"So you're just a normal person. Just like me?"

Difference evasion in managing an advantaged identity and legitimising inequality

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Publication date
2025

Chapter 1

General Introduction

Liberal societies claim to value equality and diversity, yet they are increasingly unequal and resistant to difference. In Wit is ook een kleur (2016), Dutch filmmaker Sunny Bergman explores this duality by examining why liberal white Dutch people react strongly to discussions about race and how this relates to their own whiteness. By showing children from liberal backgrounds characters who differed only in skin colour, she found they were three times more likely to perceive a white character as the 'boss' and a black character as the 'naughtiest'. Her findings echo research showing that by age five, children recognise group-based inequalities (Zhang et al., 2024), which often trickle down into prejudices despite their parents' attempts to "not see" race (Cox et al., 2022). Indeed, group differences take root in language early on through social categories (J. Turner, 1987), defining group belonging and shaping people's own social identity (Oakes, 2001). As navigating social categories invites individuals to situate themselves in relation to their group's position (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), employing them allows those advantaged to pinpoint inequality, as well as to either legitimise or question their place within it. While white people in Bergman's documentary often rejected racial categories on the grounds that they may legitimise inequality, this prevented them in turn from situating themselves in relation to their whiteness—preserving a claim to speak from an unbiased, neutral position instead of coming to terms with it. This dissertation addresses this crossroads by examining how advantaged group members construe social categories as they manage their social identity, shaping whether they legitimise or question inequality.

Bergman's documentary illustrates how white people often reject racial categories to maintain a sense of neutrality. In doing so, it reflects a broader ideological framework within liberal societies—where universalism and individuals are often prioritised over group distinctions. By enshrining principles of universal formal equality among individuals—such as those in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—societies, especially after WWII, sought to diminish the prominence of group-based distinctions that were deemed the cause of oppression, such as the Holocaust itself. Even class-based distinctions, long central to Western social structures, became increasingly reframed as relics of outdated political frameworks over the last century (Piketty, 2014)—while remaining fully operative in everyday life and fueling inequality in turn (Kraus et al., 2017). With history itself declared at an 'end', the very collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall were heralded as the triumph of liberal democracy (Fukuyama, 2012). In the wake of efforts to equalise individuals, the use of social categories and inequality became increasingly conflated.

These equalising efforts coincide with widening inequalities in Western Europe and in relation to societies in the global South. While some minoritised groups[1] in Western Europe have gained legal status comparable to those historically advantaged—for instance, through the abolition of racial segregation, the depathologisation of homosexuality, and same-sex marriage—inequality between the top 1% and the bottom 50% has increased 2.55-fold times since 1980 (Chancel et al., 2022). Public wealth, which accounted for nearly 60% of national income in 1970, fell to near zero or even negative in some Western European countries by 2020 (e.g., UK: -106%) (Chancel et al., 2022). At the same time, the inequality between the global North and the global South has increased since the 1960s, now approaching early 20th-century levels—at the height of Western imperialism (Chancel et al., 2022; Hickel, 2018).

1 The terms minoritised and disadvantaged are interchangeably employed in this dissertation.

While these widening inequalities may at first appear at odds with the liberal ideal of individual equality, this dissertation argues that downplaying social categories has not prevented inequality but instead reinforced it (Duyvendak, 2022; Whyte, 2019).

The Netherlands provides a paradigmatic case for examining how advantaged group members construe social categories as they manage their social identity in liberal, increasingly unequal societies. While the country is often praised for its commitment to individual freedoms—being the first to legalise same-sex marriage, for instance—economic inequalities have widened over the past decades. Indeed, since the late 1970s, income inequality has grown markedly, with the bottom decile experiencing a 19% decline in real income by 2011, while the top decile saw a net gain of 26%. Wealth inequality has also intensified, with the top 10% of households expanding their share of total wealth from approximately 40% in the 1980s to 60% in recent years, while the bottom half has remained effectively asset-poor (Salverda, 2014). This reflects the broader trend described in Western European societies as well as in relation to societies in the global South (Chancel et al., 2022; Hickel et al., 2021). Rising economic inequality has been linked to anomy and increased support for authoritarian leadership (Sprong et al., 2019), and the Netherlands is indeed currently governed by a right-wing cabinet led by the far right (Moses, 2024) as well as other European countries.

