-old]	1	4 (3.3)
Theme 4: Delegitimization of Feminism			**34 (28.3)**
Politicized movement with factional interest Feminism as a politicized movement, popularized by the media and with factional interests	"(…) all this feminist message that comes from the left, and now unfortunately in the government, is everything a lie, just to win money. (…) I believe that this is linked to wanting to break traditional values of family, the Christian values. (…)." [P61, 23 years-old]	.97	17 (14.2)
Radicalized movement Emphasis on the radicalization of the movement and use of derogatory expressions to describe feminists	"(…) demonstrations what they are looking for is to radicalize (…). The demonstrations of now, if you do them 50 years ago, perfect, but right now you don't have to get as radical as they are doing." [P2, 18-years-old]	1	8 (6.7)
Conflictive movement Feminism as a conflictive movement that search for an adversarial relationship between women and men, pursuing power over men	"The current feminist movement, not the healthy feminism that I support that wants equality for men and women and wants to end *machismo*, the feminism that seeks to confront men and women. It seeks to create a war, it seeks to create controversy (…)." [P7, 18-years-old]	.96	14 (11.7)
Unnecessary movement Feminism is considered unnecessary, and without sense in contemporary societies	"Let's see, currently I think that feminism is a bit silly, right? In other words, I consider them well or equally treated as a man." [P17, 19-years-old]	1	6 (5)

The names of themes and subthemes as well as the frequency of the themes appear in bold

were claimed to suffer even more than women. Participant 4 (18 years old) claimed that "men are the gender that is killed the most and two out of three cases of street violence have men as victims." They tended to turn to interpersonal violence, denying the patriarchal component of gender violence, stating that women also kill men and that the power that women wield over men is subtle but can be even more harmful than the power wielded by men over women. Participant 80 (40 years old) explained:

> Well, yes, there are many men who mistreat, but also many women who do not physically mistreat, but mentally mistreat the man very much, which does more damage than a slap. The psychic power hurts more than the physical one.

Subtheme 3: Women's Superiority and Overprotection

Almost half of the men interviewed referred to the superiority and overprotection of women ($n = 52$, 43.3%). There was a prevalent feeling of aggravation, a general perception that men are legally mistreated compared to women. The words of Participant 73 (32 years old) illustrated a generalized thought: "They [women] are now treated better than men without any doubt. They are given privileges and rights that men do not have." The same as Participant 57 (22 years old): "Better treated than men, no matter how much they say «no». Legally they are much better treated." These arguments may reflect a persistent belief in a "sexism shift" (Zehnter et al., 2021), a perception of anti-male discrimination, with men now considered to be the main target of gender discrimination, and this was justified specifically by two reasons: the application of the Gender Violence Law and the existence of different standards for women and men.

(a) **Gender Violence Law**. Multiple examples were given regarding the mistreatment of men due to the *Gender Violence Law* ($n = 27$, 22.5%). Although this law was endorsed by the Constitutional Court, Vox supporters considered it unconstitutional because it is intended to violate men's fundamental rights, for example, believing that "the presumption of innocence has disappeared for men" (Participant 7, 18 years old). Participant 117 (55 years old) defended this idea in this way:

> Firstly, the Gender Violence Law is unconstitutional because the Constitution says that everyone is equal before the law without distinction of religion, race, or sex. The first is that the Gender Violence Law puts women at a higher point than men, then (…) there is no equality with that law. (…) whoever kills a woman,

who pays for it. Do not always give her the presumption of innocence. You are forgetting that of men.

There was a widespread perception of injustice and a feeling of vulnerability for men associated with this law. Consequently, men defined themselves as the authentic victims in the "battle." Men were presented as subjugated by women's power, and participants were especially concerned about the denouncements of gender violence against men interposed by women: "If someone is hurt in this «man-woman battle», it is precisely the man, as a woman with only one untested statement can sink a man's life. That is clearly an inequality" (Participant 107, 50 years old). The proportion of false legal complaints of gender violence filed by women was highly exaggerated, declaring that many men have "to suffer thousands and thousands of false complaints" (Participants 94, 46 years old). This shift in subjectivity among privileged white men feeling aggrieved by false accusations from women has recently been analyzed in public discourses (see Banet-Weiser, 2021).

(b) **Different Standards Favorable to Women**. Another reason men felt victimized and discriminated against is the perceived existence of *different standards* favorable to women ($n = 11$, 9.2%). Some interpreted the establishment of different criteria or quotas for women as paternalistic and a clear violation of meritocratic values. The main example came from applying different criteria to access some jobs. According to participants, "the physical tests of any security body, [women] always have more help than us" (Participant 37, 20 years old). Participant 34 (20 years old) explained this issue in detail:

> (…) Another social inequality that I think is also worth mentioning is that, for example, when accessing a position as an official in the bodies of State Security Forces to access the police. For example, women have different, different, different scales than men, that is, a woman because she is physiologically inferior -that is, she has less strength- she has to aspire to a lower scale than men. But there are also men who could enter into the police force getting a good grade in the women's [proofs]; however, in men's [proofs] they get a very bad grade. That is, in my opinion, I believe that this should be studied and done through size or any other type of requirement since I believe that men are being discriminated against in part there. (…)

These feelings of aggravation and victimhood were surrounded by other discourses related to the negation of gender inequality unfavorable to women, a partial recognition of inequality, and a delegitimization of feminism.

Theme 2: Negation of the Existence of Gender Inequality

The denial of discrimination against women and the belief that inequality is no longer a problem, which is characteristic of neosexism (e.g., Tougas et al., 1995), were highly present in the interviews ($n = 83$, 69.2%), with this discourse centered around the existence of legal gender equality. Five subthemes emerged. The justification for this negation of gender inequality also involved an advantageous comparison with other social realities, a perceived exaggeration of gender inequality, and a justification of gender inequality based on gender differentiation and meritocratic beliefs.

Subtheme 1: Legal Gender Equality

Almost 60% of the participants ($n = 70$, 58.3%) claimed that *legal equality* has been fully achieved because women now study, work, and occupy high-status positions (sometimes related to the idea that women are better qualified than men). Participant 3 (18 years old) summarized this belief:

> Nowadays, a woman is not discriminated against in any position, in any company, because she is a woman (…). I think that today, both women and men have the same opportunities to study what we want, to work on what we want, and to do what we want.

Subtheme 2: Advantageous Comparison

An *advantageous social comparison* with the past or other contexts predominated in men's discourse ($n = 28$; 23.3%): "Today, women are living one of the best stages of equality they can live, and they are treated just as well or even better than many men" (Participant 71, 30 years old). Inequality is perceived as something from the past or only recognized "in underdeveloped countries" or within the Muslim religion where "women do not enjoy the freedoms and rights that men have" (Participant 39, 20 years old). Participant 90 (45 years old) argued:

> (…) in Spain, there is not as much violence as in other countries. If you compare the data on gender violence in Spain with Mexico, you will get a surprise. In Spain, it is very little compared to Mexico. (…)

Subtheme 3: Exaggeration of Gender Inequality

Some participants ($n = 9$, 7.5%) believed that there is an *exaggeration* of the prevalence of gender inequality and discrimination against women. This exaggeration is due to

"media noise" or other interests. Participant 50 (21 years old) annotated:

> Honestly, maybe it is a little uneven, but life is like that. But what about going out on the street? What's the point? As a man, do I go out on the street to say that I'm a man? to say that they mistreat me? Every couple is different. Men don't say anything because it's not the Boom. The Boom is for women since there is a lot of talk about this topic in the news.

When mentioning evidence of discrimination against women, respondents articulated different justifications for inequality and alluded to factors other than patriarchy as the true reasons for inequality.

