



Women's Participation in Collective Action for Workplace Gender Equality: The Role of Perceived Relative Deprivation, Resentment, and Moral Conviction

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Accepted: 10 March 2025
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Abstract

Gender-based collective action is essential to close widespread gender gaps in the workplace and pursue gender equality. To understand the processes underlying engagement in different forms of action, this research focused on women's relative deprivation arising from the perception of unjust disparity between women's and men's conditions at work. Across one correlational (Study 1; $N=455$) and one experimental study (Study 2; $N=320$) conducted in Italy, we tested a serial mediational model linking perceived relative deprivation in the workplace to women's engagement in collective action through resentment about gender inequalities at work and moral conviction to address gender inequality in the workplace. Two forms of collective action were considered: traditional collective action (i.e., organized action, such as signing a petition) and small acts in the workplace (i.e., more informal behaviors for gender equality). Results of the serial mediation model showed that perceiving relative deprivation was associated with a greater willingness to engage in collective action, and this association was explained through resentment and moral conviction. These findings suggest that raising awareness of gender discrimination in the work domain is a critical step toward increasing women's mobilization to act for gender equality.

Keywords Collective behavior · Social change · Women · Disadvantaged · Morality

Gender equality is a fundamental human right (United Nations, 1948), explicitly mentioned in various constitutions, declarations, and company value statements. However, we are currently far from being able to declare that gender equality has been reached in most contemporary societies (e.g., EIGE, 2023; Gomis et al., 2023). Although gender inequalities unfold in several domains (e.g., Ciaffoni et al., 2023, 2025; EIGE, 2023), one of the most pressing areas

of gender inequality is within the workplace. In most countries all over the world, women still have consistently lower salaries and employment rates, are more often hired with precarious contracts, and face more challenges in attaining upward mobility than men (EIGE, 2023; Moscatelli et al., 2020). As recently declared by the UN Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres (2018), achieving gender equality remains the “unfinished business of our time.”

Given the pervasiveness of work-related inequalities and their social implications, it is critical to understand what can motivate individuals to engage in collective action for gender equality. While men's allyship with women is fundamental in promoting social change (Kosakowska-Berezecka et al., 2020; Van Laar et al., 2024), the present research turns the spotlight on women. As recently argued (Radke et al., 2016), women apparently do not protest as often as might be expected based on their disadvantaged status. Such contention by no means implies that women are somehow to blame for accepting the status quo, that all of them should personally act against inequalities, or even that women have

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the primary responsibility for fighting against their dominated condition. Nevertheless, collective action has been in the past and is still one of the primary means through which women can pursue social change on their own behalf. For this reason, it is crucial to shed light on the antecedents of women's intentions to act for gender equality.

Given that gender inequalities are often embedded in the system or do not concern the individual personally (Crosby, 1984; Ellemers & Barreto, 2009), women might be aware of gender inequalities but consider them as legitimate and justifiable (De Cristofaro et al., 2021; Jost et al., 2012). However, recognizing that women, as a category, are unjustly disadvantaged compared to men and expressing anger at it are critical steps to confronting gender inequalities (e.g., Stangor et al., 2003; Uluğ et al., 2023). Accordingly, in this research, we examined whether and how relative deprivation, conceived as the perceived unjust disparity between women's and men's treatment and condition in the work domain (Smith et al., 2012; Smith & Pettigrew, 2015), is related to women's intentions to act for gender equality. To delve into the link between relative deprivation and collective action, we analyzed two possible underlying processes: resentment for women's disadvantaged status and moral convictions about acting for gender equality, intended as the moral significance associated with acting for such a goal (Mazzuca et al., 2022).

Since women might engage in various behaviors to pursue workplace gender equality, we considered two possible forms of collective action. Most studies have described collective action in terms of politically planned and organized behaviors that one can perform at the collective (e.g., participating in a protest) or individual (e.g., signing a petition) level. Women can undertake such a form of action (e.g., by joining 8th of March manifestations), but in everyday life, people are also likely to have frequent opportunities to promote gender equality by adopting less organized, spontaneous behaviors. For instance, women can advocate for equal opportunities with colleagues or point out discriminatory behaviors they experience or witness at work (e.g., Dray & Sabat, 2022; Miron et al., 2022). While such behaviors are still meant to pursue a collective goal—i.e., improving the condition of women as a whole—they do not require deliberated conditions but can be performed spontaneously whenever one detects discrimination or has the chance to express their position on gender issues. For the purpose of this study, we will label this latter form of action as small acts in the workplace, and refer to more organized action as traditional collective action. A correlational (Study 1) and an experimental study (Study 2) were conducted in Italy, which is one of the Western countries where the gender gap in the labor market that favors men is larger (reaching 20%, which is twice as large as in most European Countries; Eurostat,

2024) and patriarchy, which is understood as a system of relationships, beliefs, and values that ensure men's domination over women (Nash, 2020), is widespread in private and public spheres (Galizzi et al., 2024; Ostuni et al., 2022).

Relative Deprivation as Antecedent of Collective Action for Gender Equality

Collective action can be defined as any voluntary behaviors undertaken by an individual to improve the social condition of a group or achieve shared objectives (Wright et al., 1990). Most studies have focused on behaviors that require a certain degree of prior organization, such as protesting, engaging in civic participation, donating money for a supported cause, or even performing radical and violent actions (Becker & Tausch, 2015; van Zomeren et al., 2008). Some forms of action are specifically motivated to mobilize consensus (Klandermans, 1984) or persuade others to contrast a certain situation (Fieck et al., 2020). A successful example is represented by the spreading of the #MeToo movement, which aims to raise people's awareness of sexual harassment against women and provide support to victims (e.g., Menegatti et al., 2022; Moscatelli et al., 2021).

To date, less attention has been paid to more spontaneous forms of collective action. Miron et al. (2022) recently distinguished between traditional, organized collective action and “small acts” in favor of gender equality, conceived as informal, interpersonal behaviors that are aimed at encouraging others to support the cause, searching out information on women's issues, or supporting women in face-to-face or online interactions (e.g., supporting a women's post about women's issues on social media). A further example of spontaneous action is the confrontation of discrimination (e.g., Becker & Barreto, 2014), intended as the face-to-face verbal objection towards the individual responsible for discrimination (e.g., a sexist remark) performed by the target or a bystander (Dray & Sabat, 2022). While in some cases, confronters are driven by individual or distancing motives (e.g., devaluing women while emphasizing that not all women are the same), confronting discrimination represents a collective strategy to cope with the devaluation of a group when it pursues group-benefitting goals; for instance, when the target of discrimination or a bystander points out that the perpetrator's behavior is sexist (Munder et al., 2024).

Notwithstanding the variety of actions through which people can promote collective goals, to our knowledge, most studies on the antecedents of disadvantaged group members' collective action have focused on planned and institutionalized behaviors (van Zomeren et al., 2008). A recent research synthesis of collective action studies has pointed out four key powerful drivers (Agostini & van Zomeren,

2021): social identity, perceived efficacy of the group, perceived injustice, and morality-related motivations.

Many studies on women's mobilization for gender equality have examined gender and feminist identification, showing that the latter represents a more critical predictor than identification with the broad women category (Mikołajczak et al., 2022; Yoder et al., 2011). However, feminism is often stigmatized, and women refrain from identifying as feminists even though they share feminist attitudes and values (e.g., they believe in the fundamental equality between women and men; Zucker & Bay-Cheng, 2010). As for beliefs about group efficacy and resources, they are particularly relevant when one thinks of social movements with specific targets and goals (i.e., feminist movements requiring a law protecting pregnant women at work). However, people might find it hard or even little relevant to weigh group resources and efficacy when thinking of women— as a general category— pursuing the broad goal of gender equality (Radke et al., 2018).

Furthermore, people's reactions to a given situation are more often driven by a subjective sense of disadvantage than by assessing objective conditions or calculating available resources (e.g., Postmes et al., 1999; van Zomeren et al., 2008). When it comes to women, considering how they respond to gender inequality is critical to understanding their willingness to mobilize for gender equality. In fact, women differ from most disadvantaged groups, at least in Western countries. They are not a numerical minority and have, in principle, the same power and the same rights as men (Radke et al., 2016). Within a given society, women and men are socialized to the same beliefs and attitudes about gender roles and traits, including subtle forms of sexism that ostensibly underline the personal and group advantages of being a woman (Becker & Wright, 2011). For all these reasons, women might fail to recognize their disadvantaged status or might not see the differences in treatment between genders as unfair (Jost & Kay, 2005; Verniers & Vala, 2018).