To address this intersection of equalising efforts and widening inequalities, this dissertation examines two intergroup settings where equalising outlooks have taken deep root in the Netherlands: the ethnic-racial setting, on the one hand, and the sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) setting, on the other hand. By answering how advantaged group members construe social categories as they manage their social identity, I explore whether downplaying social categories prevents people from developing structural understandings of inequality and, in turn, enables those advantaged to blur their dominance—broadening the scope of the observations featured by Bergman's documentary on liberal, white Dutch people.

Social Categories, Difference, and Inequality

European societies downplay ethnic-racial categories as meaningful concepts till today (Simon, 2017). Arguably, this reluctance to ethnic-racial categorisation reflects an attempt to overcome ethnonationalism, the Holocaust, and the very European colonial history (Juang et al., 2021). Claiming the achievement of individuals' equality once equalising laws are passed (e.g., human rights, same-sex marriage) may indeed translate into the blurring of social categories that have been used to discriminate against. In ethnic-racial and SOGI contexts, however, research suggests that members of advantaged groups may be especially prone to adopting such stances. In blurring social categories, advantaged group members may dispel the threat of being seen as part of advantaged groups and, thereby, from being associated with benefiting from group-based perks (Knowles et al., 2014; Rios, 2022). However, whether and how the blurring of social categories at the intergroup level takes root in ingroup processes among members of advantaged groups—how they manage their advantage—has received scant empirical attention.

At the intergroup level, research suggests that equalising outlooks can reflect, on the one hand, in downplaying the role of social categories in shaping people's lives (difference evasion, e.g., "I don't see colour/sexual orientation and gender identity, I see people") (Knowles et al., 2009; Smith & Shin, 2014). On the other hand, equalising outlooks can reflect in downplaying inequality itself by invoking existing formal equality among individuals (inequality evasion, e.g., "Black/LGBTQ people are not disadvantaged anymore") (Brown et al., 2013; Brownfield et al., 2018). Modern forms of prejudice against ethnic-racial and SOGI minoritised groups rely on this very blurring of social categories and, in turn, the obscuring of associated positions of advantage and disadvantage. Examples include casting minoritised groups' identity claims as detrimental to inclusion (Bilali, 2014; Morrison & Morrison, 2011), framing them as seeking preferential treatment (Salvati et al., 2023), and even assuming they enjoy above-average wealth, as in the 'gay affluence' myth – the tendency to inaccurately assume that LGTBQ people earn

a higher income than cisheterosexual people (Bettinsoli et al., 2022). Meanwhile, ethnic-racial and SOGI inequalities remain pervasive in contexts that claim to uphold individual equality—including the Netherlands (Baalbergen & Jaspers, 2023; Buser et al., 2018; Drydakis, 2022; Geijtenbeek & Plug, 2018; OECD, 2020; Thijssen et al., 2021; van Elk et al., 2019). As such, downplaying social categories has enabled new ways of managing inequality rather than prevented it.

This raises my first specific research question: How do members of advantaged groups navigate difference and inequality in liberal, increasingly unequal contexts? (SQ1) Research indicates that those who evade difference (e.g., "I don't see colour, I see people"), even when acknowledging inequality (e.g., "Black people are disadvantaged because of racism"), may still disengage from challenging it—resembling patterns observed among those who outright deny inequality. In contrast, only those who acknowledged both difference and inequality exhibited support for challenging inequality (Mekawi et al., 2020). Drawing on self-categorisation theory (Oakes, 2001; J. Turner, 1987), this dissertation posits that acknowledging difference may prompt individuals to construe themselves and others as members of social groups. When advantaged group members acknowledge both difference and inequality, thus, they may be more likely to attribute inequality between people to external, relatively stable constraints (e.g., group-based historical advantage) rather than to internal characteristics such as inherent deservingness, merit, or talent (Vasilyeva & Lombrozo, 2020). While ethnic-racial and SOGI evasion have been documented (Awad & Jackson, 2016; Brownfield et al., 2018; Mekawi et al., 2020; Smith & Shin, 2014), the interplay between evading difference and inequality, and how this relates to distinct strategies to managing an advantaged identity, remains empirically unexamined.

