

# [Main ideas of neoliberal ideology](https://assignbuster.com/main-ideas-of-neoliberal-ideology/)

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## Neoliberal ideology as anchored in reality

The structural work of ideology has been a contested site of debate in the social sciences. Scholars and critics, inspired directly or indirectly by the Marxist tradition, often herald ideology as a moralizing discourse intended to conceal material interests. As such, the structure of social life and its embodied institutions is divided along the lines of an economic base and ideological superstructure. The base is comprised of those institutions that determine the chances and circumstances of one’s material reproduction, whereas the ideological superstructure is largely embodied by the state and cultural institutions whose mystifying and moralized discourse acts to conceal the inequality at the heart of the economic base. Laina Bay-Cheng’s work on how socioeconomic resources and future prospects affect young women’s investment and power in heterosexual romantic relationships provides the basis for an interwoven theoretical and empirical critique of this negative view of ideology. Taking neoliberal rhetoric as ideology, Bay-Cheng’s work illuminates the ways in which the state and cultural institutions (art, media etc.) are active agents that propel us to act according to individual interest. During the first part of her lecture at Bennington College on the 22nd September, Bay-Cheng described the intellectual creed of her work as: “ Want[ing] to change the conditions that act upon girls and that compel them to act.” Her view of neoliberal ideological rhetoric is one that is anchored on the conditions of the economic base, a. k. a. the forces that act upon girls, but at the same time recognizing that they call for a positive project that defies categorization as mere mystification or negative freedom.

Bay-Cheng’s theoretical work on the agency line goes a long way in demonstrating how neoliberalism is constructed as a utopian project and how it shapes notions of sexual agency tailored to the understanding of an ideal neoliberal subject. She describes the neoliberal subject’s rationality according their psychological dispositions: “ the prioritization of self-interest and self-service; entitlement to autonomous choice and striving; personal responsibility for all consequences (Bay-Cheng, 2015).” Even though in the last paragraph of the Agency Line, she asserts that: “ oppression is disguised and thereby enabled by casting girls’ negative sex-related experiences as manifestations of personal deficits and matters of personal responsibility (Bay-Cheng, 2015),” this does not contradict her view of neoliberal ideology as anchored in reality rather than mystification. Although neoliberal rhetoric fundamentally works to obfuscate the material and misogynistic forces acting upon young women, they promote a certain way of being (a neoliberal ontology) that has deep psychological implications to the point where “ gate keeping and self-blame are equated to agency.” Further to the point, later in the lecture Bay-Cheng presented how young poor women viewed undesired sex as a means to meet their “ thick desires”, i. e. their material needs. To Bay-Cheng, this is not lack of agency, but rather what agency looks like under material deprivation.

Since one of the most basic tenants of neoliberalism is competition, translated into the individual psyche as unfettered free will, there is an inevitable configuration of winners and losers. Neoliberal rhetoric in turn legitimates the winners according to their individual choices and blames the losers according to the same meritocratic metric. I would argue that the framework of expulsions from the formal economy helps us understand the work of gender norms in reinforcing the neoliberal subject. I see the utopic neoliberal society as a society of worthy individuals whose domination over large sections of the populace is legitimated as a result of their economic position seen as achieved from personal choices. The work of gender, race, ethnicity, migrant status, disability etc. under neoliberalism is reconfigured to mask its ultimate and relentless assault on collective bonds. By configuring people as either winners or losers the status quo assures true control and political stagnation. Bay-Cheng’s own work on the agency line recognizes an axis of winners and losers; the argument that the Trump travel ban will adversely effect so many software engineers that contribute significantly to the American economy promotes the notion of a worthy kind of migrant worker; and racialized groups in the United States are actively discriminated against according to their embrace of the posture of whiteness, which in many regards is the posture of the capitalist workplace. This is effectively how neoliberal policies and ideological rhetoric have subverted the political movements of many identity groups leading to a confused left on identity politics. Whereas prior to the neoliberal turn, the identity rubrics of gender, sexuality, and race where used by the state to discipline populations into rigid molds and as such justify the hierarchy written into the division of labor, nowadays the molds are far less rigid, in fact our identities are multiple, but always seen through a lens of worthiness ultimately inscribed in one’s economic position.