The notion that the subjective experience of inequality is critical to understanding reactions to one's group disadvantaged status is rooted in relative deprivation theory (Smith et al., 2012; Smith & Pettigrew, 2015). According to the theory (Smith et al., 2012), individuals' engagement in collective action is primarily driven by the perceived mismatch between what they believe their group should be granted and the group's current situation. Such a perception of group relative deprivation can originate from comparing with another group's achievements or the ingroup's past condition (Moscatelli et al., 2014; Walker & Pettigrew, 1984). Notably, for relative deprivation to operate, the cognitive appraisal of disadvantage must be accompanied by the perception that the disadvantage is unfair (Smith & Pettigrew,

2015; Smith et al., 2012). Feelings of injustice, giving rise to emotional responses such as resentment and anger, fuel social protest (Abrams et al., 2020; Grant et al., 2015).

Notwithstanding the consistent evidence on the power of relative deprivation in mobilizing the disadvantaged (Smith et al., 2012), little research has directly focused on its role in driving women's collective action for gender equality. Tougas and Veilleux (1988) showed that the strength of relative deprivation experienced in the workforce was positively associated with women's support of affirmative action programs. Olson et al. (1995) found that women's discontent regarding the status of specific groups they belonged to (i.e., single mothers or working women) was predictive of self-improvement behaviors.

Other studies have considered women's personal experiences of discrimination. Foster and Matheson (1995) highlighted that double relative deprivation (defined as the interaction between the experience of personal discrimination and collective relative deprivation) predicted participation in action to improve the overall status of women. Vázquez and López-Rodríguez (2023) showed that women's perception that they themselves had been discriminated against was related to stronger intentions to engage in traditional collective action for gender equality but unrelated to support for more concrete measures, such as sex quotas. However, women usually perceive more gender inequalities at the societal than at the personal level (Crosby, 1984), and perceived societal inequalities are a stronger predictor of support for gender equality than personal experience of discrimination (Sevincer et al., 2023).

Finally, several studies have examined the interplays between the appraisal of gender inequalities and women's social identification processes. Iyer and Ryan (2009) found that the perceived illegitimacy of and anger toward the "glass cliff" (the phenomenon whereby women are more likely than men to be appointed to risky leadership positions) were more critical predictors of collective action in women who showed high rather than low identification with their gender. Shifting the focus to politicized identification, Radke et al. (2018) pointed out that the awareness of the need to fight for gender equality increased feminist identification and, through it, collective action intentions, whereas Thomas and Newell (2023) found that critical reflection about gender equality was positively related to collective action intentions in young women who identified as feminists and were confident in their knowledge of gender equality issues. Considering different types of women's activism, Mikołajczak et al. (2022) showed that among feminists, the awareness of group injustice was related to greater support for progressive action (e.g., reducing the gender pay gap) and lower support for reactionary action aimed to protect male privileges. Converging evidence was provided by

Kelly and Breinlinger (1995), who focused more specifically on relative deprivation. Their study, based on a sample mainly composed of women activists, showed that relative deprivation predicted readiness to participate in collective protest and informal actions (e.g., reading articles related to women's issues), whereas it was related to self-reported actions only in a subsample of women highly identified with their gender and feminists.

Thus, overall, the reviewed studies highlight the role of injustice appraisals or women's awareness of their disadvantaged status within society (e.g., Radke et al., 2018; Sevincer et al., 2023) rather than specifically addressing feelings of relative deprivation at the collective level or separately from feminist identification and attitudes. In this research, we bring into focus women's perception of being relatively deprived as a category that arises from the comparison with the condition of men in the work domain.

From Relative Deprivation To Resentment and Moral Conviction To Act

Relative deprivation is more likely to translate into actions directed to address inequities if it evokes negative justice-related emotions, such as anger and resentment (e.g., Kessler & Mummendey, 2001; Smith et al., 2012). In particular, resentment seems to be relevant in studying women's reactions to relative deprivation, as it is an emotion that goes beyond the immediate, intense reaction of anger, is not directed toward a specific perpetrator but is linked to feelings of indignation and triggered by perceived injustice, even when the unjust experience does not directly concern the individual (Feather & Naim, 2005; Stockdale, 2013). Moreover, feminine norms hinder women's expression of intense anger and lack of control (Mahalik et al., 2005). Thinking of gender inequality at work, a woman might experience resentment in response to discriminatory practices that marginalize women; for instance, if she becomes aware that in her organization, the highest-level positions are unjustly appointed to men. Indeed, Crosby (1984) and Hafer and Olson (1993) found that the extent to which women felt resentful about women's job conditions strongly predicted self-reported political action.

A further key driver of collective action is represented by moral conviction, which has been conceived as the degree of moral significance people attach to a certain issue (Agostini & van Zomeren, 2021; De Cristofaro et al., 2021). Since a belief or an attitude based on one's sense of right and wrong tends to be perceived as the correct position that should be universally held, moral conviction, more than other types of attitudes, carries the obligation to act (Skitka et al., 2021). According to Agostini and van Zomeren (2021), if people

attach moral values to a certain issue (e.g., consider their opinion on gender equality as part of their core moral values), they are more likely to act in defence of such core values. However, as mentioned, detecting violations of moral principles concerning gender equality is often not easy because of the pervasiveness of patriarchal ideologies and justification motives (Moscatelli et al., 2024; Radke et al., 2016).

In the present research, rather than examining the extent to which women consider their opinion on gender equality as part of their core moral values, we shifted the attention to the moral values attached to acting for gender equality, that is, the extent to which a person "moralizes" specific behaviors aimed at achieving the desired goal (Mazzuca et al., 2022). Taking such a perspective, moral conviction about acting can be considered a consequence, rather than a precursor, of perceived relative deprivation and related emotions. In other words, we reasoned that recognizing the unfair treatment of women in the work domain can foster women's resentment that, in turn, can reinforce their belief that "one cannot not act"; that is, the conviction that acting is a matter of moral principles.

A similar reasoning was adopted by Mazzuca et al. (2022), who examined the correlates of men's experience of relative deprivation on behalf of women (i.e., the discontent displayed by men once they recognize the unjust disparities between men and women in the workplace; see also Beaton & Deveau, 2005). In their study, higher levels of relative deprivation on behalf of women were related to stronger feelings of guilt for male privileges and reduced fear of losing such privileges. Such group-based emotions were associated with men's stronger moral convictions about acting to redress women's disadvantages, which, in turn, were related to greater intentions to promote gender equality. Even though moral convictions about acting for gender equality will obviously arise from different experiences and processes when women instead of men are considered, stronger moral convictions should, even in women, be associated with greater collective action intentions. Accordingly, in this research, we assumed that in women, moral convictions about acting for gender equality should be fueled by relative deprivation and resentment toward work-related gender inequalities and predict their intentions to engage in collective action.

Research Overview

This research aimed to examine the relationship between women's experience of being relatively deprived compared to men in the work domain and their willingness to promote workplace gender equality, considering two processes that

might account for this association: resentment concerning women's disadvantaged status and moral conviction to act on behalf of women. To capture the variety of behaviors that women can undertake, we considered two forms of action: traditional collective action, which refers to politically-planned behaviors that require deliberated conditions and have been primarily considered in research (e.g., signing a petition), and small acts in the workplace, which include behaviors that women might have the opportunity to display in their everyday interactions (e.g., standing up against discrimination in the workplace when they detect it).

Our conceptualization of small acts in the workplace resembles Miron et al.'s (2022) construct of small acts. Whereas the latter refers to more general behaviors that one might perform in everyday life, with the notion of small acts in the workplace, we aimed to refer to behaviors that can take place at work and are targeted at promoting gender equality in that context. Such behaviors can be rather costly or even risky for one's reputation and career. For instance, the act of confronting gender discrimination in the workplace, whether it comes from clients, colleagues, or supervisors, can be stressful (Ilies et al., 2011). Women who confront gender discrimination in the workplace, either being the target of discrimination or bystanders, are likely to be viewed as biased and considered troublemakers, overreacting, and aggressive (Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Eliezer & Major, 2012).

