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

Difference evasion in managing an advantaged identity and legitimising inequality

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Chapter 2

How white people manage the weight of the past: The role of advantaged identity strategies in linking colonialism to current racial inequality

Linking European colonialism to the present may pose identity challenges to white European people. Through mixed-methods—interviews (N = 24) and surveys (N = 591)—we examined how white people in the Netherlands manage their advantaged ethnic-racial identity in relation to linking colonialism to current racial inequality. Participants employed combinations of prideful (high identification), distancing (low identification), and power-cognisant (critical identification) identity strategies. Those endorsing prideful and distancing strategies were inclined to unlink colonialism from current racial inequality, downplayed the role of ethnic-racial categories in shaping people's lives, and asserted existing racial equality. In turn, they were the most prone to legitimising the racial status quo. In contrast, those uniquely endorsing power-cognisance strongly linked colonialism to current racial inequality, recognised the role of ethnic-racial categories in shaping people's lives, and acknowledged racial inequality. As such, they exhibited a markedly pro-egalitarian outlook. We conclude by discussing the theoretical and practical implications of how white people's strategies for managing their advantaged identity shape the linkage of colonialism to the present and the legitimacy of the racial status quo.

There is a kind of disapproval in the fact that people used to rob the place, those sailors. And well, there's not much you can do about it, because it happened anyway. I mean, we're not responsible for the actions of our ancestors. […] I mean what they did then, we do things differently now.

Sanne, white Dutch woman, 62 years

I feel that this whole racist history is never really stopped. […] it seems that it was more part of the bigger narrative [Dutch colonialism] and almost like it was a necessary evil to get towards prosperity of Dutch society. […] Because I feel that the idea that colonialism was acceptable back then, is still kind of what shapes thinking for a lot of people these days.

Aart, white Dutch non-binary person, 36 years

White people in Western countries are increasingly encouraged to reconsider the links between their history of colonisation and the present. For instance, the United Nations recently advocated for redressing colonialism's enduring consequences and cast racism as one of these (Human Rights Council, 2022). Caribbean and African nations pursue reparations for the ongoing impact of transatlantic slavery through international tribunals, among other measures (African Union, 2023; Caribean Community, n.d.). In Europe, the activism of descendants of colonised peoples often involves connecting their anti-colonial resistance to current racial inequality (Lastrego, Grippa, et al., 2023). However, linking colonialism to current racial inequality remains contentious in Western contexts (Selvanathan et al., 2023). The Dutch tradition of Black Pete, rooted in slavery yet defended by some as unrelated to colonialism, symbolically reflects this controversy (Brienen, 2014). In 2022, the Dutch Prime Minister issued an apology for the Netherlands' role in transatlantic slavery, while excluding economic reparations—a gesture some deemed insufficient as it did not redress colonialism's material impact (Demony & Van Campenhout, 2024). In this article, we address how white people manage the weight of their history of colonisation in the present. We do so by examining

how white people's strategies to manage their advantaged ethnic-racial identity relate to the extent to which they link colonialism to current racial inequality and the legitimisation of the racial status quo.

Extreme poverty rose in colonised territories, many of which still have not regained pre-colonial welfare levels (Sullivan & Hickel, 2023), while wealth from colonialism continues to sustain the global dominance of former empires till today (Hickel et al., 2021). These enduring consequences are arguably coupled with lasting psychological traces, both abroad and in Europe. In the U.S., for instance, implicit biases favouring white people persist as a function of the number of black people enslaved, mediated by current racial inequality (Payne et al., 2019). In the Netherlands, white Dutch people often view colonialism and race as issues relevant only to the colonies, not to themselves (Wekker, 2016). Yet, descendants of colonised groups in the Netherlands (e.g., Surinamese, Antillean) faced wage penalties of 16%-21% compared to white Dutch people in 2019 (van Elk et al., 2019). Moreover, research shows that white Dutch people benefit from positive discrimination in education and the labour market over equally qualified non-white people with similar social networks (Baalbergen & Jaspers, 2023; Lek, 2020; Thijssen et al., 2021). Furthermore, only 2 out of the 150 members of the Dutch Parliament in 2024 (1.33%) have a background linked to territories colonised by the Netherlands, while this population represents 6.3% of the total (Bosma, 2012; Twede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, n.d.). European colonialism, far from being confined to the past or to overseas territories, continues to weigh on the lives of people in the former centres of the colonial empires to this day.