Chapters 2 and 3 apply these insights to both ethnic-racial and SOGI contexts, adopting a person-centred approach that combines qualitative interviews with quantitative surveys. A person-centred approach

employs subgroups of individuals as the unit of analysis (e.g., profiles based on multiple constructs) (Osborne & Sibley, 2017). In doing so, these chapters examine whether distinguishing between advantaged individuals who endorse high versus low levels of difference evasion—while exhibiting similarly low levels of inequality evasion, for instance—reveals key variations in how they relate to their group-based advantage. In turn, this distinction may help explain whether and how they are more prone to legitimising or questioning inequality.

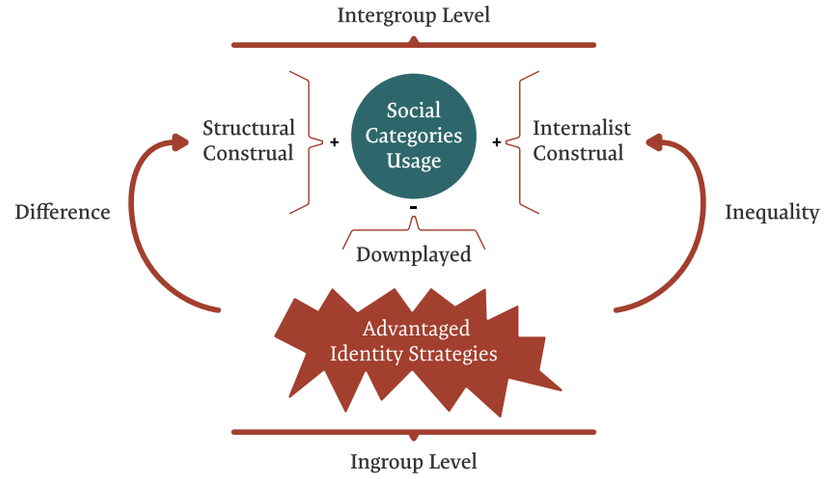
Social categories differentiate groups by evoking explanations for their differences (Oakes, 2001; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). Accordingly, the ways advantaged individuals engage with these categories may reflect how they manage their own group's standing as well as how they address inequality. Blatant prejudice, on the one hand, relies on an internalist view of social categories that attributes category members' characteristics (e.g., white people as advantaged or black people as disadvantaged) to traits internal to the category itself (e.g., "Some groups must be at the top and others at the bottom" as inherent deservingness to rule over others, or "Anyone who is willing to work hard has a good chance of succeeding" as meritocratic beliefs) (Cimpian & Salomon, 2014; Ho et al., 2015; McCoy & Major, 2007). Applied to inequality, this internalist view thus often serves to legitimise it (Hussak & Cimpian, 2015). Internalist views of social categories have thus provided the grounds for conflating their use with inequality, mirroring the patterns observed among individuals who evade both difference and inequality (Mekawi et al., 2020). In contrast, those who evade difference while acknowledging inequality may rely on downplaying social categories altogether rather than wielding them to justify inequality—although still disengaging from challenging it.

Social categories, however, can also be understood from a structural perspective. Structural views of social categories emphasise external and relatively stable constraints (e.g., historical oppression or current institutional discrimination) that shape category members' characteristics.

Research has shown that framing inequality through a structural view increased the likelihood that both children and adults rectify inequality and endorse compensatory measures rather than perpetuating it (Vasil et al., 2024). As such, structural views of social categories align with the profile of individuals who acknowledge both difference and inequality, as they were inclined to challenge inequality by supporting measures aimed at external, relatively stable constraints underpinning racial inequality (Mekawi et al., 2020).