Subtheme 4: Inequality Justified by Gender Differentiation

Some respondents ($n = 11$, 9.2%) ignored structural differences and instead referred to competitive or complementary *gender differentiation* (Glick & Fiske, 2001) that assumes biological differences between women and men. It was considered justified that in certain sectors, men dominate because "there are some jobs in which they [women] are not prepared due to the biological issue" (Participant 55, 21 years old). Participant 24 (19 years old) manifested:

> (…) before the law, we are equal. (…) it is normal that in certain sectors, it is clear that men are stronger since more men predominate, but I do not see any problem with that because if a woman wants to work in construction, then she should come and work (…)

Subtheme 5: Inequality Justified by Merit/Effort

The wage gap was usually rationalized, by making internal instead of external attributions alluding to meritocratic values and productive reasons different from gender. Other factors, such as extra hours and physical effort, were argued as the main factors for salary inequalities by three participants (2.5%). For example, Participant 66 (24 years old) stated:

> (…) the salary that you receive is directly proportional to the level of physical effort that you actually do. For this reason, for example, here in warehouses, women, in general, what they do is basically placing vegetables and fruits inside the boxes. They practically do static work. Their level of effort is much lower than that of one man, who practically is carrying boxes throughout the working day. Therefore, in this type of situation, a man will always earn more than a woman (…)

Theme 3: Partial Recognition of Gender Inequality

The recognition of inequality between women and men was partial, full of nuances, for near 60% of the participants (n = 71, 59.2%). Four subthemes emerged:

Subtheme 1: Recognition of inequality

Although inequality in the legal domain was not often recognized, there were some arguments that acknowledged an unequal (and worse) treatment of women ($n = 30$, 25%). Interestingly, these arguments rarely appeared alone, but generally were accompanied by other arguments and subthemes that presumably could reduce cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), such as the need to contextualize and frame the discrimination against women not as a generalized issue but relegated to specific domains, something exceptional, or something that can be denounced.

Subtheme 2: Domain Specificity

Some participants argued that gender inequality is not something generalized but is present only in *specific domains* ($n = 34$, 28.3%). For example, Participant 32 (20 years old) explained:

> (...) They [referred to women] may be, in part, treated worse. (...) maybe you go down the street and there are guys who say things to girls and that's true. But then, really before the legality, we are all equal, for example, if (...) men earn more for the same job than a woman (...), if that happens, they should report it and the law will protect them. So, it is not that they are unprotected; it is that it is not reported. (...). In terms of education, well, in the end, I think that a part of it, yes, well, is sexist, but in the end, I think more than sexist, the highest percentage is people who have no education, who are rude and the same that tell women any nonsense after they interact with any man and continue to be rude. They don't say to him the same things, but they treat them badly too. After all, I think so, in part they [referred to women] are treated worse, but I think it is a much lower percentage than is believed. Just like when a man kills a woman, I see it more as a murderer and I really don't know -I haven't gotten into his head- and I don't know if he really killed the woman for being a woman, because

> if that were so, if they hated all women, then they would go out into the street, take a gun and kill all women, but I think that in the end they just do it because they are simply murderers, and that's it. (...).

Subtheme 3: Exceptionality

Inequality was considered exceptional ($n = 19$, 15.8%), present only in residual aspects focused on specific concrete spheres of life, especially sexual abuse (which particularly raised indignation), the salary-wage gap, or the pregnancy issue at work. Participant 26 (19 years old) said: "I consider them well treated, except for a case of a person over 70 years of age or such cases, or isolated cases."

Subtheme 4: Denounce Inequality

When inequality was exceptionally recognized, there was a motivation to trust the system and denounce discrimination or abuse ($n = 4$; 3.3%), as we found a general perception that there is legal equality. The rationalization of the status quo, supported by system justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994), was appreciated in some arguments. For example, Participant 11 (18 years old) considered that cases of gender inequality should be denounced because the law (the political system) guarantees gender equality:

> Well, recently I saw a report in which Spain had dropped ten positions in the ranking of equality of women with men (…) the truth is that, although in the Constitution men and women are already equal, yes, it is true that you see specific aspects that…the truth is that women are below men. So, in these cases, it would be necessary to denounce, (…) with the well-known wage gap, which is an aspect that is already contemplated in the Constitution and equal rights by sex must be the same, so these cases should be denounced.

Theme 4: Delegitimization of Feminism

Some participants also reported attitudes towards feminism and feminist women ($n = 34$, 28.3%) considering that feminism is an unnecessary, politicized, radicalized and conflictive movement. Four subthemes emerged.

Subtheme 1: Unnecessary Movement

Six respondents (5%) perceived that feminism was useless, as equality was thought to have been achieved. For instance, Participant 17 (19 years old) affirmed:

> Let's see, currently I think that feminism is a bit silly, right? That is, women in terms of rights and laws, have the same things as men, that is, they do not lack anything. In other words, I consider them to be well or equally treated as a man.

Subtheme 2: Politicized Movement with Factional Interests

Feminism was perceived by some respondents as a *politicized movement* ($n = 17$, 14.2%), something popularized by the media and with factional interests linked to a left-wing ideology. Some participants claimed that they felt not represented by "that communist feminism," as Participant 47 (21 years old) called it, identifying suspicious and concealed interests and arguing criticisms against the movement itself and the National Ministry of Equality. They also showed concern about that politized movement attacking conservative and traditional values. Participant 61 (23 years old) expressed it this way:

> I believe that women now have the same rights and freedoms as men. And I believe that all this feminist message that comes from the left, and now unfortunately in the government, is everything a lie, just to win money because women currently live the same as men and all that message does not make sense. I do not know any woman who earns less than a man in the same job and I believe is linked to wanting to break traditional values of family, the Christian values. (…)

Subtheme 3: Radicalized Movement

There was a clear perception of the *radicalization* of feminism by some participants ($n = 8$, 6.7%). Participant 6 (18 years old) stated that "the current feminist movement is taking a dangerous drift." In general, these participants considered that the procedures and mechanisms to achieve equality are inadequate, exaggerated, and radical. According to Participant 2 (18 years old):

> (…) Right now, I am not going to say that they are equal -because there is no maximum equality yet- but it is true that now the demonstrations…what they are looking for is to radicalize (…). The demonstrations of now, if you do them 50 years ago, perfect, but right now you don't have to get as radical as they are doing.

The magnitude of the perceived radicalization was also evident in the qualifying terms used to refer to feminists,

as in the words of Participant 87 (45 years old): "to remove the machismo, you don't have to be *feminazi*, you should seek real equality, not go overboard." Feminists were also accused of being contradictive and of violating prescriptive roles. Protesters for equality were perceived to act without rationality and their behavior was contrasted with the behavior of renowned female political leaders, who were used as real exemplars of feminists. Participant 92 (45 years old) declared:

> Because for me, they are loonies who have no shame when it comes to protesting. (…) Because a woman does not have to undress on the public street to express an equality right. Since when has Margaret Thatcher, for example, had to do that to become president of England? Or, the president of the German government, Angela Merkel, is president of a country from the most powerful in the world and she does not need to undress to strengthen her femininity. (…)

Subtheme 4: Conflictive Movement

Some participants saw feminism as a conflictive movement ($n = 14$, 11.7%), whose authentic motives are not "equality but to seek revenge on men for having them subjected for a long time ago" (Participant 3, 18 years old), and "humiliating the figure of men" (Participant 39, 20 years old). Here, we can observe a well-established division between a true feminism and a "false feminism" that is generating a rupture in society (Participant 109, 51 years old), a *social conflict.* Participant 7 (18 years old) claimed:

> The current feminist movement, -not the healthy feminism that I support that wants equality for men and women and wants to end *machismo*-, the feminism that seeks to confront men and women, it seeks to create a war, it seeks to create controversy (…).

The idea that feminism does not really seek equality but "the supremacy" of women over men was present in some interviews, and this was argued as a reason to stop supporting feminism. According to Participant 99 (48 years old), "feminism skips the red lines of equality," which means that the movement is perceived to have overstepped and transgressed gender equality.

Co-occurring and Mixed Themes

Although we analyzed the (sub)themes separately, they were generally interrelated in the discourse of the participants. Regarding the broader themes, the negation of the existence of gender inequality predominated ($n = 83/120$, 69.2% of the total sample) and appeared clearly connected with the themes of partial recognition of gender inequality in 59% of the cases ($n = 49/83$), male victimhood in 44.6% of the cases ($n = 37/83$), and delegitimization of feminism in 32.5% of the cases ($n = 27/83$).

The (sub)themes reinforced each other, some serving as evidence and justification of the main arguments. For example, references to legal gender equality were generally accompanied by references to women's superiority ($n = 23$), advantageous comparison (that is, women in Spain are better now than ever and compared to other countries, $n = 20$), and partial recognition of inequality relegated to specific domains ($n = 24$). When the participants talked about the superiority of women, almost half of them ($n = 24/52$) also tended to refer to the Gender Violence Law as an example of the privileged position of women.