How white people manage their advantaged ethnic-racial identity may relate to the extent to which they link colonialism to current racial inequality. As linking colonialism offers a structural explanation for people's societal standing, doing so may threaten white people's internalist explanations about their own standing, such as inherent deservingness to rule over others (i.e., social dominance orientation—SDO) and individuals' effort (i.e., meritocratic beliefs). Building on the notion that people manage their social identities to achieve and maintain positive self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and on advantaged identity strategies research (Shuman et al., 2024), we reason that by emphasising historical discontinuity, white people may draw moral distinctions between past and present and diminish this threat, absolving themselves of accountability for colonialism (Freel & Bilali, 2022). This notion aligns with findings from New Zealand and Chile, where denying the relevance of colonial atrocities among settler individuals was related to lower support for reparations to indigenous people (Castro et al., 2022; Sibley et al., 2008). Conversely, white individuals who reject internalist explanations for people's societal standing may view racial inequality as a threat to their group's reputation, prompting them to consider structural explanations, such as historical oppression (Knowles et al., 2009; Vasilyeva & Lombrozo, 2020). Thus, how white Dutch people manage their advantaged ethnic-racial identity may reflect in whether they link colonialism to current racial inequality.

White people's ethnic-racial identity in Europe is indeed contested (Essed & Trienekens, 2008; Wekker, 2016). Ethnic-racial identity refers to the overlapping aspects of customs, language, and phenotype often racialised in European contexts (Jugert et al., 2022). As such, some people in Dutch refer to white individuals as blanke mensen; blank denoting to be a blank slate. Some argue that blank thus blurs white people's racial position, allowing them to evade their privileged status and history and, by extension, its relation to the marginalised status of colonised descendants. Consequently, some advocate for using the Dutch word wit instead (white in English) (Nzume, 2017). This occurs against the backdrop of European societies' reluctance to use racial categories (Simon, 2017), arguably seeking to overcome ethnonationalism, the Holocaust, and the very European colonial history (Juang et al., 2021). Employing distinct social categories to manage their ethnic-racial identity, however, white people in the Netherlands elaborate on how colonialism impacts the present.

Linking colonialism to current racial inequality may disrupt its reproduction. Research has shown that linking colonialism curbed symbolic racism (Lastrego & Licata, 2010) and was positively associated with support for amending inequality (Starzyk et al., 2019). Historical linking may prevent people from explaining groups' societal positions through properties inherent to their social categories (e.g., inherent deservingness or effort). Instead, it may encourage structural explanations that focus on stable, external factors, such as historical oppression, shaping these social categories (Vasilyeva & Lombrozo, 2020). While European research on people's views of colonialism has addressed generational differences (Licata & Klein, 2010), attribution of responsibility (Lastrego et al., 2022), and support for reparations (Lastrego, Magonet, et al., 2023), the role of white people's management of their advantaged ethnic-racial identity has not been examined. This lack of studies on European whiteness has resulted in our current ignorance on how heirs of historical privileges reaped by colonialism manage this inheritance.

Taking a mixed-methods approach, we answer the following questions in the Dutch context: How white people manage their advantaged ethnic-racial identity (RQ1); whether and how they (un)link colonialism to current racial inequality (RQ2); and whether and how advantaged identity strategies relate to legitimising current racial inequality (RQ3). In Study 1, we qualitatively explore our model through in-depth interviews. In Study 2, we quantitatively examine our model using surveys, distinguishing white people's identity strategies, their associations with historical linking, and legitimising ideologies of racial inequality. In the next section, we outline our model, integrating advantaged identity strategies, the historical linking of colonialism, and ideological correlates. For an overview of theoretical expectations, see Table 1.