Given that these construals—whether internalist, downplayed, or structural—represent different ways of reasoning about the relationship between social category members and their context (i.e., social reasoning), the perspective adopted may meaningfully reflect how advantaged individuals manage their own group's standing. While research has documented how distinct views of social categories impact the lives of minoritised group members (Phalet & Baysu, 2020), how they relate to advantaged group members' identity strategies remains, however, largely underexplored (Amemiya et al., 2023). For an overview of these relationships, see Figure 1.

Figure 1: Conceptual Map of the Dissertation



Note. The figure illustrates the relationship between social categories and advantaged identity strategies. The model embeds the ingroup level (bottom) within the intergroup level (top), emphasising how social categories shift between structural, downplaying, and internalist perspectives as construals of intergroup difference and inequality vary. "+" and "–" signs indicate positive and negative relationships regarding social categories usage, respectively.

Social Categories and Advantaged Identity Strategies

Building on this, my second specific research question asks: How do members of advantaged groups manage their standing? (SQ2) Prior research shows that group status shapes attitudes toward inequality. In particular, holding an advantaged position can motivate people to maintain it. For instance, children aged 3 to 8 who were assigned to an advantaged group (i.e., receiving more resources) were less likely to perceive the inequality as unfair and less inclined to rectify it compared to those assigned to a disadvantaged group (Rizzo & Killen, 2020). As attaining positive self-esteem is a fundamental task of the self—particularly in Western contexts (Heine et al., 1999; Tajfel & Turner, 1979)—those in advantaged positions may maintain their positive self-esteem by reinforcing ingroup identification and strengthening categorisation,

both symbolically (i.e., differentiation) and materially (i.e., inequality). Accordingly, heightened identification with an advantaged identity and strengthened categorisation, in the social-psychological tradition, have often been linked to increasing inequality (Billig, 1985; Oakes, 2001; Park & Judd, 2005). This notion, historically rooted in analyses of fascism in the first half of the 20th century (Adorno et al., 1950), in turn equates tolerance and the absence of prejudice with decreasing identification and deflecting categorisation. However, this approach has drawn criticism for obscuring how inequality may be perpetuated through equalising outlooks—particularly those that downplay categorisation (Hopkins et al., 1997).

Recent work has thus broadened the scope of how advantaged groups manage their standing to preserve positive self-esteem in liberal contexts (Goren & Plaut, 2012; Knowles et al., 2014; Leach et al., 2001; Shuman et al., 2024). In the Netherlands and other liberal societies—where procedural justice and equality before the law are emphasised—social standing is often framed as a reflection of effort and talent, both prescriptively and descriptively (e.g., meritocratic beliefs) (McCoy & Major, 2007). Because meritocratic beliefs attribute inequality to internal traits rather than structural factors, advantaged group members confronting intergroup inequality may experience a threat of being perceived as structurally advantaged beneficiaries of non-meritocratic perks (Knowles et al., 2014). To manage this threat, some may reinforce their ingroup identification to defend their standing, strengthening categorisation through internalist perspectives, as the social-psychological tradition has suggested. Others, however, may distance themselves from their advantaged identity by emphasising their individuality instead, thereby reducing the salience of social categories—echoing the pattern portrayed by Bergman's documentary on liberal white Dutch people (Shuman et al., 2024). Whether by strengthening or weakening their advantaged identification, both strategies may ultimately serve to leave group-based inequality intact at best—and to exacerbate it at worst.

Those who reject meritocratic beliefs, in contrast, may perceive inequality as a reputational threat to their advantaged group (Knowles et al., 2014). In dispelling this threat, they may favour structural views of social categories—over both internalist ones or downplaying their relevance. As structural views cite external, relatively stable constraints that shape category members' features (e.g., group-based historical advantage) (Vasil et al., 2024; Vasilyeva & Lombrozo, 2020), beholders may be prompted to acknowledge their own advantaged position in turn (Goren & Plaut, 2012). In examining whether and how equalising outlooks takes root in advantaged group members' identity processes, thus, this dissertation extends on Bergman's documentary aiming to better understand how advantaged group members can instead question inequality as they manage their social identity.