The recognition of gender inequality against women appeared to be generally related to other subthemes that included the general existence of legal equality ($n = 10$), advantageous comparison ($n = 11$), and women's superiority ($n = 9$). That is, even when the discrimination against women was recognized, it tended to be diminished as there is freedom and equality for everyone, women were perceived to be better now than before, and they are treated even better than men.

Discussion

Qualitative analysis of the discourse of far-right men revealed four major themes: male victimhood, negation of inequality, partial recognition of inequality, and delegitimization of feminism. From the analysis, we can conclude that participants used several strategies to justify their views that men are more often the victims and women are overprotected and therefore further support for women's rights is unjustified. Only eight participants (6.7% of the total sample) denied gender inequality without referring to more than one theme. This is not surprising as these themes are integrated into a broader narrative consistent with that of men's rights activists (Träbert, 2017).

The negation of the existence of gender inequality, the partial recognition of inequality, and the delegitimization of feminism constitute attitudes towards a social reality that help to understand how these participants construct their perception of gender (in)equality. Although the negation and partial recognition of inequality were more prevalent than male victimhood in far-right men's discourse, the presence of this latter issue seems important in that it is giving rise to a perceived sexism shift (Zehnter et al., 2021), based on the subjective belief that men now suffer more discrimination than women.

The discourse around the theme of male victimhood has additional value for us because it delves into the phenomenological experience lived by the participants that gender relations are unfair and painful. The feeling of unfairness seemed to be associated with a questioning of one's own morality (see Leach et al., 2007) and may stand as a key in the experience of these men that may trigger other cognitive and emotional reactions. Male victimhood is a centerpiece of contemporary antifeminism and a powerful strategy against feminism because it denounces the existence of structural and pervasive discrimination against men (Träbert, 2017). To curb the growth of antifeminism and increase the acceptance of feminism and commitment to gender equality, it, therefore, seems important to address the arguments around male victimhood.

Drawing on the key findings of this study and the focus on male victimhood, we conducted two experiments to test whether non-confrontational strategies that address male victimhood may be effective in increasing acknowledgement of gender inequality and men's support for gender-based collective action. We focused on the argument that (a) the morality of all men is unfairly questioned based on the despicable behavior of a few men, and (b) men also suffer even if society does not recognize their suffering. We selected these categories based on their potential to change attitudes towards gender equality without arousing defensive reactions. Although there were more frequent references to other categories related to legal equality and overprotection of women in Study 1, we considered that contrasting legal equality with actual equality and/or denying that women are overprotected could produce higher defensiveness among far-right men because these arguments are central to their ideology and they can selectively pick examples (e.g., gender violence law) to fortify their position. In contrast, acknowledging their morality as a group and their suffering would respond to some of the perceived offenses of feminism without provoking defensive reactions, which, through a reciprocity principle, might make them more receptive to social change towards equality.

Study 2

In Study 2 we tested the effectiveness of three different strategies for shifting attitudes in two areas that seemed important in far-right men's discourse: (1) perceived discrimination against women and men and (2) acceptance of the feminist narrative regarding gender violence. We also analyzed men's willingness to act as allies by participating in collective action for women's rights. One strategy was confrontational and reflected the moral reproach for men's sexual aggression against women that the far-right men in Study 1 often described. To that end, participants in the *moral reproach* condition learned that a recent study indicated that most women considered men as less moral than they perceive themselves to be, a procedure adapted from Vázquez et al. (2022). As moral reproach may induce social identity threat and defensive reactions (e.g., Branscombe et al., 1999; Kende et al., 2020; Minson & Monin, 2012; Monin, 2007), we did not expect this strategy to change men's commitment to gender equality.

The other two strategies were designed to be non-confrontational and reflected an acknowledgement of men's morality and the costs of gender roles and stereotypes to their well-being. The first non-confrontational strategy consisted of acknowledging the collective morality, which has been shown to increase the willingness of advantaged group members to participate in collective action on behalf of the disadvantaged group (e.g., Vázquez et al., 2022). To do this, in the moral verification condition, we told participants that a recent study indicated that most women perceive men as moral as they see themselves (based on Vázquez et al., 2022). The second, non-confrontational strategy consisted of recognizing the suffering of men, one of the concerns that far-right men expressed in Study 1. To that end, participants in the male suffering condition read an opinion article that highlighted the negative consequences that gender stereotypes have for men.

We compared each of these conditions with the control condition in which there was no treatment. However, since the non-confrontational strategies designed for this experiment targeted fears specifically expressed in Study 1 by supporters of a political party that uphold traditional gender roles, they may be effective only for those who share that same position on gender roles, that is, men who adhere more strongly to traditional gender roles. Therefore, before the experimental manipulation, we measured participants' adherence to traditional gender roles, a factor associated with more victim blaming in cases of gender violence (Grubb & Turner, 2012) and less engagement in collective action for gender equality (Vázquez & López-Rodríguez, 2023). Other variables such as ideological orientation could also have a moderating effect, but by including an assessment of various issues (e.g., economic), it would not be as accurate a reflection of how participants perceive the place and role that corresponds to men and women in society as adherence to traditional gender roles is.

We expected that male participants' adherence to traditional gender roles would be associated with less perceived discrimination against women (H1a) but more against men (H1b), less willingness to participate in collective action for women's rights (H1c), and less acceptance of the feminist narrative regarding gender violence (H1d). As for the main effects of the manipulation, no hypotheses were established

as we expected the manipulation to interact with adherence to traditional gender roles. We expected to find significant effects of the condition among participants who strongly adhere to traditional gender roles (traditional men from now on), but not among those who adhere weakly to those roles. Specifically, we expected to find significant differences in the reactions of traditional men between the control condition (not strategy delivered) and the two non-confrontational conditions (moral verification and male suffering).

In addition, traditional participants in the moral verification condition were expected to express more perceived discrimination against women (H2a) and men (H2b), be more willing to participate in collective action for women's rights (H2c) and accept more the feminist narrative regarding gender violence (H2d) than those in the control condition. The same pattern was hypothesized for traditional men in the male suffering condition compared to the control condition: more perceived discrimination against women (H3a) and men (H3b), more willingness to participate in collective action for women's rights (H3c), and more acceptance of the feminist narrative regarding gender violence (H3d). Based on previous evidence (Vázquez et al., 2022), we did not expect significant interaction effects regarding the comparison between the moral reproach condition and the control condition on any dependent variable.

Method

Data, code, and materials for Studies 2–3 are available at https://osf.io/km53b/?view_only=0464309107d54940a583bb84cafc3c7c

Participants

We estimated the sample size before data collection. To be cautious, we anticipated a small difference of .02 between the slopes for participants with a strong adherence to traditional gender roles and those with a weak adherence. Analysis with G*Power (Faul et al., 2009) indicated that 388 participants would be necessary to detect such a difference with 80% power and a significance level of .05 in a linear bivariate regression (two groups, difference between slopes) considering an allocation ratio of 1 and a standard deviation residual of .05. We recruited 417 Spanish male undergraduates from a distance learning education university ($M_{age} = 32.05$, $SD_{age} = 10.71$) who participated for course credits.

Procedure

Participants were invited to complete an online questionnaire about the relationships between women and men as part of a practical activity for which they could add up to one point in the final grade of the Social Psychology subject. Women and non-Spanish participants were diverted to different studies. All participants provided their informed consent before completing the questionnaire.

Participants first completed a measure of adherence to traditional gender roles and then were assigned to one of the four conditions. Participants in the *moral reproach condition* read that thousands of women gathered in different cities around the world in 2019 to denounce sexual abuse and violence by performing a ritual called "The rapist is you." Participants were told that the objective of this performance was to denounce the main forms of violence against women and the impunity enjoyed by men who attack women. Then, they watched a 38-seconds-long YouTube video (https://eu.qualtrics.com/CP/File.php?F=F_4SnzMgQQwQ6itKd) with a sample performance of Chile. The video showed dozens of blindfolded women singing a protest song to denounce institutional passivity in the face of violence against women (e.g., "The oppressive state is a male rapist. The rapist is you").