Table 1: Hypothesised Theoretical Relations

	Advantaged Identity Strategy		
	Prideful	Distancing	Power-cognisant
Ethnic Ingroup Identification	High	Low	High
Historical Linking	Low	Low	High
Colour Evasion	Mid	High	Low
Racial Inequality Evasion	High	Low	Low
Inequality	High	High	Low
Legitimisation	(Social Dominance)	(Meritocratic Beliefs)	(Both)

Advantaged Identity Strategies, Historical Linking, and Ideological Legitimation

Prideful Identity Strategy

Some white Dutch people may pridefully embrace their ethnic-racial identity and defend their societal standing in turn. Research in the U.S. has identified a prideful identity strategy among white individuals, marked by strong ethnic-racial identification, denial of historical and current racial inequality, and the hierarchy-enhancing believe of inherent deservingness to rule over others (i.e., SDO) (Bonam et al., 2019; Goren & Plaut, 2012). As prideful white people are posited to derive their self-esteem from identifying with their group-based advantage, differentiating themselves from other groups through categorisation is often expected (e.g., by using social categories to discriminate against). As mentioned, however, European contexts often discourage racial categorisation (Jugert et al., 2022). Those endorsing a prideful strategy in European contexts may thus strongly identify with their ethnic-racial group and, simultaneously, downplay ethnic-racial categories (i.e., "I do not see colour but people" as colour evasion) (Knowles et al., 2009). Research has reported a positive relation between SDO and unlinking colonialism from the present (Castro et al., 2022; Sibley & Osborne, 2016). Those endorsing a prideful identity strategy are thus expected to endorse high ethnic-racial identification, to unlink colonialism, to evade colour and inequality, and thus legitimise it.

Distancing Identity Strategy

White Dutch people who attribute people's societal standing to individuals' efforts may be prone to distancing themselves from their group-based advantage (Shuman et al., 2024). In the U.S., for instance, research has shown that white individuals often reject ethnic-racial categories in favour of being seen as individuals or as members of humanity (Dottolo & Stewart, 2013). While distancing may prevent individuals from recognising their group-based advantage, some may still acknowledge inequality by casting it as outgroup disadvantage. Indeed, research suggests that people across advantaged social identities often recognise inequality even when their group membership goes unnoticed to themselves (Pratto & Stewart, 2012). Concurrently, distancing may translate into viewing others as individuals at the expense of their group memberships as well. Such a colour evasive outlook can reframe inequality as a product of individuals' effort (i.e., meritocratic beliefs) (Knowles et al., 2009). This approach, which acknowledges inequality while evading colour, has been associated with a reluctance to counter inequality similar to that observed in outright denial (Mekawi et al., 2020). Indeed, meritocratic framings of inequality have also been shown to lead people to perpetuate inequality (Vasil et al., 2024). Thus, those endorsing a distancing identity strategy are expected to exhibit low ethnic-racial identification, unlink colonialism, evade colour while acknowledging inequality, and still legitimise it.

Power-Cognisant Identity Strategy

White Dutch individuals who reject notions of inherent deservingness and individuals' effort to explain people's standing may construe racial inequality as an image-threat to their group's reputation (Shuman et al., 2024). Dispelling this threat, they may favour structural explanations of racial inequality and, in turn, hold power-cognisance as an identity strategy (Goren & Plaut, 2012). Adopting a structural construal allows to recognise external, stable constraints that shape social categories and their properties (e.g., white people's advantaged status) (Vasilyeva & Lombrozo, 2020), inclining individuals to link colonialism to current racial inequality. In doing so, white people may be able to identify with their ethnic-racial group and, simultaneously, prevent them from extending their experience to outgroups. Thus, white people endorsing power-cognisance may acknowledge colour rather than evade it (Helms, 1993). As acknowledging colour has been shown to relate to stronger perspective-taking and empathy (Mekawi et al., 2017), it may also relate to developing a critical view of colonialism—stance associated with support for material reparations (Lastrego, Magonet, et al., 2023).