Existing literature on advantaged identity strategies largely relies on quantitative, cross-sectional research, focusing on settler colonial contexts (e.g., U.S.) and ethnic-racial intergroup relations (Goren & Plaut, 2012; Shuman et al., 2024). Addressing these limitations, this dissertation employs both qualitative (i.e., interviews) (Chapters 2 and 3) and quantitative methods (i.e., surveys) (Chapters 2, 3, and 4). Also, it incorporates cross-sectional (Chapters 2 and 3) and experimental approaches (Chapter 4) by examining a different context: the Netherlands, a European former colonial empire. Moreover, it broadens the scope of advantaged identity strategies beyond ethnic-racial intergroup relations to examine the SOGI setting—all domains where equalising outlooks have taken deep root.

Chapters 2 and 3 examine how white and cisheterosexual Dutch people manage their advantaged social identity, respectively. Building on these findings, Chapter 4 tests the causal relationship between inequality framings (high vs. low vs. control) and difference evasion. It further examines how individual differences (e.g., political orientation, distancing from cisgender status by stating "I'm just a man, not a so-called cisman") shape responses to inequality framings, as well as its

downstream effects on policy preferences. To date, no research has systematically examined how difference and inequality evasion take root in advantaged group members' identity processes, implying views of social categories with ideologically divergent implications. Identifying their ideological correlates is thus key to determining whether such divergent views of social categories stem from these foundations.

Social Categories Shifting Between the Legitimisation and Questioning of Inequality

This leads to my third and last specific research question: How do advantaged group members legitimise or question inequality? (SQ3) As suggested above, some individuals who evade difference may still acknowledge inequality. However, as mentioned, previous work suggests that they may be just as reluctant to challenge inequality as those who outright deny its existence (Mekawi et al., 2020). Experimental evidence further supports this idea. For instance, white antiegalitarian people in the U.S. strategically evaded difference and endorsed equal treatment rhetoric, which in turn served to justify opposition to structural policies (Chow & Knowles, 2016; Knowles et al., 2009). Mirroring structural views of social categories, structural policies target external, stable factors that sustain group-based inequality, such as institutional practices embedded in school curricula, healthcare systems, and labour markets (Chater & Loewenstein, 2023).

Structural views of social categories are often institutionally prevented by national legislation as well. For instance, anti-discrimination policies in Western European countries often prohibit the use of group categories in decision-making—by forbidding the registration of SOGI or ethnic-racial identity (European Commission, 2017, 2023). As a result, whether a legal measure disadvantages a minoritised group can be dismissed under the pretense of neutrality (i.e., non-discrimination) (Spade, 2015). In turn, the potential of social categories to highlight external, stable factors that uphold inequality instead has been historically obfuscated (Vasilyeva & Lombrozo, 2020). While employing social categories

through an internalist view legitimises inequality, downplaying them may prevent people from developing structural views of inequality instead and allow some to perpetuate it in the name of justice.

Liberal contexts, where individual equality is praised, are thus unlikely to prompt advantaged group members to cultivate self-esteem by reinforcing their ingroup identification—as the social-psychological tradition once suggested. As liberal contexts are burgeoningly unequal, examining whether members of advantaged groups contribute to widening inequalities by distancing themselves from their advantage thus warrants further inquiry. Research suggests that those who do so are also prone to endorsing strong meritocratic beliefs (Knowles et al., 2014; Shuman et al., 2024). By diluting group-based, structural inequality into individuals' trajectories based on merit, research has shown that meritocratic portrayals of inequality lead people to perpetuate inequality (van Dijk et al., 2020; Vasil et al., 2024). While meritocratic beliefs align with liberal standards of procedural justice, as mentioned, anti-egalitarians can strategically invoke these principles to resist efforts aimed at improving the lives of minoritised groups—alleging infringements on equality before the law (Chow & Knowles, 2016). As such, holding the anti-egalitarian belief in inherent deservingness to rule over others (i.e., social dominance orientation, Ho et al., 2015) has also been associated with evading difference (Knowles et al., 2009; Worthington et al., 2008). Social dominance orientation and meritocratic beliefs represent ideological correlates of, respectively, blatant and system-justifying forms of prejudice in the social-psychological tradition (N. Kteily et al., 2012; Ledgerwood et al., 2011).