Participants in the *moral verification condition* read the results of a fictitious macro-survey conducted with a representative sample of Spaniards that had investigated how moral women perceive men to be and how moral men perceive themselves. The results of the macro-survey indicated that women perceive men as moral as they perceive themselves. Participants were presented with a figure showing the morality that men attributed to themselves (83 on a scale from 0 to 100) and the morality that women attributed to men (84). Immediately after this, to reinforce the manipulation, they were shown two fictitious statements of the women interviewed: "Most men behave morally. Of course, there are bad men, but they are a minority, they do not represent the majority of men" and "I think that men, in general, behave appropriately. I mean, there are men who don't, who mistreat women, but the majority are moral and respectful").

Participants in the *male suffering condition* read an excerpt from a fictitious opinion column written by a man. The main message was that gender stereotypes and inequality between men and women generate considerable suffering in men by creating unattainable expectations in multiple areas such as professional performance (e.g., "stereotypes force us to put our professional career ahead of anything else. That pressure means that when we lose our job or fail to meet our job expectations, we feel like failures, worthless"), competitiveness with other men (e.g., "We also spend a lot of time fighting other men to see who has more power), and sexual performance (e.g., "Regarding sexual behavior, we must always be willing, "measure up", leave her satisfied, etc.").

Participants in the *control condition* were simply informed that they would answer a series of questions regarding men and women. After the manipulation, participants proceeded

to the rest of the questionnaire containing different dependent variables that were presented to the participants in the order used below. Finally, they were debriefed and thanked.

Measures

Unless otherwise specified, all scales ranged from 0 (*Strongly disagree*) to 6 (*Strongly agree*). We first measured participants' adherence to traditional gender roles with the Gender-Linked subscale of the Social Roles Questionnaire (SRQ; Baber & Tucker, 2006) consisting of eight items such as "A father's major responsibility is to provide financially for his children" and "Some types of work are just not appropriate for women." The reliability of the scale was good, α = .79.

After the experimental manipulation, we measured *perceived discrimination against women* by means of a 4-item scale adapted from Schmitt et al. (2002). The reliability of the scale was good, α = .87. Example items were: "Women as a group have been victimized by society" and "Prejudice and discrimination against women exist."

We measured *perceived discrimination against men* by means of a 4-item scale adapted from Schmitt et al. (2002). The reliability of the scale was good, α = .86. Example items were: "Men as a group have been victimized by society" and "Prejudice and discrimination against men exist."

We also assessed participants' w*illingness to engage in collective action for women's rights* by means of seven items taken from Vázquez et al. (2020). Participants indicated to what extent they were willing to participate in seven actions such as attending a demonstration or going on strike to defend women's rights, using a scale ranging from 0 (*Not willing at all*) to 6 (*Totally willing*). The reliability of the scale was good, α = .93.

Then, we measured *acceptance of the feminist narrative regarding gender violence* using six items adapted from Nasie et al. (2014) such as: "I can understand feminists' point of view regarding gender violence" and "I can accept at least part of the details presented in the feminist perspective on gender violence." The reliability of the scale was good, α = .80.

We also evaluated *fusion with the feminist movement* for an exploratory purpose. Since we did not develop hypotheses regarding this variable, we report these results in Supplementary Materials (available at https://osf.io/km53b/?view_only=0464309107d54940a583bb84cafc3c7c).

Results

Correlational Analyses

We first obtained the descriptive statistics and correlations between all variables (see Table 2). Adherence to traditional gender roles was negatively associated with perceived discrimination against women, willingness to participate in collective action and acceptance of the feminist narrative about gender violence, whereas it was positively associated with perceived discrimination against men. Higher perceived discrimination against women was associated with more willingness to participate in collective action and more acceptance of the feminist narrative. In contrast, higher perceived discrimination against men was negatively associated with those same variables.

Analysis Plan

To test the main hypotheses, we conducted a regression analysis for each dependent variable: perceived discrimination against women and against men, willingness to participate in collective action for women's rights, and acceptance of the feminist narrative against gender violence. For the analyses we used the module GAMLj (General Analyses for the Linear Model) in Jamovi (Version 2.3.19.0). Condition was considered the predictor and adherence to roles was the moderator. As the condition had four levels, this module created three dummy-coded variables that compared the control condition with each of the manipulations (0 control, 1 experimental conditions). As a result, three interaction terms (each dummy by adherence to gender roles) were also entered as predictors. Adherence to gender roles was considered a continuous variable and mean centered. Table 3 provides a summary of the results for these tests. Simple slope analyses (considering the 16th and 84th percentiles of the moderator, adherence to gender roles) are presented. Supplementary materials (https://osf.io/km53b/?view_only=0464309107d54940a583bb84cafc3c7c) contain additional analyses in which the moral reproach condition is compared with all the others or the two non-confrontational strategies (moral verification and male suffering) with each other.

Perceived Discrimination

The regression model for perceived discrimination against women only yielded a significant effect of adherence to roles (H1a). The greater the adherence to gender roles, the lower perception of discrimination against women. No other effects were significant. The regression model for perceived discrimination against men yielded a positive effect of adherence to roles (H1b), such that the greater the adherence, the stronger the perceived discrimination against men. There were also significant main effects of the moral reproach and male suffering conditions, such that participants in the moral reproach ($M = 2.07$, $SD = 1.58$) and male suffering ($M = 2.23$, $SD = 1.38$) conditions perceived more discrimination against

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among Variables, Studies 2–3

	Study 2		Study 3		Correlations				
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5
1. Gender roles	1.17	0.93	1.79	1.17	-	-.24***	.39***	-.31***	-.31***
2. Perceived discrimination against women	4.90	1.16	4.36	1.47	-.25***	-	-.17***	.55***	.53***
3. Perceived discrimination against men	1.90	1.56	2.30	1.72	.34***	-.10*	-	-.29***	-.49***
4. Collective action	3.43	1.60	3.13	1.81	-.31***	.24***	-.24***	-	.57***
5. Narrative acceptance	3.96	1.23	3.22	1.45	-.46***	.35***	-.47***	. 56***	-

Note. Correlations below the diagonal correspond to Study 2. Correlations above the diagonal correspond to Study 3.
*$p < .05$; ***$p < .001$

men than those in the control condition ($M = 1.67$, $SD = 1.54$). No other effects were significant (see Table 3).

Willingness to Participate in Collective Action for Women's Rights

The regression model for collective action intentions yielded a significant effect of adherence to roles (H1c). The effects of the interaction between the moral verification manipulation and adherence to roles (H2c), and of the interaction between the male suffering manipulation and adherence to roles (H3c) were also significant. The decomposition of these two interactions revealed that both moral verification and male suffering increased willingness to participate in collective action as compared to the control condition in those participants who strongly adhered to gender roles (see Fig. 1), but not in those whose adherence was weak. No other effects were significant (see Table 3).

Acceptance of the Feminist Narrative Regarding Gender Violence

The regression model for acceptance of the feminist narrative yielded a significant effect of adherence to roles (H1d). The effects of the interaction between the moral verification manipulation and adherence to roles (H2d) and of the interaction between the male suffering manipulation and adherence to roles (H3d) were also significant. The decomposition of these two interactions revealed that both moral verification and male suffering increased the acceptance of the feminist narrative as compared to the control condition in those participants who strongly adhered to gender roles (see Fig. 2). However, they did not affect participants who weakly adhered to gender roles. No other effects were significant (see Table 3).

Discussion

These results suggest that non-confrontational strategies may increase the acceptance of the feminist narrative regarding gender violence and engagement in collective action for women's rights among men who adhere the most to traditional gender roles. As compared to a control condition, verifying that most men are moral or emphasizing the costs that men pay for gender stereotypes led participants who adhered more strongly to gender roles to increase their willingness to participate in collective action for women's rights and their acceptance of the feminist narrative on violence against women. However, these positive effects did not emerge for men who weakly adhered to gender roles. The lack of reaction of these participants was not unexpected because the non-confrontational strategies were based on the discourse of far-right supporters and therefore may not match the concerns of participants with a weak adherence to traditional gender roles, who were more open to the feminist narrative regarding gender violence and collective action for women's rights (see Table 2). As expected, direct reporting of violence against women (moral reproach) had no effect as compared to the control condition, except that increased the perception of discrimination against men. The manipulation of male suffering also caused an increase in the perception of discrimination against men.