Moreover, research in the U.S. indicates that only those who acknowledged both colour and inequality were inclined to counter inequalities (Mekawi et al., 2020). As such, those endorsing power-cognisance as an identity strategy are expected to exhibit high ethnic-racial identification, link colonialism, acknowledge both colour and inequality, and thus question it.

The Present Research

Taking a mixed-methods approach, in Study 1 we qualitatively explored our model using interviews, addressing how white Dutch people manage their advantaged ethnic-racial identity (RQ1) and whether and how they link colonialism to current racial inequality (RQ2). We found that participants blended identity strategies, yielding qualitatively distinct profiles. As such, these profiles could not be reduced to a single identity strategy.

In examining whether and how white individuals simultaneously endorsed identity strategies, we shifted in Studies 2a and 2b to a person-centred approach employing Latent Profile Analysis (LPA). Echoing our qualitative observations, participants in Studies 2a and 2b clustered into categorically distinct identity profiles (RQ1). Additionally, we validate our model by measuring advantaged identity profiles' likelihood of racial self-identification (blank vs. wit), ethnic ingroup identification (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992), beliefs in inherent deservingness to rule over others (i.e., SDO) (Unzueta et al., 2012) and meritocratic beliefs (i.e., Protestant Work Ethic) (Major et al., 2007). In turn, we assess these profiles' correlates of historical linking of colonialism (RQ2) and racial inequality legitimation (RQ3) by tapping into colour evasion (Knowles et al., 2009) and racial inequality evasion (Brown et al., 2013). For these constructs, the positive associations with racial inequality legitimation are well-established (Awad & Jackson, 2016; Yi et al., 2023).

Building on the advantaged identity strategies framework (Shuman et al., 2024) , we adapt its application from settler colonial contexts to the

Netherlands, a former colonial empire shaped by transatlantic slavery (Wekker, 2016). Ensuring the content-validity of our theoretical model, methodologies, and results, we comprehensively drew on ethnic-racial identity research on European contexts (Juang et al., 2021; Jugert et al., 2022) and whiteness in the Netherlands (Essed & Trienekens, 2008; Wekker, 2016). Building on our qualitative observations, we created measures to capture white Dutch people's ethnic-racial identity strategies and historical linking of colonialism. We provide structural, convergent, and discriminant validity evidence for these scales (see supplementary materials).

Currently, no empirical research examines the psychological and ideological implications of advantaged identity strategies or the historical linking of colonialism among white European people. By bridging the gap between individuals and structures of inequality, we investigate, for the first time in a European context, how white people manage their advantaged identity and whether their approach relates to the extent to which they link colonialism to and legitimise current racial inequality.

Study 1

Method

Participants

Twenty-four self-identified white Dutch participants were interviewed (54.16% cis men, 41.6% cis women, and 1 trans person), ranging in age from 23 to 68 years (M = 49.21, SD = 15.32). Participants were selected based on age and political orientation, representing three distinct generations as well as left-wing and right-wing political leanings (see supplementary materials). As twelve interviews are recommended per analysis axis for data saturation (Guest et al., 2006), our analysis drew on twelve participants for each political orientation. We obtained ethical approval from the Ethics Review Board of the University of Amsterdam.

Procedure

Study 1 pre-registration can be viewed here https://osf.io/p8nym/?view_only=c9bdc19ea4114d0c801c4738968dd192. Potential participants completed a pre-screener survey advertised on Facebook. Those who matched our criteria were invited to participate. Upon providing consent, the structured interviews were conducted in-person or via Zoom. Interviews lasted between 1 hour 13 minutes and 2 hours 34 minutes. They were conducted in Dutch or English based on participants' preference, and were audio-recorded, anonymised, and transcribed. Transcriptions in Dutch were translated into English.