Based on the relative deprivation perspective (Smith et al., 2012), we reasoned that the more women experience relative deprivation concerning the conditions of women compared to those of men, the more they should be motivated to engage in collective action for gender equality. Such a relationship should, at least partially, be accounted for by resentment of gender inequality and the moral conviction associated with engaging in action to promote equality. Since, as explained before, traditional collective action and small acts in the workplace differ in their planned versus more spontaneous nature but not necessarily in their goal or in the required efforts, we assumed that both forms of action would be related to the proposed predictors without advancing distinct hypotheses concerning the two forms of collective action.

Specifically, we expected that relative deprivation, either measured (Study 1) or manipulated (Study 2), would result in higher resentment (Hypothesis 1), which should, in turn, be related to stronger moral convictions about acting (Hypothesis 2). Relative deprivation should be associated with greater moral conviction, directly or through resentment (Hypothesis 3). Moral conviction should be associated with higher intentions to engage in traditional collective action (Hypothesis 4a) and small acts in the workplace (Hypothesis 4b). Resentment should be related, directly

or through moral conviction, to increased collective action intentions (Hypotheses 5a-5b). Finally, we expected that relative deprivation would be related to higher intentions to engage in traditional collective action and small acts in the workplace, either directly or through the mediation of resentment and moral conviction, which were tested as sequential mediators (Hypotheses 6a-6b).

Since right/conservative (vs. left/liberal) political orientation was found to be related to lower support for gender equality (Sevincer et al., 2023), political orientation was included as a covariate in both studies' models. In Study 1, age was also included as a covariate since there is some evidence that middle-aged and older adults are more willing to engage in collective action as a response to group-related disadvantage than younger adults (Weiss et al., 2016).

As mentioned, identification with feminists can be a powerful driver of collective action (Mikołajczak et al., 2022), but it is sometimes stigmatized (e.g., Yoder et al., 2011). This seems to be the case in Italy, where feminism is often considered a niche or extremist movement (Alonso et al., 2023; Blasi, 2019). For this reason, based on Zucker and Bay-Cheng's (2010) claim that one can hold values and attitudes brought about by feminism without identifying as feminist, in Study 2, we included alignment with feminist values as a covariate in the model.

Study 1

Study 1 aimed to provide correlational evidence for the associations between women's perception of relative deprivation, resentment, moral conviction, and intentions to engage in traditional collective action and small acts for gender equality. We tested a sequential mediation model where relative deprivation was associated with resentment (first mediator), moral conviction about acting (second mediator), and collective action intentions. Simple mediation paths were also tested.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Both studies were approved by the Bioethical Committee of the University of Bologna. For both studies, we report how we determined all data exclusions, sample size, manipulations, and measures, consistent with reporting standards for quantitative research (Appelbaum et al., 2018). The design and analyses for the two studies were not preregistered.

Data for Study 1 were collected in Italy in October–November 2021. Participants were recruited via social networks (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) and through snowball

sampling and invited to fill in a questionnaire on the Qualtrics platform. The research was presented as a study aimed at examining women's opinions and beliefs about the condition of women in the workplace. Participants provided informed consent before filling in the questionnaire. Participation was voluntary and completely anonymous, and participants were not compensated.

To determine the sample size, we relied on Fritz and MacKinnon's (2007) recommendation that 400 participants are sufficient to detect small/medium indirect effects in complex mediation, assuming an alpha of 0.05 and a power of 0.80. We also followed Kelloway's (2014) recommendation for structural equation models (SEM) incorporating latent variables, according to which the ratio of observation to estimated parameters should be at least 5:1. Since we estimated that overall, considering the measures employed, the model had 88 parameters, we fixed the minimum sample size at $N=440$. We left the questionnaire open for four weeks and checked whether the minimum sample size had been reached after that period. Of an initial sample of 528 women who provided their consent to participation, 66 participants were removed because they did not complete all the main variables. Moreover, since we were interested in examining variations in the strength of moral convictions associated with engaging in collective action (rather than evaluating the impact of being in favor or against it), following van Zomeren et al.'s (2011) procedure, we excluded seven participants who were against or uncertain about acting to promote more gender equality (as explained in the procedure and measure section). The final sample consisted of 455 women ($M_{\text{age}} = 33.89$, $SD = 11.23$, range = 18–70 years old), an adequate sample size based on Kelloway's (2014) recommendation. All participants were of Italian nationality. As for their occupational status, 24% ($n = 104$) of the participants were undergraduate, master, or postgraduate students; 60% ($n = 273$) were workers; 2% ($n = 9$) were job seekers; 1.1% ($n = 5$) were housewives; 2.2% ($n = 10$) were retirees; and 10.8% ($n = 49$) chose the option "other" (e.g., working students, in maternity leave).

Measures

The questionnaire, which required 10 min to be completed, was in Italian and included measures of perceived relative deprivation, resentment, moral conviction, and intentions to engage in collective action, in this order. Participants indicated their political orientation and were presented with the demographics at the end.

Relative Deprivation Relative deprivation was measured by asking participants to rate the extent to which they agreed (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*) with seven items

concerning women's disadvantages in the work domain compared to men. The items were developed following the requirements for fraternal relative deprivation measures indicated by Smith et al. (2012): a disadvantaged intergroup comparison and an emphasis on entitlement or deservingness. The items were: "Thinking of the world of work, I feel deprived when I think about what we have as women compared to what men have," "When I compare what we have as women with what men have, I realize that we are quite worse off," "Women earn less than men with the same qualifications," "For us women finding a qualified job is much tougher than is for men," "I feel dissatisfied comparing women's and men's situation at work," "In general, women are unjustly disadvantaged compared to men in the world of work," and "Women are usually valued less than men in the workplace." A CFA on the seven items of relative deprivation revealed inadequate fit according to commonly adopted fit criteria, $RMSEA = 0.154$, 95% CI [0.133, 0.175], $CFI = 0.923$, $TLI = 0.885$, $SRMR = 0.040$. Based on the inspection of modification indexes, one item ("Women are usually valued less than men in the workplace") was deleted. The new solution confirmed that all items saturated on a single dimension (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89$) and had an adequate fit, $RMSEA = 0.039$, 95% CI [0.001, 0.072], $CFI = 0.996$, $TLI = 0.993$, $SRMR = 0.014$. The six items were averaged to compute a relative deprivation index, with higher scores indicating higher levels of perceived relative deprivation in the workplace.

Resentment To measure resentment, participants read: "When thinking about gender inequalities in the workplace, as a woman, I feel..." and were asked to rate the extent to which they felt (a) resentful, (b) rancorous, and (c) outraged (1 = *not at all*; 7 = *very much*). The measure showed good reliability ($\alpha = 0.80$). We used mean scores, whereby higher scores indicated stronger resentment for gender inequalities in the workplace.

Moral Conviction Participants were first asked whether they were against or in favor of acting to promote more gender equality at work. The response scale ranged from 1 (*completely against*) to 7 (*completely in favor*), with the midpoint indicating that the respondent was neither against nor in favor. As mentioned, only data from participants with a favorable attitude towards acting (i.e., responses ranging from 5 to 7) were considered (see van Zomeren et al., 2011). Afterwards, participants indicated the extent to which acting for gender equality was part of their moral convictions (1 = *not at all*; 7 = *very much*) on a 3-item measure adapted from Skitka et al. (2008). They were asked, "To what extent

Table 1 Geomin Rotated Factor Loadings for Traditional Collective Action and Small Acts in the Workplace (Study 1)

Items	Traditional collective action	Small acts in the workplace
Participating in public demonstrations or flash mobs	0.751	-0.038
Signing a petition	0.804	-0.008
Supporting associations that promote gender equality	0.613	0.050
Financially supporting initiatives	0.650	0.083
Following or showing support for persons or groups that promote gender equality on social media	0.539	0.161
Correcting others' sexist language in the workplace	0.019	0.876
Intervening in the face of episodes of discrimination against women at work	0.014	0.761
Discussing the need to tackle gender inequality at work with colleagues	0.168	0.570

is acting for gender equality...a) based on strong moral principles; b) an essential personal tenet; c) reflect your core moral convictions" ($\alpha=0.83$). Mean scores were computed, with higher scores indicating stronger moral convictions related to acting for gender equality.