Although the results are promising, the study has several limitations. The sample included Psychology students who are generally in the left/liberal pole of the political spectrum and are probably aware of the detrimental effects of gender stereotypes. Instead of measuring ideological orientation, we captured a particular dimension of that orientation more related to our research questions, beliefs about gender roles, to control for its effects. Anyway, as these strategies were based on the discourse of far-right men, the potential orientation of the sample to

the left would diminish rather than artificially inflate the effects. Also, in the moral reproach condition participants watched a short video, whereas in the other conditions they read a text. Additionally, the source and content of the message was not the same across the experimental conditions. While in the conditions of moral reproach and verification, the information came from women (outgroup), in the case of recognition of suffering, the author of the fictitious article was a man (ingroup). To control for these confounds we conducted an additional experiment with a sample of the general population in which all conditions were matched in terms of format, length, and the source of the message. We did not assess additional demographic information.

Study 3

Study 3 aimed to replicate the results of Study 2 with a more heterogeneous sample and a more rigorous experimental design. Moreover, the study was pre-registered. As in Study 2, participants first reported their adherence to traditional gender roles and then were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions (i.e., control, moral reproach, moral verification, and male suffering). Considering the results of the previous study, we expected to find a significant effect of adherence to traditional gender roles on our dependent variables, such that the higher the adherence, the lower the perception of discrimination against women (H1a), the greater the perception of discrimination against men (H1b), the lower the willingness to participate in collective actions for women's rights (H1c) and the less acceptance of the feminist narrative regarding gender violence (H1d).

Regarding the main effect of manipulations, given the findings of Study 2, we expected that participants in the moral reproach condition would perceive more discrimination against men than those in the control condition (H2). Likewise, we expected that participants in the male suffering condition would perceive more discrimination against men than those in the control condition (H3).

Regarding the interaction effects, based on Study 2, we expected to find significant differences in the reactions of traditional men between the control condition (not strategy delivered) and the two non-confrontational conditions (moral verification and male suffering) on willingness to participate in collective action for women's rights and acceptance of the feminist narrative regarding gender violence. Traditional participants in the moral verification condition were expected to express more willingness to participate in collective action (H4a) and greater acceptance of the feminist narrative (H4b).

The same pattern was hypothesized in the male suffering condition compared to the control condition for traditional men: more willingness to participate in collective action for women's rights (H5a) and more acceptance of the feminist narrative regarding gender violence (H5b). We did not expect to find these effects among men who adhered weakly to traditional gender roles. Regarding the comparison between the moral reproach and the control condition, we did not anticipate significant interaction effects.

The hypotheses, procedure and analysis plan were pre-registered (https://osf.io/7tv2j/?view_only=bef72cc38b334e8481e8b6f4a766b9a3).

Method

Participants

As in Study 2, we anticipated a small difference between the slopes for participants with a strong adherence to traditional gender roles and those with a weak adherence (.02). Analysis with G*Power (Faul et al., 2009) indicated that 388 participants would be necessary to detect such a difference with 80% power and a significance level of .05 in a linear bivariate regression (two groups, difference between slopes) considering an allocation ratio of 1 and a standard deviation residual of .05. The final sample consisted of 428 Spanish men ($M_{age} = 51.33$, $SD_{age} = 11.56$) who were financially compensated for their participation. Five additional participants were discarded for taking less than 150 seconds or more than 10,000 seconds to complete the questionnaire. The participants received an invitation to participate from a panelist company, Netquest, which only invited male panelists with Spanish nationality. This company has 1.5 million panelists, and its quality is certified by the ISO 20252 standard for social, opinion and market research. To guarantee the quality of the data, they use various procedures such as participation frequency monitoring, email validation, IP monitoring, skippers (to prevent bots), duplicate control, etc. In addition, they comply with the strictest European regulations on privacy and processing of personal data. Panelists received invitations through multiple channels and, after each participation, were rewarded with points that could be redeemed for a wide variety of gifts in the online store of the company.

Procedure

Participants were invited to complete an online questionnaire about the relationships between women and men. We first measured participants' adherence to traditional gender roles and then participants were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions. All participants read the results of a fictitious macro-survey conducted with a representative sample of Spaniards and then received

Table 3 Study 2: Regression Analyses for Perceived Discrimination Against Women and Men, Willingness to Participate in Collective Action, and Acceptance of Feminist Narrative

	b	*se*	*p*	LLCI	ULCI	β
Perceived discrimination against women						
Reproach	0.03	0.15	.868	-0.28	0.33	.02
Verification	-0.18	0.15	.249	-0.48	0.13	-.15
Suffering	0.20	0.15	.185	-0.10	0.51	.18
Adherence to Roles	**-0.37**	**0.11**	**.001**	**-0.59**	**-0.14**	**-.29**
Roles × Reproach	-0.18	0.16	.268	-0.50	0.14	-.15
Simple slope—Low adherence	0.19	0.21	.369	-0.23	0.61	.17
Simple slope—High adherence	-0.15	0.22	.502	-0.58	0.29	-.13
Roles × Verification	0.16	0.17	.344	-0.17	0.48	.13
Simple slope—Low adherence	-0.32	0.22	.135	-0.75	0.10	-.28
Simple slope—High adherence	-0.03	0.22	.899	-0.47	0.41	-.03
Roles × Suffering	0.25	0.16	.128	-0.07	0.57	.20
Simple slope—Low adherence	-0.03	0.22	.909	-0.45	0.40	-.02
Simple slope—High adherence	**0.44**	**0.22**	**.041**	**0.02**	**0.89**	**.38**
Perceived discrimination against men						
Reproach	**0.41**	**0.20**	**.041**	**0.02**	**0.80**	**.26**
Verification	-0.01	0.20	.958	-0.41	0.38	-.01
Suffering	**0.54**	**0.20**	**.007**	**0.15**	**0.94**	**.35**
Adherence to Roles	**0.64**	**0.15**	**< .001**	**0.35**	**0.93**	**.38**
Roles × Reproach	-0.02	0.21	.920	-0.44	0.40	-.01
Simple slope—Low adherence	0.43	0.28	.123	-0.12	0.98	.28
Simple slope—High adherence	0.39	0.29	.175	-0.17	0.95	.25
Roles × Verification	0.12	0.22	.578	-0.30	0.54	.07
Simple slope—Low adherence	-0.12	0.28	.667	-0.67	0.43	-.08
Simple slope—High adherence	0.10	0.29	.720	-0.47	0.67	.07
Roles × Suffering	-0.38	0.21	.076	-0.79	0.04	-.23
Simple slope—Low adherence	**0.89**	**0.28**	**.002**	**0.33**	**1.44**	**.57**
Simple slope—High adherence	0.18	0.28	.519	-0.37	0.73	.12
Collective action						
Reproach	0.24	0.21	.246	-0.17	0.65	.15
Verification	0.40	0.21	.056	-0.01	0.81	.25
Suffering	0.18	0.21	.390	-0.23	0.59	.11
Adherence to Roles	**-0.88**	**0.15**	**< .001**	**-1.19**	**-0.59**	**-.51**
Roles × Reproach	0.11	0.22	.616	-0.32	0.55	.06
Simple slope—Low adherence	0.14	0.29	.630	-0.43	0.71	.09
Simple slope—High adherence	0.35	0.30	.244	-0.24	0.93	.22
Roles × Verification	**0.75**	**0.22**	**.001**	**0.30**	**1.19**	**.43**
Simple slope—Low adherence	-0.28	0.29	.333	-0.86	0.29	-.18
Simple slope—High adherence	**1.11**	**0.30**	**< .001**	**0.52**	**1.71**	**.69**
Roles × Suffering	**0.59**	**0.22**	**.007**	**0.16**	**1.03**	**.34**
Simple slope—Low adherence	-0.37	0.29	.213	-0.94	0.21	-.23
Simple slope—High adherence	**0.75**	**0.29**	**.011**	**0.17**	**1.32**	**.47**
Acceptance of feminist narrative						
Reproach	0.08	0.15	.580	-0.21	0.38	.07
Verification	0.07	0.15	.657	-0.23	0.36	.05
Suffering	0.26	0.15	.080	-0.03	0.56	.21
Adherence to Roles	**-0.89**	**0.11**	**< .001**	**-1.11**	**-0.68**	**-.68**
Roles × Reproach	0.26	0.16	.100	-0.05	0.58	.20
Simple slope—Low adherence	-0.16	0.21	.448	-0.57	0.25	-.13
Simple slope—High adherence	0.33	0.22	.121	-0.09	0.76	.27
Roles × Verification	**0.51**	**0.16**	**.002**	**0.19**	**0.82**	**.38**