We adopted a two-fold approach in our interview scheme by prompting participants to consider their *ethnic* group membership (e.g., "What ethnic group do you feel you belong to?") while allowing self-categorisation in *racial* terms (e.g., "Just *blank*, average Dutch person" or "I'm a white (*wit*) Dutch person"). The interviews comprised five sections on *Dutch Groups and their Shared Past* (e.g., How would you summarise Dutch history to the new generations?), *White Ethnic-Racial Identity* (e.g., Which ethnic group do you feel that you belong to?), *Master and Alternative White Narratives* (e.g., What opinions are dominant among people from your ethnic group when remembering Dutch history?), *Partaking in White Collective Memory* (e.g., How was the so-called Golden Age taught to you and what is your opinion?), and *Past/Present Relations* (e.g., To what extent are those events important to understand current-day Dutch society?) (for the entire interview scheme, see https://osf.io/62qp9/?view_only=ff514ca5e4ea4b5da8a9831f5763f3dd).

Analytical Strategy

The first, fourth, and fifth authors analysed the data following Thematic Analysis guidelines (Braun & Clarke, 2006) using ATLAS.ti (2023). We began by creating a deductively-driven codebook to ensure coding theoretical trustworthiness. We proceeded with an inductively-driven phase by contrasting the codebook with the data allowing us to change existing codes and create new ones. Lastly, the first author honed his skills to independently code text content by assessing intercoder agreement with the fourth and fifth co-authors on a random subset of three interviews. Intercoder agreement was calculated by the proportion of overlap among coders, resulting in 73.88%. After discussing discrepancies, intercoder agreement was again calculated, resulting in 99.24%. The first author then coded the remaining interviews using the validated codebook (for codebook creation see supplementary materials). The anonymised transcripts can be accessed at https://osf.io/62qp9/?view_only=ff514ca5e4ea4b5da8a9831f5763f3dd.

Results

We first describe how participants managed their white ethnic-racial identity reflecting each advantaged identity strategy, addressing RQ1. We then describe how the white identity strategy related to the linking of colonialism to current racial inequality, addressing RQ2.

Prideful Identity Strategy

I'm really proud of the Golden Age. I'm really proud that we Dutch people, who lived in this part of Europe, that we did [that]. *That we went all over the world, that we discovered other countries, other people, other food, everything. And that we had these great arts. I've never thought about, ahm, this slavery thing.* (Annelies, 56 years old, right-wing)

For Annelies and five others across generations and political leanings, pridefulness defends collective identity in response to acknowledgers of colonialism. For others, pridefulness signals resistance against non-white Dutch people. As Peter (61 years old, right-wing) stated:

I do have the feeling that an appeal is being made to me that I should accept the society that is being created now, that I should like it all. And 'ahh how lovely, how multicultural'. No, I don't like that. Nice, listen, in the Bijlmer we all sat together and I was the only Dutchman […] You think to yourself, "What the hell, I was the only Dutchman." […] There are so many taboos now that you become a bit of a pariah if you think differently, if you talk about history and if you talk about pride.

The Bijlmer area in Amsterdam is home to post-colonial black and brown immigrants whose Dutch nationality is legally unquestionable, but Peter still views himself as the sole Dutch person around. In this way, his prideful statement subtly positions white skin colour as an implicit category of Dutch belonging and, simultaneously, flipped whiteness's dominant position in society into one of disadvantage. In pridefully defending his identity, Peter smuggled whiteness as an unmarked vantage point defining Dutchness and circumventing its associated privileges.

Some younger participants also endorsed pridefulness by explicitly disentangling it from skin colour to incorporate non-white Dutch people, as articulated by Irine (26 years old, right-wing).

We shouldn't be proud that we are white because you know that's a bad thing. I don't think you need to link it to skin colour, you can just say we are proud to be Dutch and you're also Dutch, so let's be proud together.

Historical Unlinking of Colonialism

Those endorsing a prideful identity strategy were inclined to unlink colonialism from the present.

I don't feel it has much use being very apologetic. I mean, we were not those people. Those were different times, different lives. We must see it in perspective. Besides I mean everybody did it. Any country that got the chance to be great and conquer land and you know they did it. It was another age. (Bram, 66 years old, right-wing)

Bram's quote reflects how historical discontinuity was asserted by framing colonialism as belonging to a distinct, past era. By separating 'those people' from 'us,' he divides the past and the present into distinct entities. This periodisation is reinforced by a call for perspective-taking, which further distances the audience from the events. Bram's reasoning suggests that colonial settlements are part of a time that is not 'ours,' effectively unlinking colonialism from the present.