Traditional Collective Action and Small Acts in the Workplace To measure traditional collective action intentions, we used five items of normative collective action adapted from Tausch et al. (2011). Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they would have been willing to engage in the following five actions to promote gender equality at work: "participating in public demonstrations or flash mobs," "signing a petition," "supporting associations that promote gender equality," "financially supporting initiatives," and "following or showing support for persons or groups that promote gender equality on social media." To capture small acts in the workplace, participants were asked the extent to which they were willing to engage in the following actions: "Discussing the need to tackle gender inequality at work with colleagues," "Intervening in the face of episodes of discrimination against women at work," and "Correcting others' sexist language in the workplace." The

response scale ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*) for all the items.

Given that the items of small acts in the workplace were developed ad hoc in the absence of such a construct in the literature, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) on the eight items of traditional collective action and small acts in the workplace to examine whether a two-factor structure fitted the data better than a single-factor structure. The EFA showed that a two-factor structure fitted the data well, CFI=0.991, TLI=0.981, RMSEA=0.044 [0.014, 0.070], SRMR=0.020, whereas a single-factor structure did not, CFI=0.769, TLI=0.676, RMSEA=0.182 [0.165, 0.200], SRMR=0.114. The reliability of both traditional collective action ($\alpha=0.86$) and small acts in the workplace ($\alpha=0.79$). Factor loadings are reported in Table 1. Mean scores were computed for each measure, with higher scores indicating stronger intentions to engage in action for gender equality.

Political Orientation Participants indicated their political orientation on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 (*extreme left-wing*) to 7 (*extreme right-wing*).

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations among variables. For exploratory purposes, we ran a paired sample *t*-test to compare the extent to which participants reported they would engage in traditional collective action and small acts in the workplace. Participants reported higher intentions to engage in small acts in the workplace than in traditional collective action, $t(454)=25.36, p<.001, d=1.189$. Relative deprivation, resentment, moral conviction, and the two collective action measures were positively related to each other. Right-wing political orientation was negatively associated with all variables except for age. Age was negatively related to intentions to engage in small acts only.

Table 2 Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations Among Study 1 Variables

	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Relative deprivation	5.67 (1.06)	0.26***	0.23***	0.37***	0.23***	-0.19***	-0.07
2. Resentment	5.14 (1.24)		0.37***	0.26***	0.25*	-0.11*	-0.08
3. Moral conviction	6.17 (0.84)			0.50***	0.49***	-0.22***	-0.03
4. Traditional collective action	4.98 (1.17)				0.46***	-0.36***	-0.09
5. Small acts in the workplace	6.24 (0.76)					-0.27***	-0.12**
6. Political orientation	2.45 (1.51)						-0.04
7. Age	33.89 (11.23)						1

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

Sequential Mediation Analysis

To test the main hypotheses, we estimated a model in which relative deprivation, entered as the predictor, was related to collective action intentions through resentment and moral conviction about acting, entered as sequential mediators. Political orientation and age were included as covariates. SEM with latent variables (Bollen, 1989) was performed using Mplus 8.3 (Muthén & Muthén, 2019). Model parameters were estimated using the maximum likelihood method. Bootstrap (5000 resamples) estimates of indirect effects and bootstrapping bias-corrected confidence intervals (CIs) were calculated to test for mediation. This method does not assume a normal distribution for all paths and allows empirically generating a sampling distribution for the indirect effects (e.g., Zhang, 2014). To examine model fit, we relied on four indices (Schumacker & Lomax, 2010): comparative fit index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), which should exceed 0.90 to be considered acceptable, and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), which should be lower than 0.08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

First, we estimated the measurement model. The fit indexes were acceptable, CFI=0.917, TLI=0.901, RMSEA=0.072 [0.065, 0.078], SRMR=0.064. The factor loadings for the items of the latent variables are reported

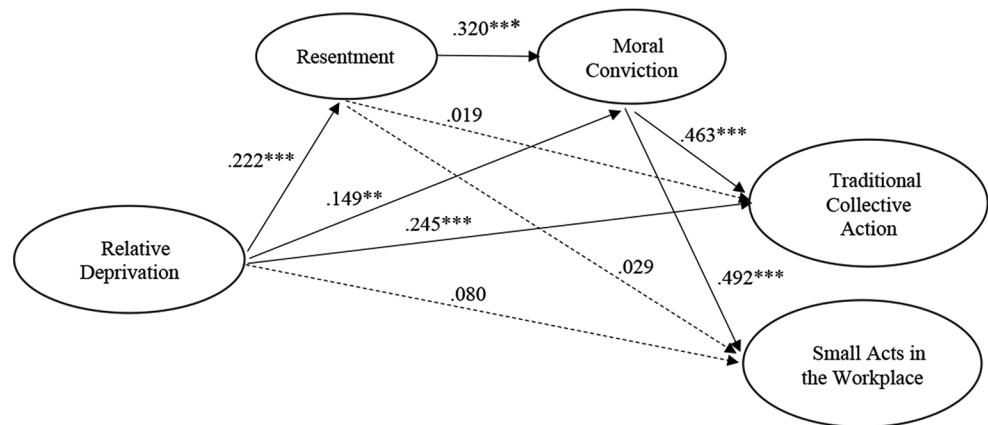
in Table S1 in the online supplement. The fit indexes of the estimated sequential mediation model were acceptable, CFI=0.937, TLI=0.923, RMSEA=0.057, 95% CI [0.051, 0.064], SRMR=0.061. Table 3 reports the estimates for direct and indirect effects and the CIs of the main model. Significant direct links are also shown in Fig. 1. As expected, relative deprivation was significantly associated with the proposed first mediator (resentment; supporting Hypothesis 1), which was positively related to the second mediator (i.e., moral conviction; supporting Hypothesis 2). Relative deprivation was associated with greater moral conviction directly and through resentment (supporting Hypothesis 3). Moral conviction was positively associated with intentions to engage in traditional collective action and small acts in the workplace (supporting Hypotheses 4a-4b). The direct links between resentment and the two collective action measures were not significant, whereas the indirect links through moral conviction were significant (supporting Hypotheses 5a-5b). While relative deprivation maintained a direct association with traditional collective action, the indirect effect through the mediators was significant, supporting Hypothesis 6a. The indirect effect of relative deprivation on traditional collective action through moral conviction was also significant, whereas the indirect effect through resentment was not.

Table 3 Standardized Direct and Indirect Effects of the SEM (Study 1)

	Relative Deprivation	Resentment	Moral conviction	Traditional collective action	Small acts in the workplace
	β (SE) [95% CI]	β (SE) [95% CI]	β (SE) [95% CI]	β (SE) [95% CI]	β (SE) [95% CI]
Direct effects					
RD		0.222*** (0.067) [0.093, 0.348]	0.149** (0.055) [0.045, 0.255]	0.245*** (0.048) [0.153, 0.340]	0.080 (0.064) [-0.049, 0.198]
Resentment			0.320*** (0.054) [0.215, 0.426]	0.019 (0.051) [-0.077, 0.118]	0.029 (0.063) [-0.092, 0.155]
Moral conviction				0.463*** (0.056) [0.358, 0.576]	0.492*** (0.065) [0.365, 0.618]
Indirect effects					
RD→Resentment→			0.071** (0.024) [0.031, 0.128]	0.004 (0.012) [-0.018, 0.029]	0.006 (0.015) [-0.020, 0.041]
Resentment→Moral conviction→				0.148*** (0.033) [0.093, 0.225]	0.157*** (0.035) [0.098, 0.236]
RD→Moral conviction→				0.069* (0.026) [0.023, 0.126]	0.073* (0.029) [0.023, 0.136]
RD→Resentment→ Moral conviction→				0.033** (0.012) [0.014, 0.064]	0.035** (0.013) [0.015, 0.069]
Covariates					
Political orientation	-0.213*** (0.050) [-0.314, -0.116]	-0.053 (0.053) [-0.155, 0.050]	-0.183*** (0.053) [-0.284, -0.077]	-0.227*** (0.047) [-0.319, -0.131]	-0.157** (0.060) [-0.273, -0.035]
Age	-0.072 (0.046) [-0.166, 0.017]	-0.052 (0.048) [-0.146, 0.040]	-0.006 (0.045) [-0.093, 0.084]	-0.073 (0.038) [-0.148, 0.001]	-0.121** (0.041) [-0.203, -0.043]

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

Fig. 1 Standardized coefficients for direct paths in the structural equation model for Study 1. Control variables (political orientation and age) were included in the model but are not shown in the figure. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$



Considering small acts in the workplace, neither the direct effect of relative deprivation nor the indirect effect through resentment was significant. The indirect link between relative deprivation and the outcome through moral conviction was significant. Supporting Hypothesis 6b, the sequential indirect effect through the two proposed mediators was significant.