Chapters 2 and 3 thus examine whether ideologically divergent implications stem from distinct profiles of white and cisheterosexual people. They do so by operationalising beliefs in inherent deservingness to rule over others (i.e., social dominance orientation, Ho et al., 2015), and the descriptive belief in merit and talent as the basis of social standing (i.e., meritocratic beliefs, McCoy & Major, 2007). Building on this, Chapter 4 tests whether evading difference in response to inequality leads people to favour individual-level policies at the expense of structural ones. In doing so, Chapter 4 examines whether acknowledging difference instead increases support for structural, group-based policies.

Individual-level policies focus on altering perceptions and behaviours, such as awareness campaigns and anti-bias training—in contrast to structural policies targeting external, stable factors sustaining intergroup inequality (Chater & Loewenstein, 2023). Individual-level approaches have dominated behavioural public policy—despite often yielding mixed results or even backfiring. For instance, conditional cash transfers requiring low-income families to send children to school or meet health benchmarks have shown modest short-term gains, while school dropout rates and health disparities remained largely unchanged (Hall, 2008). Diversity training programmes aimed at curbing discrimination often lack empirical support and have been associated with post-treatment reactance (Dobbin & Kalev, 2018; Kalev et al., 2006). Similarly, encouraging women to combat bias through assertiveness often leads to backlash against counter-stereotypical behaviour, further entrenching gender inequality (Rudman & Glick, 2001; Rudman & Phelan, 2008). In response, calls for psychological science to adopt structural approaches have recently intensified (Chater & Loewenstein, 2023).

Successful structural approaches have included, for instance, mandating pay transparency to reduce wage gaps (Gamage et al., 2024), instituting quotas for minoritised groups on governing boards (Women's Labour Force Participation, n.d.), implementing school-to-work transition programmes that ensure equal pay to address gender inequality (Ubfal, 2022), and enacting housing mobility programmes that allow families to move to low-poverty neighbourhoods—boosting children's long-term income as a result (Chetty et al., 2016). While discussions on structural policies concerning class- and gender-based inequality still have a long way to go, their absence in relation to ethnic-racial and SOGI inequality is particularly conspicuous in social-psychological work—with a notable exception in the related yet distinct context of settler colonialism (e.g., Fryberg et al., 2024). This dissertation contributes to this shift in social-psychological research by advancing a structural approach to understanding how advantaged group members manage their position in ethnic-racial and SOGI contexts within liberal, increasingly unequal settings.

Summary and Overview

How do members of advantaged groups construe social categories as they manage their social identity, shaping whether they legitimise or question intergroup inequality? This dissertation addresses this general research question in the ethnic-racial and SOGI intergroup contexts of the Netherlands. It does so by comprehensively bridging self-categorisation theory (Oakes, 2001; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001), advantaged identity strategies (Goren & Plaut, 2012; Shuman et al., 2024), diversity ideologies (Awad & Jackson, 2016; Smith & Shin, 2014), and social reasoning research traditions (Amemiya et al., 2023; Vasilyeva & Lombrozo, 2020).

Across three empirical chapters, the general research question outlined above is broken down into the three interrelated specific research questions of:

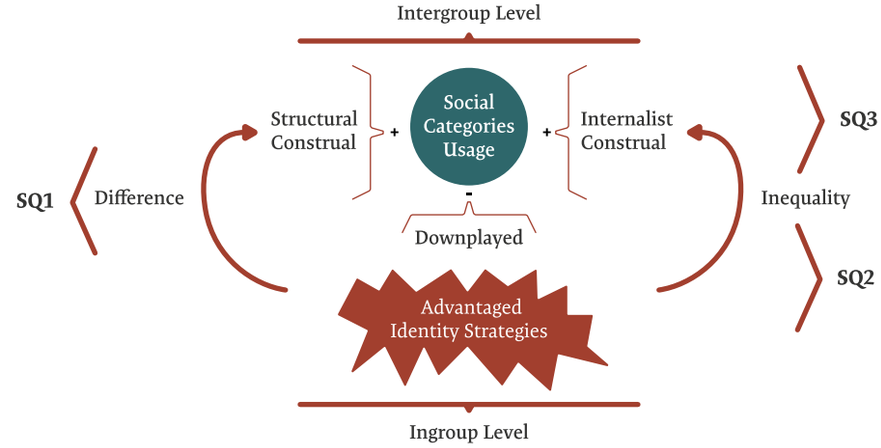
(SQ1) **How do members of advantaged groups navigate difference and inequality?**