Distancing Identity Strategy

[Interviewer] *Would you recognise yourself as part of white people?* [Interviewee] *Yeah but even the white people is not one group.* [Interviewer] *How would you say white in Dutch?* [Interviewee] *Blank.* [Interviewer] *And ethnically how would you label that?* [Interviewee] *Normal Dutch? Normal Dutch. […] Very average.* (Klaas, 66 years old, left-wing)

Nine participants across generations and political orientations distanced themselves from their ethnic-racial membership by presenting it as "normal" or "average." By referring to a compelling normality that

would better define them than being white, they used the category *blank* instead of *wit* to describe themselves. As mentioned, using *blank* to refer to being white in Dutch has been contested as it is posited to blur people's ethnic-racial positions. Accordingly, those distancing emphasised individual characteristics at the expense of their ethnic-racial group membership. For instance, Aldo stated:

So, in that sense, a certain culture is also, what influences life then. And yes, you know, I don't have the feeling that I belong to any particular culture at all. (48 years old, left-wing)

Some often emphasised a lack of culture, distancing themselves from bearing a cultural background, as if this detachment stripped away any group-based perspective. In rejecting what they termed 'group thinking' and 'hooliganism,' in turn, they viewed these as barriers to individuality and freedom of thought. As Irine (26 years old, right-wing) stated:

I'm really a person who likes to look at individuals. I think it's really wrong to say this whole group is this, this whole group is that, I think it's really wrong and always ends in tragedy. I think really individualised, I think which used to be I guess a core value right of the Western society. I really hate the group thinking.

Historical (Un)linking of Colonialism

Those distancing endorsed either blatant historical unlinking or reluctant linking. In either case, these participants portrayed attempts to link colonialism to the present as a source of bias. As Dan (31 years old, right-wing) stated:

It contributes to hyperpolarisation. […] As if in Dutch history, that sort of the wrongs of our history is constitutive of our whole society. I don't view our society as an oppressive society […]. It's one of the wealthiest societies that you can imagine, in the world and in history, and you should be glad and thankful for being here.

At the same time, a few made some room for historical linking. As Klaas (66 years old, left-wing) stated "*It's important to black people* [to claim historical linking], *because whenever we look upon it, they still find difficulties in having the same opportunities and same chances. […] But objectively, it's much more complicated.*" As such, objectivity often appeared as the litmus test to address the past.

Power-Cognisant Identity Strategy

I'm ethnically Dutch. I'm white. So, I'm definitely not on the back negative end of the colonial histories. I'm a privileged person. Ik ben wit en ik ben Netherlands. [I'm white and Dutch] *[…] is the label that I should carry, because I think that the label* wit *comes also with a certain responsibility and privilege that I get to experience.* (Aart, 36 years old, left-wing)

Ten participants—two right-wing and eight left-wing—explicitly referenced their skin colour by using the term *wit*. By doing so, they acknowledged the structural advantages of their ethnic-racial group. The implications of using *wit* or *blank* as ethnic-racial categories were also critically discussed during the interviews.

Blank I would translate it to like nude, so like neutral, without colour. For me, it's like a colourblind term. So it's a way to not claim whiteness, like have it [to] *be the normal, unnamed, natural state.* (Carlijn, 24 years old, left-wing)

As *wit* sheds light on their background, these participants were able to describe norms and values of their white cultural upbringing, detaching themselves from it. While they identified as part of their ethnic-racial group, this identification implied a critical distance that galvanised their perspective-taking. In turn, they were prone to appreciating intergroup differences as they enabled renewed understandings. As Amber (25 years old, left-wing) said about discussing with non-white people:

It's very interesting to have a conversation, for example have like a miscommunication, but not in a bad way but more in a way like, wow, I meant it like this, but it's picked up in a different way and then, you're kind of like oh, I think we don't really understand each other, like, what's going on? And then you explain it like, oh, I never even thought I could look at it this way.