Table 3 (continued)

	b	*se*	*p*	LLCI	ULCI	β
Simple slope—Low adherence	-0.40	0.21	.059	-0.81	0.02	-.32
Simple slope—High adherence	**0.55**	**0.22**	**.012**	**0.12**	**0.98**	**.45**
Roles × Suffering	**0.39**	**0.16**	**.015**	**0.08**	**0.70**	**.29**
Simple slope—Low adherence	-0.09	0.21	.660	-0.51	0.32	-.08
Simple slope—High adherence	**0.63**	**0.21**	**.003**	**0.22**	**1.05**	**.51**

LLCI Lower limit confidence interval, *ULCI* Upper limit confidence interval
Statistically significant values are highlighted in bold

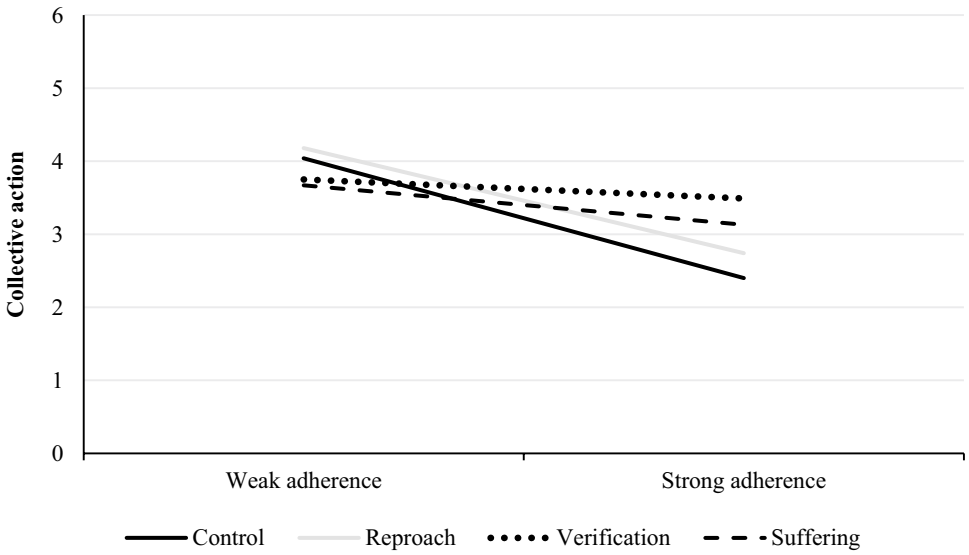

Fig. 1 Willingness to Participate in Collective Action as a Function of Condition and Adherence to Gender Roles

two fictitious statements of the women interviewed. Participants in the *moral reproach condition* learned that the macro-survey had investigated how moral women perceive men to be and how moral men perceive themselves and its results indicated that women perceive men as less moral than they perceive themselves. Participants were presented with a figure showing the morality that men attributed to themselves (83 on a scale from 0 to 100) and the morality that women attributed to men (45). Immediately after this, to reinforce the manipulation, participants were shown two

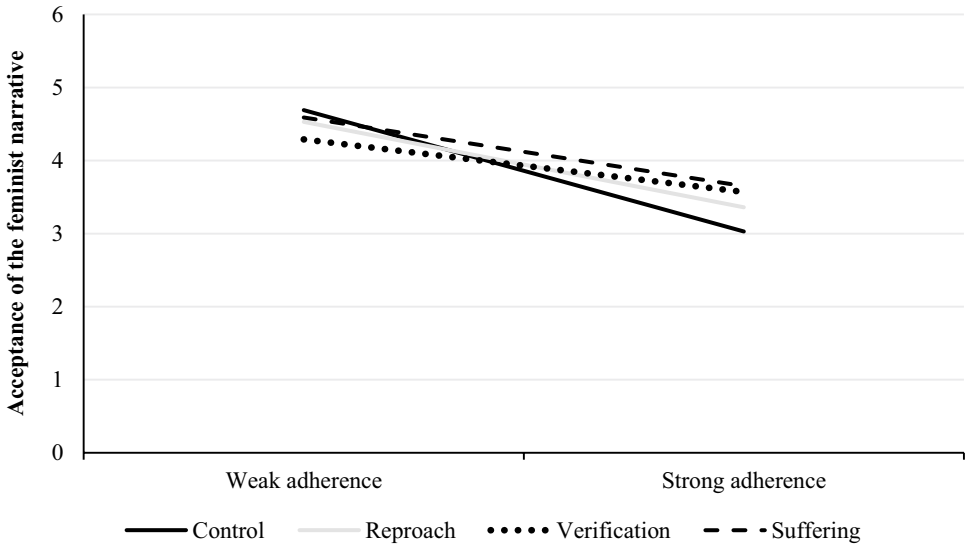

Fig. 2 Acceptance of the Feminist Narrative Regarding Gender Violence as a Function of Condition and Adherence to Gender Roles

Table 4 Study 3: Regression Analyses on Perceived Discrimination Against Women and Men, Willingness to Participate in Collective Action, and Acceptance of Feminist Narrative

	b	*se*	*p*	LLCI	ULCI	β
Women discrimination						
Reproach	0.27	0.19	.168	-0.11	0.64	.18
Verification	0.20	0.20	.325	-0.20	0.59	.13
Suffering	0.35	0.21	.097	-0.06	0.76	.24
Adherence to Roles	-0.14	0.13	.298	-0.39	0.12	-.11
Roles × Reproach	-0.30	0.16	.072	-0.62	0.03	-.23
Roles × Verification	0.01	0.18	.959	-0.35	0.37	.01
Roles × Suffering	-0.28	0.18	.122	-0.63	0.07	-.22
Men discrimination						
Reproach	0.13	0.21	.542	-0.29	0.55	.08
Verification	0.25	0.22	.260	-0.19	0.69	.15
Suffering	**0.48**	**0.23**	**.041**	**0.02**	**0.94**	**.28**
Adherence to Roles	**0.38**	**0.14**	**.008**	**0.10**	**0.66**	**.26**
Roles × Reproach	0.28	0.18	.121	-0.07	0.64	.19
Roles × Verification	0.17	0.20	.401	-0.23	0.57	.12
Roles × Suffering	0.24	0.20	.223	-0.15	0.63	.16
Collective action						
Reproach	0.30	0.23	.194	-0.15	0.75	.17
Verification	**0.55**	**0.24**	**.025**	**0.07**	**1.02**	**.30**
Suffering	**0.59**	**0.25**	**.020**	**0.10**	**1.08**	**.33**
Adherence to Roles	**-0.45**	**0.16**	**.004**	**-0.76**	**-0.15**	**-.29**
Roles × Reproach	-0.02	0.20	.925	-0.41	0.37	-.01
Roles × Verification	0.08	0.22	.710	-0.35	0.52	.05
Roles × Suffering	-0.16	0.21	.456	-0.58	0.26	-.10
Acceptance of feminist narrative						
Reproach	0.15	0.19	.416	-0.21	0.52	.10
Verification	-0.13	0.19	.503	-0.51	0.25	-.09
Suffering	0.04	0.20	.833	-0.36	0.44	.03
Adherence to Roles	**-0.29**	**0.13**	**.021**	**-0.54**	**-0.04**	**-.23**
Roles × Reproach	-0.12	0.16	.456	-0.43	0.19	-.10
Roles × Verification	0.03	0.18	.887	-0.33	0.38	.02
Roles × Suffering	-0.28	0.17	.108	-0.62	0.06	-.22

Note. LLCI Lower limit confidence interval, *ULCI* Upper limit confidence interval

Statistically significant values are highlighted in bold

fictitious statements of the women interviewed: "There are many forms of violence against women such as abuse or street harassment. Men who commit violence against women get away with it because other men do nothing to stop or condemn it" and "I believe that men, in general, do not behave appropriately. There are men who directly mistreat their partner, but many others do not respect women. It is logical that women are afraid of any man because the executioners are always men and the victims are always women. It is men who perpetrate rape, harassment, and gender violence, so it is normal that we suspect any stranger."