(SQ2) **How do members of advantaged groups manage their standing?**

(SQ3) **How do members of advantaged groups legitimise or question inequality?**

For situating the specific research questions against the backdrop of the conceptual model, see Figure 2. In the next subsections, I outline the content of each of the chapters that follow.

Figure 2: Mapping Specific Research Questions onto the Conceptual Model



Note. SQ1, SQ2, and SQ3 refer to Specific Research Questions 1, 2, and 3.

Chapter 2: How White People Manage the Weight of the Past

Based on qualitative (interviews; N = 24) and quantitative (surveys; N = 591) data, this chapter examines how white Dutch people manage their ethnic-racial identity through distinct self-categorisations. Specifically, I investigated whether and how self-categorising through a structural view (i.e., identifying as wit/white to denote advantage) or downplaying self-categorisation (i.e., identifying as blank to signal inconspicuousness) is related to linking colonialism to current racial inequality.

Qualitative Study 1 explored (1) how white people managed their advantaged ethnic-racial identity and (2) whether and how they linked colonialism to current racial inequality. Drawing on research examining whiteness in the U.S. and the Netherlands (Essed & Trienekens, 2008; Frankenberg, 1993; Knowles et al., 2014; Wekker, 2016), ethnic-racial identity in Europe (Juang et al., 2021; Jugert et al., 2022), and historical linking (Selvanathan et al., 2023; Sibley et al., 2008; Starzyk & Ross, 2008), we designed a structured interview scheme to address these questions in an exploratory fashion. After conducting 24 interviews (12 left-wing people, 12 right-wing people), we developed and validated a

codebook based on Thematic Analysis guidelines to code the transcriptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic axes analysed were Ethnic-Racial Advantaged Identity Strategies and the Historical Linking of Colonialism.

Most participants exhibited a mix of the theorised advantaged identity strategies, rather than adhering strictly to a single strategy. Adopting a person-centred approach, the quantitative Studies 2a and 2b employed Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) to examine how white Dutch people combined identity strategies and clustered into distinct profiles. As no previous scales measured advantaged identity strategies, we developed new scales grounded in the notion of whiteness as a process of self-categorisation (Knowles et al., 2014; Oakes, 2001). In line with construct validation standards in social psychology (Flake et al., 2017), we provide evidence of our measures' structural and external validity in the supplementary materials for this chapter.

In Studies 2a and 2b, the emergent advantaged identity profiles were tested against theorised ideological correlates of general inequality (e.g., social dominance orientation, meritocratic beliefs) and historical linking of colonialism to current racial inequality (e.g., "Colonialism has had a lasting impact in the form of today's racism".) Additionally, these studies examined (3) whether and how advantaged identity strategies relate to ethnic-racial social category construals—namely, difference evasion (e.g., "People who focus a lot on ethnicity forget that we are all just people") and inequality evasion (e.g., "Compared to white people, Black and Muslim people have equal opportunities").

Chapter 2 elaborates on the limitations of its approach and future research directions. Finally, it concludes by discussing the theoretical and practical implications of the findings in light of the structural foundations of white ethnic-racial dominance.

Chapter 3: Cisheterosexual People in Post-Closeted Times

Based on qualitative (interviews; N = 20) and quantitative (surveys; N = 531) data, Chapter 3 builds on the framework developed in Chapter 2 and extends it to the SOGI intergroup context. Taking a person-centred approach from the outset, Chapter 3 investigates (1) how cisheterosexual people navigate difference and inequality regarding SOGI. We qualitatively and quantitatively identified profiles combining low-to-high difference evasion (e.g., "People who focus a lot on sexual orientation and gender identity forget that we are all just people") and low-to-high inequality evasion (e.g., "Compared to cisgender and heterosexual people, LGBTQ people have equal opportunities").