Historical Linking of Colonialism

We have this beautiful centre of the city because really rich people back in the day, built their houses with money, partially from the colonies. And we wouldn't have this beautiful city centre, if not for the extortion of other ethnicities. […] I mean you do need to take accountability for that.

(Lucas, 23 years old, left-wing)

This statement, along with Aart's quote at the start of this paper, illustrates how those endorsing power-cognisance frequently linked colonialism to current racial inequality. In doing so, some interpreted contemporary racism as stemming from the belief that colonial oppression was mechanically driven and somehow inevitable (see Bram's quote). By framing inevitable past oppression as a factor fueling present-day racism, discussions on colonialism were viewed as relevant for questioning current racial inequality. In challenging the notion of inevitability, some participants reflected on the structural factors that enabled oppression and elaborated on the resistance efforts of colonised people. As Eline (41 years old, right-wing) stated:

I was also taught that black people are very poor, you know, that we captured them then they needed to work for us, very poor people. Well, in the reality, they're very strong and courageous: they run away, they fight, and they just were not letting them get enslaved so easily. But that perspective is never told.

Blending Identity Strategies

All in all, most participants blended distancing either with pridefulness or power-cognisance. On the one hand, some blended pridefulness with distancing strategy, blurring in turn their ethnic-racial group membership (e.g., "*I don't think you need to link it to skin colour, you can just say we are proud to be Dutch and you're also Dutch so let's be proud together*" Irine). Also, only few participants exhibited distancing strategy alone (e.g., *"I don't have the feeling that I belong to any particular culture at all."* Aldo). Both prideful-distancing and distancing people unlinked colonialism from the present. On the other hand, some blended distancing with power-cognisant strategy. They exhibited some degree of historical linking under the guise of objectivity (e.g., *"It's important to black people* [to claim historical linking] *But objectively, it's much more complicated."* Klass). Lastly, some participants also exclusively endorsed power-cognisance, associated with strong historical linking (e.g., "*I feel that the idea that colonialism was acceptable back then, is still kind of what shapes thinking for a lot of people these days*" Aart).

Discussion

White Dutch people employed prideful, distancing, and power-cognisant identity strategies. In line with our expectations, participants who conveyed prideful and distancing strategies were likely to unlink colonialism from current racial inequality, while power-cognisant people strongly linked colonialism to the present.

Beyond these three expected strategies, the interviews also suggested two unexpected combinations: prideful-distancing and distancing-cognisant identity profiles. These participants unlinked colonialism from current racial inequality. As such, we provided preliminary evidence of distinct white identity strategies in an European context (RQ1) and demonstrated that they were meaningfully associated with (un)linking colonialism (RQ2). Further examining how white Dutch individuals simultaneously endorse identity strategies, in Studies 2a and 2b we shift

to a person-centred approach and quantitatively examine advantaged identity strategies profiles (RQ1), their associations with historical linking (RQ2), and their ideological correlates (RQ3).

Studies 2a and 2b

We collected two independent samples to quantitively assess advantaged identity strategies among white Dutch people in relation to the historical linking of colonialism. Participants were recruited from Prolific (Study 2a) and Facebook (Study 2b) to ensure a range of ages—those in Study 2a were younger (M = 29.94) than those in Study 2b (M = 64.53). Both studies comprised identical measures and procedures. Samples were independently analysed to provide evidence for the scales' structural (i.e., factoriality and robustness) and external validity (i.e., convergent and discriminant validity) (see supplementary materials). Materials, data and code for constructs validation are available at https://osf.io/n583t/?view_only=4e8243acddf440689f4f5db93ed5c23c.

Building on our qualitative observations, we conducted Latent Profile Analyses in each sample (LPA) and empirically determined whether and how participants clustered in distinct profiles by employing advantaged identity strategies simultaneously (RQ1). Drawing on person-centred research standards in social psychology (Osborne & Sibley, 2017), LPA enabled us to ascertain the composition and number of profiles that best summarised the data at hand. Next, we assessed profiles' associations with the theorised key outcomes of participants' racial self-identification (blank vs wit) and ethnic ingroup identification (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). Further validating the advantaged identity profiles in line with our model, we examined profiles' associations with beliefs in inherent deservingness to rule over others (i.e., SDO) (Unzueta et al., 2012) and meritocratic beliefs (Major et al., 2007).