Finally, the two covariates were unrelated, $estimate = -0.035$, $SD = 0.047$, $p = .459$. Political orientation (i.e., being right-wing oriented) was negatively related to the main model measures. Age was negatively associated with small acts in the workplace.

Supplementary Analyses

Since it has been claimed that conducting analyses both with and without control variables can be valuable for statistical validity (Sturman et al., 2022), we re-ran the analyses without including political orientation and age as covariates. The fit of this model was acceptable, $CFI = 0.944$, $TLI = 0.934$, $RMSEA = 0.058$ [0.051, 0.055], $SRMR = 0.064$. The pattern of direct and indirect effects remained unchanged, supporting that the covariates did not alter the associations between the main variables. Complete findings are reported in Table S2 in the online supplement.

Finally, it could be argued that participants who identified as university students, housewives, or job-seekers ($n = 123$) may not have had any work experience and might have responded differently from working women ($n = 332$), especially concerning small acts in the workplace. We, therefore, conducted multigroup analyses to examine possible differences in the associations between the model variables in the two subsamples. First, we compared a model in which the regression coefficients were free to vary across subsamples (i.e., an unconstrained model) with a model where all the parameters were constrained to equality across subsamples. Table S3 in the online supplement reports the direct and indirect effects in the two subsamples. The chi-square

difference test showed that the constrained and the unconstrained models were not significantly different, $\Delta\chi^2 = 7.050$, $\Delta df = 9$, $p = .632$, $\Delta CFI = 0.000$, $\Delta RMSEA = -0.001$. Next, the Wald test statistic was applied to identify one-by-one significant differences in path coefficients in the two subsamples. To this aim, we compared the unconstrained model with a series of models where one path coefficient was fixed equal. The results revealed only two significant comparisons between the two subsamples: (a) the correlation between traditional collective action and small acts in the workplace was -0.048 , $SE = 0.056$, $p = .758$ in the non-worker subsample, whereas it was 0.275 ($SE = 0.071$), $p < .001$ in the worker subsample ($Wald = 7.070$, $p = .008$); and (b) the association between political orientation and small acts in the workplace was 0.057 ($SE = 0.098$), $p = .560$ in the non-worker subsample, whereas it was -0.211 ($SE = 0.053$), $p < .001$ in the worker subsample ($Wald = 5.522$, $p = .010$). No other Wald tests were significant, $ps > 0.065$.

Discussion

The results of Study 1 provided initial support for the hypothesis that women's intention to engage in collective action for gender equality was positively related to their perception of being relatively deprived compared to men through the mediation of resentment and moral conviction. Such findings held for both forms of action, even though they showed partial mediation for traditional collective action and complete mediation for small acts in the workplace. More right-wing-oriented respondents reported lower levels of relative deprivation, resentment, moral conviction, and collective action intentions, a finding that aligns with previous evidence that conservatives are less likely than liberals to support gender equality (Sevincer et al., 2023). Age, the other covariate, was negatively related to the small acts measure only. Thus, unlike what was found by Weiss et al. (2016) examining collective action against age-related disadvantages, women's age is not a key predictor of their

mobilization for social change in the work domain, possibly because it is unrelated to feelings of relative deprivation in the first place. Since the correlational nature of these findings does not allow for the establishment of causation, Study 2 was run to experimentally assess the impact of relative deprivation and the mediation paths observed in Study 1.

Study 2

Study 2 tested experimentally whether high (vs. low) relative deprivation increased collective action intentions by fostering resentment and moral conviction related to acting for gender equality. Relative deprivation was manipulated by exposing women participants to information related to the small versus large gaps between women's and men's levels of employment, wage, and representation in the information and communication technology work field in Italy. Like in Study 1, we tested a sequential mediation model— through resentment and moral conviction— and simple mediation paths. Political orientation, which was related to all variables in Study 1, was included as a covariate. Age was not considered as it was not strongly associated with collective action intentions in Study 1 and to avoid excessive parameters in the model. Alignment with feminist values was also included as a covariate in the model.

Method

Participants

Data were collected in Italy in April 2022 using the Qualtrics platform. Participants were recruited via social networks and through snowball sampling. The research was advertised in the same way as Study 1. The questionnaire was anonymous. To determine the minimum sample size, we used Kelloway's (2014) suggested ratio of observation to estimated parameters of at least 5:1. Given that we planned to test a SEM model with 67 parameters, we fixed the minimum sample size to 335. We left the questionnaire open for three weeks. Overall, 345 women took part in the study. However, 17 participants were excluded since they did not complete the study, and five failed the manipulation check concerning the experimental condition assignment (as described below). Like in Study 1, three participants were excluded because they were against acting to promote gender equality (see van Zomeren et al., 2011).

The final sample consisted of 320 women ($M_{\text{age}} = 33.33$, $SD = 14.78$; range = 18–70 years old), all of Italian nationality. The majority (56.3%; $n = 180$) were workers, 31.3% ($n = 100$) were students, 1.9% ($n = 6$) were job

seekers, 2.8% ($n = 9$) were housewives, 3.8% ($n = 12$) were retirees, and 4.1% ($n = 13$) chose the option “other” (e.g., working student; maternity leave). Since the final sample was slightly undersized for a model estimating 67 parameters, we reduced the number of parameters in the model by recurring to parceling, a procedure that enables obtaining a more appropriate variable-to-sample size ratio and more stable parameter estimates provided the unidimensionality of the underlying scales (e.g., Bandalos, 2002). Specifically, two 2-item parcels were created for the traditional collective action measure. Doing this, the number of parameters was reduced to 61, allowing us to respect the 5:1 ratio of observation to estimated parameters suggested by Kelloway (2014).

Procedure

Experimental Manipulation Participants were randomly presented with the extract of a report describing the gender gap in the work domain in Italy as either low (i.e., low deprivation condition) or high (i.e., high deprivation condition). The report was attributed to the fictitious EIGP (European Institution for Gender Parity). In the low deprivation condition ($n = 161$), women read the following sentences: “According to the EIGP (European Institution for Gender Parity), the current participation rate of women in the workforce in Italy is not very different from that of men. Women earn slightly less than men. Moreover, many women are employed in sectors like information and communication technology, where men have been the majority for decades.” In the high deprivation condition ($n = 159$), participants read the following sentences: “According to the EIGP (European Institution for Gender Parity), the current participation rate of women in the workforce in Italy is much lower than that of men. Women consistently earn less than men and are underrepresented in sectors, like information and communication technology, where men have been the majority for decades.”

Pilot Study Before running Study 2, a pilot study was conducted to assess the extent to which the two extracts from a fictitious report and the EIGP (i.e., the organization that allegedly published them) were perceived as reliable. Fifteen women from the general population ($M_{\text{age}} = 30$ years, $SD = 8.62$) were randomly presented with a paper questionnaire reporting one of the two report extracts, followed by two items asking the extent to which they perceived the report as reliable and the EIGP as trustworthy (1 = *not at all*; 5 = *very much*). There were no significant differences in the extent to which participants in the low vs. high relative deprivation condition perceived the report as reliable

(respectively, $M=3.63$, $SD=0.74$, and $M=3.88$, $SD=0.99$), $t(14) = -0.571$, $p=.577$, or in the perception of the EIGP as trustworthy (respectively, $M=4.38$, $SD=0.74$, and $M=4.00$, $SD=0.76$), $t(14)=1.00$, $p=.334$. After completing the questionnaire, participants were also orally asked to comment upon the EIGP reports and showed no doubts about the EIGP or the reports' content.