Participants in the *moral verification condition* read that the results of the fictitious macro-survey revealed women perceived men as moral as they see themselves and saw the same figure as in Study 2. After that, they received two fictitious statements of female participants: "Most men behave morally. Of course, there are bad men, but they are a minority, they do not represent the majority of men" and "I think that men, in general, behave appropriately. I mean, there are some men who mistreat women, but the majority are moral and respectful."

Participants in the *male suffering condition* were informed that the survey explored the perceptions of men and women about the suffering of men and the results indicated that women recognize the suffering of men to the same extent that they do. Participants were presented with a figure showing the suffering that men attributed to themselves (63 on a scale of 0 to 100) and the suffering that women attributed to men (64). Then, they read two statements of the women interviewed: such as "Gender roles force men to put their careers ahead of everything else. That's why when

they lose their job, they feel like a failure, worthless. Stereotypes also lead people to make fun of men who take care of their children and put their family life before work" and "Men believe that they have to be strong, not cry, be sure of themselves and fight other men to see who has more power. Since this male model of competitiveness and performance is impossible to achieve, men suffer greatly from it. I believe that men would suffer less if they freed themselves from the shackles of gender stereotypes."

Participants in the *control condition* were informed that the survey investigated the reading habits of Spaniards and the results indicated that 43% of those surveyed spend between one and ten hours a week reading books. Then they were presented with a figure showing the extent to which people prefer to read on paper (78 on a scale from 0 to 100) and in digital format (59). Then they read two statements from women such as "I would like to spend more time reading, but my daily obligations make me so tired that, when I finish dinner, I almost always end up putting on a series." and "I think I read more than most people, but I still have the feeling that a few years ago I read more books than I do now. I guess now we have more distractions with mobile phones, Netflix, social networks, etc. All of this means that we spend less and less time reading."

After the manipulation, participants completed the same dependent variables as in Study 2 and two manipulation checks. Finally, participants were debriefed and thanked.

Measures

We first measured participants' adherence to traditional gender roles as in Study 2. The reliability of the scale was good, $\alpha = .81$. After the manipulation, we assessed the dependent variables using the same scales as in Study 2. The reliability of the scales was good. The reliability for the dependent measures was as follows: *perceived discrimination against women* $\alpha = .92$, *perceived discrimination against men* $\alpha = .89$, *willingness to engage in collective action for women's rights* $\alpha = .94$, and *acceptance of feminist narrative regarding gender violence* $\alpha = .85$.

Then, as manipulation checks, we included two items: (a) "How moral do women think that men are?" ranging from 0 (*not at all moral*) to 6 (*very moral*), and (b) "How much do women believe that men suffer?" ranging from 0 (*little suffering*) to 6 (*a lot of suffering*).

Results

Correlational Analyses

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics and the correlations between all the variables. Adherence to traditional gender roles was negatively associated with perceived discrimination against women, willingness to participate in collective action and acceptance of the feminist narrative about gender violence, whereas it was positively associated with perceived discrimination against men. Higher perceived discrimination against women was associated with more willingness to participate in collective action and more acceptance of the feminist narrative. In contrast, higher perceived discrimination against men was negatively associated with those same variables.

Manipulation Checks

We then conducted an ANOVA on each manipulation check. These analyses yielded a significant effect on the morality item, $F(3, 424) = 51.02$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .27$, and the suffering item, $F(3, 424) = 25.78$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .15$. Participants in the moral verification condition ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 0.88$) believed that women perceived men as more moral than those in the other three conditions, Ms < 3.08, ps $< .001$, whereas participants in the moral reproach condition ($M = 2.46$, $SD = 1.15$) believed that women perceived men as less moral than those in the other three conditions, Ms > 3.02, ps $< .001$. On the other hand, participants in the male suffering condition ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 1.15$) believed that women recognized that men suffer more than those in the control and moral reproach conditions, Ms < 2.26, ps $< .001$. There was no difference between the male suffering condition and the moral verification condition ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 1.29$), $p = .497$, suggesting that the acknowledgement of men's morality by women also may involve the recognition of their suffering.

Analysis Plan

As in Study 2, we conducted a regression analysis on each dependent variable using the module GAMLj (General Analyses for the Linear Model) in Jamovi (Version 2.3.19.0). Condition was considered the predictor and adherence to roles was the moderator. Three dummy-coded variables that compared the control condition with each of the manipulations (0 control, 1 experimental conditions) were created. As a result, three interaction terms (each dummy by adherence to gender roles) were also entered as predictors. Adherence to gender roles was considered a continuous variable and mean-centered. Table 4 shows the results of these regression analyses.

Perceived Discrimination

The regression on perceived discrimination against women yielded no significant effects. On perceived discrimination against men, there was a positive effect of adherence to roles,

such that the greater adherence, the stronger perceived discrimination against men (H1b). Also as expected, there was a significant main effect of the male suffering manipulation (H3), such that participants perceived more discrimination against men in this condition ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 1.76$) than in the control condition ($M = 2.02$, $SD = 1.67$). The main effect of moral reproach on perceived discrimination against men was not significant (H2 was not supported). No other effects were significant.

Willingness to Participate in Collective Action for Women's Rights

The regression on collective action intentions revealed a negative effect of adherence to roles, such that the greater adherence, the less willingness to participate in collective action for women's rights (H1c). The main effects of the moral verification and male suffering manipulations were also significant. Participants were more willing to participate in collective action for women's rights in the moral verification ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.73$) and male suffering ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.75$) conditions than in the control condition ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 1.84$). No other effects were significant.

Acceptance of the Feminist Narrative regarding Gender Violence

The regression on acceptance of the feminist narrative only yielded a significant negative effect of adherence to gender roles indicating that the greater adherence, the less acceptance (H1d).

Discussion

Study 3 supports the potential of non-confrontational strategies to get men involved in the fight for gender equality. Having women acknowledging their morality or their suffering led men to show more willingness to participate in collective action for women's rights as compared to the control condition. Unexpectedly, these positive effects were not moderated by participants' adherence to gender roles as in Study 2 (H4a and H5a were not supported) such that in Study 3 the non-confrontational strategies were effective for both traditional and progressive men. The reason for these differences might be that the participants in Study 3 were more adhered to traditional gender roles than those in Study 2, which could have increased the sensitivity to our manipulations in the lower levels of the distribution. However, we did not replicate the positive effects of these strategies on the acceptance of the feminist narrative about gender violence (H4b and H5b were not supported). This could be because the participants in Study 3 were notably older than those in Study 2. Given that blaming attitudes regarding gender violence are more frequent in older people (European Commission et al., 2015), it is possible that resistance to accept the feminist narrative on this issue has been especially strong in Study 3.

Additionally, participants who were led to believe that women recognized their suffering perceived more discrimination against men than those in the control condition (H3). Fortunately, this increased perception of aggravation was not accompanied by reductions in collective action intentions for women's rights or acceptance of the feminist narrative. As in Study 2, the confrontational strategy that questions the morality of men did not affect collective action intentions nor the acceptance of the feminist narrative.

General Discussion

The recent successes of the feminist movement have been accompanied by a mobilization by the extreme right against equality policies and by a *manosphere* that advocates messages of hatred towards women and presents men as the victims of gender discrimination (Cupać & Ebetürk, 2020; Träbert, 2017). In the present research, we examined this backlash against feminism among ideologically traditional men (far-right supporters) to better understand the resistance to support gender equality. Then, we used this knowledge to inform the design of non-confrontational strategies that may foster greater support for women's rights and examined their effects relative to a control condition and considered the potential role of adherence to traditional gender roles in any observed effects.

The qualitative analysis in Study 1 revealed several themes related to the resistance of far-right supporters to gender equality, consistent with observations of the discourse among men's rights movements (Träbert, 2017). Participants reiterated that there was legal equality between women and men and dismissed evidence for gender inequality and women's lower status through a variety of rationalizations, such as natural gender differentiation. Many of the men in the qualitative study described a simplified idea of gender inequality, often ignoring implicit, benevolent, and subtle manifestations of sexism. Part of the discourse also delegitimized the current feminist movement. Feminism was considered a movement that is useless because there is not inequality, is getting more radical, and seeks to establish a conflict ("a battle") between women and men. These arguments contributed to present feminism and feminists as immoral actors, not trustworthy and misguided. This pattern of justifications and attributions for inequality was consistent with system justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994), with almost no connection to or awareness of structural forces that perpetuate such inequality.