After conducting 20 interviews (8 left-wing, 6 centrist, 6 right-wing), we created a codebook and analysed the data following Thematic Analysis guidelines (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic axes under study were Attitudinal Repertoire on Difference and Inequality, Cisheterosexual Identity Strategies, and Countering Inequality. The quantitative Study 2 consisted of Latent Profile Analyses on two independent samples. For addressing our questions quantitatively, we developed and validated novel measures drawing on the ethnic-racial intergroup literature (i.e., racial colourblindness, Awad & Jackson, 2016), previous work on SOGI evasion (Brownfield et al., 2018; Smith & Shin, 2014), and our qualitative observations in Study 1. Following stablished standards (Rubio et al., 2003), the content validity of difference evasion and inequality evasion scales were successfully pre-validated in a Panel of Experts pilot study (N = 6). Constructs' validation and Study 2 were pre-registered. Evidence of measures' construct validity is offered in supplementary materials for this chapter.

Upon addressing how cisheterosexual people navigate difference and inequality, we addressed the question of (2) how they manage their advantaged identity. Specifically, we examined whether the resulting profiles of cisheterosexual people shed light on meaningful qualitative patterns of their advantaged identity strategies and categorically dis-

tinguished quantitative correlates. Lastly, the studies examined the question of (3) how these profiles qualitatively related to distinct appraisals of countering inequality (e.g., collective action), and categorically distinguished correlates of legitimising ideologies of inequality (i.e., modern anti-LGBTQ prejudice (Morrison & Morrison, 2003); social dominance orientation, and meritocratic beliefs.)

Lastly, Chapter 3 elaborates on the limitations of our approach and future research directions. By situating SOGI against the backdrop of burgeoning equalising efforts in liberal societies, Chapter 3 concludes by discussing the theoretical and practical implications of the findings.

Chapter 4: Inequality Framings Shape Cisheterosexual People's Construals of LGBTQ Cisheterosexual Difference and Policy Preferences to Address Inequality

Chapter 4 builds on the framework and mixed-methods findings of Chapters 2 and 3 to test whether and how inequality framings causally relate to evading difference, as well as individual versus structural policy preferences. Drawing on previous social psychology research (Klebl & Jetten, 2024; Peters et al., 2022), we successfully pre-validated our SOGI inequality manipulation and policy preferences scale in independent samples (Nmanipulation = 200; Nscale = 40). Following experimental validation standards in social psychology (Chester & Lasko, 2021), evidence of manipulation and measures' construct validity is presented in supplementary materials for this chapter.

In two preregistered, highly-powered experiments (N = 2,200), our findings show whether and how cisheterosexual people endorsed difference evasion in response to inequality framings, as well as the role of individual differences (e.g., political orientation and distancing from the cisgender category) in this relationship. Subsequently, our findings show how evading difference in response to these framings shaped cisheterosexual people's preferences for individual- versus structural-level policies. Drawing on hypothesised and exploratory findings, Chapter 4

theorises potential explanations for the results while reflecting on the strengths and limitations of its approach. From this foundation, Chapter 4 outlines future research directions and discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the findings.

Chapter 5: General Discussion

Lastly, Chapter 5 integrates insights from the nine conducted studies in this dissertation (2 interview studies, 2 survey studies, 2 survey experiments, 1 experimental pre-validation, 1 measure pre-validation, and 1 Panel of Experts). It summarises and interprets the main findings from the empirical chapters by following the three specific research questions of: (SQ1) How do members of advantaged groups navigate difference and inequality? (SQ2) How do members of advantaged groups manage their standing? (SQ3) How do members of advantaged groups legitimise or question inequality?

Chapter 5 theorises about the factors at play that help explain the overarching pattern of results. In doing so, it discusses theoretical implications of the results. Next, it reflects on practical implications of the findings to foster substantive equality amidst difference. By elaborating on the limitations of the present approach, it continues by outlining future research directions. Chapter 5 concludes by highlighting the implications of this dissertation in contributing to a social psychology able to promote structural thinking.