Questionnaire In Study 2, after reading the alleged EIGP's report extracts, participants were presented with a measure of perceived injustice of the gender gap at work. Since perceiving a group's disadvantage as unfair is a necessary component of relative deprivation (Smith & Pettigrew, 2015; see also Agostini & van Zomeren, 2021), such a measure was meant to prove the effectiveness of the experimental manipulation. They then completed the measures included in the proposed model, that is, resentment, moral conviction about acting for gender equality, traditional collective action and small acts in the workplace, political orientation, and alignment with feminist values (in this order). Afterwards, participants filled in the demographics. As a manipulation check, they were then asked to indicate if the report stated that, in Italy, gender inequalities in the work domain were "rather small" or "rather large." As mentioned, five respondents failed such a manipulation check and were excluded from the analyses. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were informed about the study's aims and the experimental manipulation. They were also told about the fictitious nature of EIGP, and it was explicitly stated that, for the purposes of the study, some participants had been given false information. Participants were also provided with some data about the gender employment gap (20%, according to Eurostat, 2022) and the pay gap (up to 15% in private industries). Then, all participants were asked for consent to confer data in light of the unveiling of the cover story. All participants consented.

Dependent Variables

To ensure that the experimental manipulation was effective in fostering feelings of high versus low relative deprivation, participants were asked to rate the extent to which for women, compared to men, the situation described in the report was (a) unfair, (b) undeserved, and (c) discriminatory (1 = *not at all*, to 7 = *very much*; $\alpha=0.91$). Mean scores were computed, whereby higher scores indicated higher perceived injustice. The measures of resentment ($\alpha=0.82$), moral conviction ($\alpha=0.85$), traditional collective action ($\alpha=0.79$), small acts in the workplace ($\alpha=0.76$) and political orientation were the same as Study 1. A CFA

conducted on the eight items of traditional collective action and small acts supported that the 2-factor structure identified in Study 1 fitted the data well, CFI=0.966, TLI=0.950, RMSEA=0.068 [0.044, 0.093], SRMR=0.054. Alignment with feminist values was measured by asking participants, "How close do you feel to the values of feminism?" (1 = *not at all*; 7 = *very much*).

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Preliminary independent-sample *t*-tests were conducted to verify that the participants randomly assigned to the two experimental conditions did not differ in political orientation or alignment with feminist values. They showed no difference in political orientation, $t(318)=1.56$, $p=.120$, or alignment with feminist values, $t(318) = -1.31$, $p=.190$.

To assess the effectiveness of the experimental manipulation, a *t*-test was conducted on the measure of perceived injustice of the situation described in the report. Participants perceived higher injustice in the high relative deprivation ($M=6.39$, $SD=0.82$) than in the low relative deprivation condition ($M=4.25$, $SD=1.83$), $t(319)=13.50$, $p < .001$, $d=1.510$, supporting that the experimental manipulation induced coherent perceptions of women's disadvantages.

Finally, a paired-sample comparison of the two collective action measures showed that, as in Study 1, participants scored higher on the measure of small acts in the workplace ($M=6.06$, $SD=0.83$) rather than traditional collective action ($M=5.00$, $SD=1.07$), $t(319)=19.33$, $p<.001$, $d=1.081$.

Comparisons between High Versus Low Relative Deprivation on the Main Variables

Table 4 shows the scores in the two experimental conditions and the bivariate correlations among the model variables. A series of independent sample *t*-tests on the main model measures revealed that participants in the high (vs. low) relative deprivation condition showed higher levels of resentment, $t(318)=8.45$, $p<.001$, $d=0.944$, and moral conviction, $t(318)=2.90$, $p=.004$, $d=0.325$. They also reported stronger intentions to engage in traditional collective action, $t(318)=3.99$, $p<.001$, $d=0.446$, and small acts, $t(318)=3.13$, $p=.034$, $d=0.238$.

Mediation Analysis

As in Study 1, a SEM with latent variables (Bollen, 1989) was conducted to estimate a model where relative deprivation predicted collective action through resentment and moral conviction (sequential mediators). Political orientation and

Table 4 Means (*SD*) and Correlations Among Study 2 Variables

	Low Deprivation	High Deprivation	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1. Resentment	4.05 ^a (1.55)	5.32 ^b (1.11)	0.22***	0.28***	0.12*	-0.11*	0.23***
2. Moral conviction	6.00 ^a (0.89)	6.27 ^b (0.76)		0.49***	0.50***	-0.22***	0.36***
3. Traditional collective action	4.76 ^a (1.19)	5.23 ^b (0.87)			0.48***	-0.31***	0.41***
4. Small acts in the workplace	5.97 ^a (0.87)	6.16 ^b (0.78)				-0.15***	0.34***
5. Political orientation	2.89 ^a (2.47)	3.47 ^a (2.38)					-0.23***
6. Alignment with feminist values	5.47 ^a (1.23)	5.65 ^a (1.17)					1

Note. Means with different superscripts differ significantly ($ps < .05$) within rows

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

Table 5 Standardized Direct and Indirect Effects of the SEM (Study 2)

	Resentment	Moral conviction	Traditional collective action	Small acts in the workplace
	β (SE) [95% CI]	β (SE) [95% CI]	β (SE) [95% CI]	β (SE) [95% CI]
Direct effects				
Relative Deprivation	0.440*** (0.048) [0.345, 0.533]	0.044 (0.068) [-0.094, 0.172]	0.064 (0.064) [-0.064, 0.188]	0.036 (0.065) [-0.096, 0.161]
Resentment		0.201** (0.078) [0.044, 0.349]	0.194* (0.082) [0.034, 0.358]	-0.029 (0.072) [-0.163, 0.120]
Moral conviction			0.481*** (0.064) [0.352, 0.605]	0.549*** (0.067) [0.412, 0.676]
Indirect effects				
RD → Resentment →		0.089* (0.036) [0.024, 0.163]	0.085* (0.037) [0.020, 0.165]	-0.013 (0.032) [-0.073, 0.042]
Resentment → Moral conviction →			0.097* (0.041) [0.024, 0.170]	0.110* (0.046) [0.026, 0.211]
RD → Moral conviction →			0.021 (0.033) [-0.044, 0.086]	0.024 (0.038) [-0.051, 0.098]
RD → Resentment → Moral conviction →			0.043* (0.019) [0.012, 0.086]	0.049* (0.021) [0.012, 0.086]
Covariates				
Political orientation	-0.020 (0.052) [-0.127, 0.62]	-0.210*** (0.056) [-0.324, -0.119]	-0.216*** (0.055) [-0.321, -0.109]	0.001 (0.057) [-0.145, 0.111]
Alignment with feminist values	-0.292*** (0.058) [-0.407, -0.180]	-0.016 (0.068) [-0.157, 0.109]	0.063 (0.049) [-0.039, 0.150]	-0.089 (0.046) [-0.178, 0.004]

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

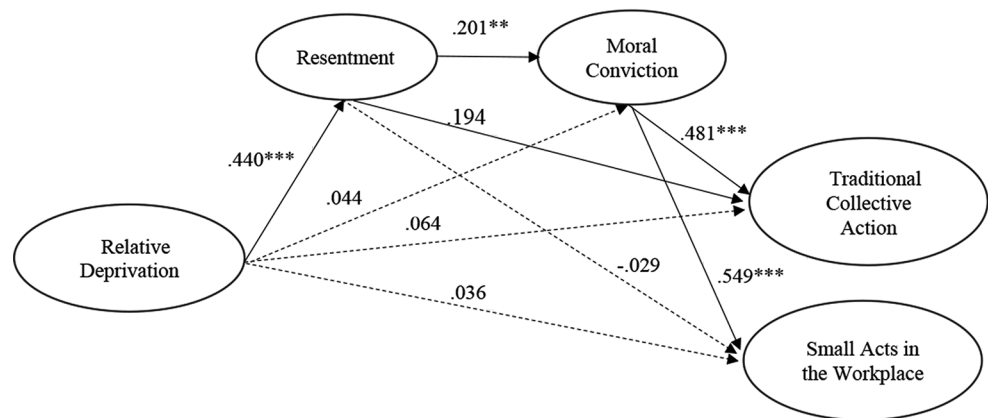
alignment with feminist values were included as covariates. The fit indices of the measurement model were good, CFI=0.973; TLI=0.965, RMSEA=0.047, 95% CI [0.032, 0.061], SRMR=0.042 (see Table S4 in the online supplement). As mentioned, the latent variable of traditional collective action was composed of three indicators (one single item and two 2-item parcels; e.g., Bandalos, 2002).