A primary theme to emerge from this was a belief in male victimhood, consistent with the notion of a "sexism shift" (Zehnter et al., 2021), whereby men perceive themselves as the gender group who experiences more discrimination. Men who articulated these beliefs indicated that if gender inequality does exist, it is harmful to men and not women. Participants exhibited a feeling of being mistreated, being viewed as morally inferior, and a belief that the suffering of men is not recognized whereas women are overprotected and have privileges. The moral inferiority experienced by men can serve as a source of identity threat that can evoke defensive reactions (e.g., Branscombe et al., 1999), like denying the existence of gender inequality.

Considering these resistances, Study 2 and 3 experimentally tested the effectiveness of different messages to increase men's commitment to gender equality depending on their adherence to traditional gender roles. We compared the effectiveness of one confrontational (moral reproach) and two non-confrontational strategies (moral verification and recognizing male suffering) with a control condition (no strategy delivered) to increase willingness to participate in collective action for women's rights and acceptance of the feminist narrative regarding gender violence. The two non-confrontational strategies addressed two concerns expressed by far-right men in Study 1: the questioning of the morality of all men due to acts of violence against women committed by a few and the perception that the suffering of men is not recognized by society. Building on these concerns, the first non-confrontational strategy consisted of recognizing that most men are moral (moral verification), whereas the second was based on the acknowledgement that they also suffer due to gender stereotypes (male suffering). As compared to a control condition, these two strategies helped men to increase their acceptance of the feminist narrative on violence against women (only in Study 2) and their willingness to participate in collective action for women's rights (Studies 2–3). In Study 2, these strategies only had significant effects among men who were strongly adhered to gender roles, precisely those whose concerns informed these strategies. Since those who uphold traditional gender roles are more opposed to social change towards gender equality, it is promising that non-confrontational strategies are effective precisely in them. In contrast, in Study 3 adherence to traditional gender roles did not moderate the effects, such that men with weak adherence to gender roles also increased their willingness to participate in collective action for women's rights after exposure to the moral verification or male suffering conditions (vs. control).

The differences in the samples between the studies in terms of age (older and probably more traditional men in Study 3) and dedication (Psychology students in Study 2 and general population in Study 3) could explain the variations in the results. Another possibility is that the modifications in the manipulations that we introduced in Study 3 to equalize the conditions as much as possible may explain the lack of moderation. This explanation would not apply to the moral verification condition that remained unchanged. In any case, the lack of moderation shows that non-confrontational strategies might also be effective to mobilize non-traditional men on behalf of gender equality.

The positive effects of the moral verification strategy are consistent with previous studies showing that acknowledging the morality of advantaged groups can increase intentions to participate in collective action for equality (Vázquez et al., 2022). Moral verification might promote openness to alternative narratives among people who have more resistance because it averts social identity threat (e.g., Branscombe et al., 1999). Recognizing the suffering of men might also prevent them from feeling threatened by feminist messages. This strategy might take advantage of the victimizing discourse that has recently gained traction (Zehnter et al., 2021), but not to blame women for men's suffering, but to fight a common enemy, gender stereotypes. There were no differences in the effectiveness of the strategies based on moral verification and male suffering to promote acceptance of the feminist narrative regarding gender violence (Study 2) and willingness to engage in collective action for women's rights (Studies 2 and 3) (see Supplementary Materials: https://osf.io/km53b/?view_only=0464309107d54940a583bb84cafc3c7c). However, recognizing male suffering also led to higher perceptions of discrimination against men, which in a context of increasing male victimhood (Zehnter et al., 2021) could be maliciously exploited.

Regarding the confrontational strategy, moral reproach did not have significant effects on willingness to engage in collective action for women's rights or acceptance of the feminist narrative regarding gender violence. This is also consistent with previous studies indicating that questioning the morality of advantaged groups does not influence positively or negatively the intentions to participate in collective action for equality as compared to a control condition (Vázquez et al., 2022). In sum, these studies suggest that non-confrontational strategies seem more effective than direct confrontation to increase recognition of gender violence and support for collective actions for women's rights among those men who most adhere to traditional gender roles.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This work is not free of limitations. Because we had a large sample of far-right voters in Study 1, different research assistants were involved in performing the interviews. Although they received precise instructions, their differences in style, sex, and relationship with the interviewed participants might have influenced the discourse of the

speakers. Also, as aforementioned, the manipulations of Study 2 not only varied in content, but in other aspects as format, length, and informative source, which could lead to erroneous conclusions about the cause of the effects found. However, Study 3 solved these limitations by equalizing the conditions to avoid potential confounds. Besides adherence to traditional gender roles, new studies could analyze the effect of other variables that could also moderate the influence of our manipulations besides adherence to traditional gender roles. For instance, factors related to gender identity and roles such as the strength of gender identity, neosexism, or masculinity might increase the threat perceived by men due to the advancement of women. Therefore, future studies could test whether non-confrontational strategies are especially indicated for men with strong gender identity, neosexist attitudes, and very masculine. Finally, we did not collect sociodemographic information such as occupation, economic and socio-educational level, which may affect the generalizability of our findings.

Future research might explore women's resistance to feminism. Although men tend to participate in and support far-right and anti-feminist movements more, there are also female sympathizers, and even recently there seems to be an emergence of women leaders within these movements (Worth, 2021). Given that the threats perceived by these women in feminism do not completely overlap with those of men, we believe it is necessary to develop specific strategies to overcome women's opposition to feminism. For example, traditional women may not feel their morality challenged by allegations of gender violence, so verifying their morality should have no effect on their stance on feminism. Future studies would have to first identify the reasons for women's resistance to feminism and then develop specific strategies to counter that resistance.

Practice Implications

This research contributes to our understanding of men's resistance to accepting feminist narratives regarding gender violence and supporting collective action for women's rights. Our findings of Study 1 showed that some policies aimed at protecting women from gender violence (e.g., the Gender Violence Law in Spain) and/or promoting their integration in traditionally masculine occupations (e.g., the use of differential standards in the physical tests for men and women to access specific jobs) may be highly misunderstood and used to justify the idea that men are discriminated against. A clarification of these policies combined with the non-confrontational strategies implemented in Studies 2–3 -recognizing men's morality and suffering- might reduce the resistance of strong detractors to the advancement of women. By contrast, campaigns based on moral reproach could induce important defensive reactions on far-right voters by inducing identity threat and male victimhood.

Our findings support the need to adapt and combine different strategies to get men to accept the social changes necessary to achieve real equality. Direct confrontational strategies might be useful with men who do not adhere to gender roles and are receptive to the advancement of women in society. However, in the case of traditional men, it may be necessary to consider the potential for social identity threat and beliefs of male victimhood. Instead of confrontational messages (e.g., questioning the morality of men due to gender violence or denying their suffering) that might elicit defensive reactions, more subtle strategies as moral verification and recognition of their suffering could allow these men to be more open to listening to a feminist perspective, which can at least be a first step to overcome their resistance to social change.

Conclusion

The recent resurgence of feminism has been accompanied by an emergence of anti-feminist reactionary movements that question gender equality policies and argue that men are victims of discrimination. Based on an analysis of qualitative data from far-right men about gender equality, we developed and tested confrontational and non-confrontational strategies for increasing men's support of women's rights. Results from two experimental studies demonstrated that non-confrontational strategies that acknowledge the morality of men or their suffering due to gender stereotypes may increase their commitment to gender equality, especially among men who adhere more to traditional gender roles. Overall, these findings suggest that strategies aimed at allaying the fears that fuel the perceived victimization of men may foster more allyship among men.

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Availability of Data and Material To protect the identity of participants, to be faithful to the informed consent that they gave us, and to guarantee the exclusively scientific use of the qualitative data, the data of Study 1 only will be shared upon request to the corresponding author. The data, materials, code, and supplementary materials of Study 2 and 3 are available in OSF at the following link: https://osf.io/km53b/?view_only=0464309107d54940a583bb84cafc3c7c

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethical Approval Research associated with the project was approved by the ethics committee of the University of Almería (UALBIO2019/005; UALBIO2021/024).

Consent to Participate Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Conflicts of Interest The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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