The fit of the sequential mediation model was acceptable, CFI=0.949; TLI=0.930, RMSEA=0.063, 95% CI [0.050, 0.075], SRMR=0.049. Table 5 reports the estimates for direct and indirect effects and the CIs of the model. Significant direct links are also shown in Fig. 2. High (vs. low) relative deprivation predicted higher resentment (supporting Hypothesis 1), which was related to stronger moral

convictions about acting (supporting Hypothesis 2). Relative deprivation affected moral conviction through resentment (supporting Hypothesis 3). Moral conviction was significantly related to traditional collective action and small acts in the workplace, supporting Hypotheses 4a-4b. Resentment was directly related to traditional collective action and indirectly to both collective action measures through moral conviction (Hypotheses 5a-5b).

Relative deprivation had no significant direct effect on collective action intentions; it did have an indirect effect on traditional collective action through resentment, whereas all the other simple mediation paths through resentment or moral conviction were not significant. However, supporting Hypotheses 6a-6b, the sequential mediation through

Fig. 2 Standardized coefficients for direct paths in the structural equation model for Study 2. Control variables (political orientation and alignment with feminist values) were included in the model but are not shown in the figure. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$



resentment and moral conviction was significant for both collective action measures. Finally, right-wing orientation was related to reduced levels of moral conviction and traditional collective action intentions. Alignment with feminist values was associated with lower resentment. The two covariates were not related to each other, $r = .101$, $SE = 0.063$, $p = .112$.

Supplementary Analyses

Even though the practice of item parceling is advantageous when the factor structure is unidimensional, resulting in less bias in estimates of structural parameters than solutions based on the individual items (Bandalos, 2002), such a procedure could result in an inflated fit. To be confident that the results would hold when single items were considered as indicators of latent variables, we re-ran the analysis considering single items. The fit of such a model was good, $CFI = 0.957$; $TLI = 0.945$, $RMSEA = 0.051$, 95% CI [0.039, 0.062], $SRMR = 0.048$, and the results remained unchanged, as reported in Table S5 in the online supplement.

We also estimated the main model without including covariates (Sturman et al., 2022). The fit was good, $CFI = 0.963$; $TLI = 0.949$, $RMSEA = 0.060$, 95% CI [0.046, 0.075], $SRMR = 0.042$, and the pattern of effects did not change (see Table S6 in the online supplement). Finally, considering that a subsample of participants (university students, job seekers, and housewives; $n = 106$) might not have had any work experience, we tested a model including the employment status (1 = non-worker, 2 = worker) as a covariate. The fit of the sequential mediation model remained acceptable, $CFI = 0.933$; $TLI = 0.907$, $RMSEA = 0.070$, 95% CI [0.058, 0.082], $SRMR = 0.048$. As shown in Table S7 in the online supplement, being a worker was associated with lower intentions to engage in small acts in the workplace. No other associations between employment status and the main model variables were significant. The pattern of direct and indirect effects remained unchanged, with the exception

of the direct link between resentment and traditional collective action, which became non-significant ($p = .067$).

Discussion

The results from Study 2 corroborated those of Study 1, supporting the prediction that experiencing relative deprivation may strategically motivate women to fight against gender inequalities. Being exposed to a report concerning the occurrence of high (vs. low) gender inequality in the workplace increased women's resentment, their conviction that acting against gender inequality is of moral importance, and their willingness to act to promote more equality in the workplace through planned and more informal and spontaneous behaviors. The findings showed sequential mediation through resentment and moral conviction: Namely, relative deprivation seems to foster collective action as it boosts resentment, which leads women to attach moral values to action for gender equality.

The findings also supported that right-wing political orientation predicted lower moral conviction and lower intentions to engage in traditional collective action (but not small acts). Alignment with feminist values was associated with lower resentment of gender inequalities and was unrelated to collective action intentions in the main model. Given that such variables were positively associated at the bivariate level, we did not consider this finding problematic as it is likely due to the partialling out of the other measures.

General Discussion

This research aimed to deepen the understanding of the factors that might motivate women to engage in collective action for gender equality. To this end, in two studies, we tested whether women's experience of relative deprivation, intended as the feeling that women suffer unjust disadvantages in the workplace compared to men, was associated with a greater willingness to act to challenge such

inequalities, either through politically-planned actions (e.g., participation in demonstrations) or more informal and spontaneous behaviors in everyday interactions (e.g., discussions with colleagues). We also analyzed whether the relationship between relative deprivation and collective action intentions was sequentially mediated by increased resentment and moral convictions about acting for gender equality.

As expected, relative deprivation was associated with stronger resentment, moral conviction, and intentions to engage in collective action. The findings also supported the hypothesized mediational paths and were consistent with respect to traditional collective action and small acts in the workplace. As the only exception, relative deprivation maintained direct links with traditional collective action in Study 1, whereas the effects of relative deprivation on the two forms of action were totally mediated in Study 2.

Altogether, these findings highlight that a critical determinant of women's willingness to promote gender equality is their recognition that women suffer from unjust disadvantages in the work domain, which in turn triggers resentment and moral conviction about acting. Experiencing relative deprivation not only drives women's engagement in planned actions but motivates them to act every time they see the opportunity to contrast gender discrimination and promote equality in the workplace.

These results align with previous theorization on relative deprivation (Smith et al., 2012), as they demonstrate that, even within the realm of gender inequalities, perceiving that an ingroup is unfairly disadvantaged compared to an outgroup fosters negative emotions and actions aimed to redress the unjust situation. They also add to the literature on collective action (Agostini & van Zomeren, 2021). First, these findings suggest possible specificities of collective action for gender equality. In particular, resentment seems less related to collective action intentions (even at the bivariate level) than can be expected based on what is generally found in other domains (Smith et al., 2012), possibly because of feminine norms that inhibit anger-related emotions (Mahalik et al., 2005). However, these findings highlight that resentment is related to action to the extent that it fuels moral conviction. Second, this research underlines how examining moral conviction about acting for a certain goal rather than— or in addition to— moral conviction attached to a given issue (Agostini & van Zomeren, 2021) can contribute to the understanding of how injustice appraisals and emotions can translate into action. Third, these studies align with scholars' interest in different forms of collective action (e.g., Stroebe et al., 2019; Theocharis & van Deth, 2018). While participants reported greater intentions to engage in small acts than in traditional collective action, experiencing relative deprivation has similar relationships with both forms of action.

Finally, it is important to reflect on the specificities of the cultural context in which this research was conducted. In Italy, work-related gender inequalities are marked (EIGE, 2023), and their recognition can be hindered by the still widespread ideologies that support male privilege (Ostuni et al., 2022). While in recent years, there has been a resurgence of feminist mobilization on issues such as gender-based violence or the media representation of women's bodies (Bonu Rosenkranz & della Porta, 2024; Malagrecia, 2006), the issue of workplace inequality has been less prominent in the political and social debate (e.g., Alonso et al., 2023; Blasi, 2019). For these reasons, one might argue that Italian women are less aware of gender inequalities or consider them more legitimate and grounded than women from other, more gender-equal countries.

On the one hand, such a consideration underlines how, in Italy, making women and men aware of gender inequalities and their inherent injustice is fundamental in order to nurture emotions and moral convictions that can translate into formal and informal action against gender discrimination. On the other hand, research has pointed out cultural differences in people's tendency to engage in collective action as well as in the determinants of such actions (Fischer et al., 2017; Hu et al., 2015). Besta et al., (2024) cross-cultural findings suggest that in societies where gender equality has already been achieved to some extent, engagement in actions for gender equality seems to be lower. Thus, more evidence is needed to examine whether the pattern of results observed in this research will be replicated in other countries and to examine possible variations as a function of factors such as countries' level of gender inequalities, the rooting and strength of feminist movements against work inequalities, and other cultural and ideological differences.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The present study has some limitations. First, Study 1 only provided correlational evidence on the associations between the variables of interest. Even though Study 2 allowed us to establish the causal effect of experimentally-induced relative deprivation on resentment, moral conviction, and collective action intentions, future studies should provide further experimental tests of the supposed sequential pattern of relationships. Moreover, it would be important to establish whether the effects of relative deprivation observed in Study 2 can persist beyond the immediate experimental session.

A possible weakness of this research concerns the experimental manipulation of relative deprivation in Study 2, which consisted of exposing women to information about the (high or low) extent to which women are worse off than men in the workplace. To ensure that this manipulation

made women experience relative deprivation as expected, we measured women's perception of the described gender differences as unfair. This procedure aligns with conceptualizations of relative deprivation that see the cognitive appraisal of a disadvantage and (in)justice considerations as inextricably intertwined (Smith & Pettigrew, 2015; Smith et al., 2012). However, we acknowledge that measuring perceived relative deprivation (as a result of manipulated relative deprivation) using the same measure of Study 1 would have ensured better comparability between the two studies.

Relatedly, one might say that Study 2's experimental manipulation did not entirely capture the notion that relative deprivation arises from the mismatch between one's beliefs about the ingroup's deservingness and its current situation (Smith et al., 2012). As Smith and Pettigrew (2015; see also Feather et al., 2015) noted, deservingness—despite its central role and connection to justice-related emotions—has received scant attention within relative deprivation research. Thus, operationalizing—and measuring—relative deprivation with a better focus on deservingness could extend the knowledge of how relative deprivation affects collective action.

The additional analyses conducted to compare the subsamples of non-worker and worker women did not reveal substantial differences in the associations between the model variables in either study. Nevertheless, to gain a more nuanced understanding of how feelings of relative deprivation arise and relate to action intentions, future research should focus on workers' experiences and collect information about their job status and position or the work context (e.g., the organizational culture or the number of women employed in the organization). For instance, given that gender inequalities are greater for higher-status positions and in male-dominated fields (e.g., Gomis et al., 2023; Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2024), such factors are very likely to influence women's perception of relative deprivation and decisions to act for gender equality.

Since we were interested in the correlates of women's experience of relative deprivation at the category level, we assumed a binary conception of gender (Morgenroth & Ryan, 2021). We are aware that in recent years, views of gender have started to change, even though the notion of gender fluidity in Italy is still less widespread than in other Western countries (Scandurra et al., 2021). Thus, future studies should adopt a more fluid conception of gender. Moreover, taking an intersectional approach (e.g., Parent et al., 2013) and considering how gender intersects with other social identities could enhance our understanding of people's reactions to societal inequalities.

While we focused on intergender comparisons, we recognize that Study 2's experimental manipulation also implied temporal comparison as women were briefly reminded that

for a long time, men have been the majority of workers in sectors like information and communication technology. Intergroup and temporal comparisons are likely to be deeply intertwined when thinking about gender inequalities, given their historical roots (Burkett & Brunell, 2024; Hansen et al., 2015). Nevertheless, future studies should pay attention to distinguishing between intergender and temporal comparisons more sharply. They might also incorporate different types of temporal comparisons and look in more detail at how women's beliefs about temporal changes in women's conditions influence their reactions to gender inequality appraisals (De la Sablonnière et al., 2009). For instance, if a woman thinks that the gender gap was definitely bigger for her mother's generation, she can feel less resentful for women's current situation than a woman who focuses on the slowness with which the gender gaps are closing. Moreover, there is some evidence that women's hope for improvement of gender equity in the future is related to acceptance of current social and economic gender disparities (Owuamalam et al., 2021).

As explained before, given the goals of this research, we did not consider other key predictors of collective action—concerning social identity and efficacy beliefs—whose role has been well documented in previous research (Agostini & van Zomeren, 2021; Grant et al., 2015). Including these factors in future studies might provide a more complete picture of the motivators of women's collective action for gender equality. In particular, building on Mikołajczak et al.'s (2022) approach, it would be interesting to examine the interplay between relative deprivation and identification with different subgroups of women in predicting different forms of mobilization for gender equality. Moreover, future studies could shed light on women's beliefs about the efficacy of organized and informal types of collective action. In order to deepen the role of moral conviction about acting, research might also include the construct of belief in gender collectivism, which captures the belief that women should work together to achieve goals (Liss et al., 2004). This would allow the integration of a collective dimension in the measure of moral conviction.

Although collective action has been traditionally conceptualized and measured in terms of behavioral intentions, research has generally pointed out a distance between intentions and behaviors (e.g., Conner & Norman, 2022). It would, therefore, be important to employ measures that capture concrete behaviors: For instance, respondents could be asked to report the frequency of actions they actually performed or to engage in concrete actions (e.g., writing an email to solicit the government's attention or indicate the amount of money they are willing to donate to a related cause). While one can reasonably expect a lower adherence to such actions compared to self-report intentions to act,

including such measurements would enrich our understanding of collective actions' antecedents while overcoming the methodological limits of self-report measures.

Finally, gender inequalities are by no means limited to the work domain (e.g., Ciaffoni et al., 2023, 2025), and considering traditional collective action and small acts against them would be important to capture women's reactions to disadvantages in different contexts. For instance, thinking of gender imbalance in roles and duties within close relationships, engaging in informal and context-related acts is perhaps more relevant and appropriate than engaging in more formal action. The latter can instead be critical in obtaining legislative interventions to prevent and punish violence against women. At the same time, keeping the attention on this issue high with organized actions might strengthen people's readiness to intervene in everyday contexts to help victims.

Practice Implications

At the practical level, this research suggests that to plan interventions for gender equality in the work domain, one cannot disregard that women must, in the first place, recognize their unjustly disadvantaged condition compared to men. Even though international agencies like EIGE or ILO regularly provide data on the gender gaps in employment, career, or wage, and the lower percentages of women in decision-making positions are clearly evident, women—and men—are often little aware of such unjust discrepancies or even consider them as normal and justified (Jost & Kay, 2005; Radke et al., 2016).

Of course, we do not mean that the onus of changing the gender structure relies on women. Even though men are less ready than women to detect gender inequalities (García-González et al., 2019), they can efficaciously act in solidarity with women. For instance, men are likely to promote gender equality initiatives when they recognize women's unjust disadvantage and overcome their fear of losing advantages (e.g., Mazzuca et al., 2022) or gender equality is framed as an issue that regards both genders (Subašić et al., 2018).

While appraisal of inequalities passes through different processes in men (e.g., Iyer & Ryan, 2009; Radke et al., 2018), both women and men should be sensitized and encouraged to detect workplace situations and practices where women are discriminated against. This implies changing individuals' perceptions and beliefs about the acceptability of those situations and raising their awareness about the adverse consequences of tolerating discrimination. The importance of involving both women and men in promoting equality aligns with evidence that gender-based diversity initiatives specifically targeted toward women within

organizations often have unintended negative consequences (Cundiff et al., 2018; Iyer, 2022).

Notably, engaging in both forms of action considered in this research is likely to have positive repercussions for women as well as for organizations and society at large. For instance, intervening against discrimination or discussing gender inequality in the workplace can not only alleviate the negative feelings of targeted women but also educate others on how to promote more equal work settings and contribute to creating a supportive, inclusive and identity-safe organizational climate (e.g., Dray & Sabat, 2022; Shelton & Stewart, 2004). Participating in traditional collective action can empower individuals and, therefore, sustain future mobilizations (Carvacho et al., 2023). Ultimately, through such organized forms of collective action, it is possible to press for legislative and organisational changes, which are crucial to raising awareness of institutional support for gender equality and achieving more gender equality in the workplace.

Conclusion

Despite feminist efforts, gender inequalities in the work domain remain a major issue worldwide, limiting women's access to and control over resources (EIGE, 2023). In two studies, we examined women's awareness of existing gender inequalities through the theoretical lens of relative deprivation theory and highlighted that recognizing women's unjust disadvantages can translate into collective action for gender equality if it fosters resentment and increases moral conviction about acting. The same processes fuel both intentions to engage in politically planned collective actions and actions that women can undertake more often in everyday contexts. Overall, these findings suggest that raising women's awareness of gender inequalities can give rise to processes that lead them to advocate for social change. It is a chain of political views, emotions, and shared cognition that can lead women to fight for a more equal world.

Supplementary Information The online version contains supplementary material available at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-025-01573-7>.

Author Contributions All authors contributed to the studies' conception and design. Material preparation, data collection, and analysis were performed by the first and second authors. The first draft of the manuscript was written by the first author, and all authors commented on previous versions of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Funding Open access funding provided by Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna within the CRUI-CARE Agreement. This work was supported by Funds from the European Union Next Generation EU and the Italian Ministry of University and Research,

Prin 2022 [2022BXT34T], to the fourth author.

Data Availability The data that support the findings of this study are available on the Open Science Framework. https://osf.io/wbtym/?view_only=51545215db064429b94babc88a3396c7

Declarations

Ethical Approval Ethical approval for these studies was received from the Bioethical Committee of the University of Bologna. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants involved in the study.

Competing Interests The authors have no financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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