Lastly, we assessed the profiles' associations with the historical linking of colonialism (RQ2) as well as their tendencies toward colour evasion (Knowles et al., 2009) and racial inequality evasion (Brown et al., 2013), both of which reflect legitimation of racial inequality (RQ3). See Table 1 for an overview of the hypothesised theoretical relations.

Studies 2a and 2b are presented in unified sections. Materials, data, and code for Studies 2a and 2b are available at https://osf.io/jcsw5/?view_only=edb466ede2db4f8ebef4494b3ec59827. We report all measures and data exclusions.

Method

Participants

Study 2a

Three-hundred and fifty-six participants were recruited through Prolific. Nine participants identified otherwise than *blank* or *wit* and were therefore excluded from analysis, yielding a final sample of 347 self-identified white Dutch participants (47.83 % cis men, 49 % cis women, and 3.17 % trans and non-binary people). Ages ranged from 18 to 73 years old (M = 30.03, SD = 9.90). Political orientations ranged from left (1) to right (9) (M = 3.86, SD = 1.76).

Study 2b

Two-hundred and seventy participants were recruited through Facebook. Those who identified otherwise than *blank* or *wit* were excluded, yielding a final sample of 244 self-identified white Dutch participants (55.33% cis men, 42.21% cis women, and 2.04% trans and non-binary). Ages ranged from 19 to 83 years (M = 64.49, SD = 11.13). Political orientations ranged from left (1) to right (9) (M = 3.74, SD = 1.89).

Measures

Participants reported their political orientation on a scale from 1-Left to 9-Right and self-identified by using ethnic-racial identity categories (e.g., *Blank Nederlands*, *Wit Nederlands*). For all other measures, participants rated their agreement with statements on 9-point Likert scales, ranging from "1-Strongly disagree" to "9-Strongly agree."

Ethnic ingroup identification was measured using four items from Luhtanen & Crocker's identity subscale (1992) (e.g., "My ethnic group is an important reflection of who I am."; α_{2a} = .71, α_{2b} = .70).

Advantaged identity strategies were measured as follows: Prideful strategy (e.g., "I see myself as a proud Dutch person of our ethnic heritage", α_{2a} = .79, α_{2b} = .82); Distancing strategy (e.g., "I feel that my ethnic group does not have a significant impact on how I see the world", α_{2a} = .69, α_{2b} = .68); Power-cognisant strategy (e.g., "I see myself as a white Dutch person with associated privileges because of my ethnic group membership", α_{2a} = .80, α_{2b} =.76). Construct validity analyses confirmed a three-factor advantaged identity strategies scale, with four items each (see supplementary materials).

Legitimising ideologies of general inequality were measured as follows: social dominance orientation, eight items (e.g., "Group equality should not be our main goal"; α2a = .81, α2b =.83) (Unzueta et al., 2012); and meritocratic beliefs (i.e., Protestant Work Ethic), three items (e.g., "Anyone willing to work hard has a good chance of succeeding"; α2a = .86, α2b =.85) (Major et al., 2007).

Historical linking of colonialism was measured with seven items (e.g., "Colonialism has had a lasting impact in the form of today's racism", α_{2a} = .90, α_{2b} =.91.) Construct validity analyses confirmed a one-factor scale (see supplementary materials).

Legitimising ideologies of racial inequality were measured as follows: colour evasion, four items (e.g., "People preoccupied with ethnicity forget that we are all just humans"; α_{2a} =.86, α_{2b} =.83) (adapted from Knowles et al., 2009); racial inequality evasion, four items (e.g., "Racism is a problem in the Netherlands" (reverse-coded); α_{2a} = .88, α_{2b} =.86) (adapted from Brown et al., 2013).

Procedure

Participants were asked to report their political orientation, to identify in ethnic-racial terms, and to complete the ethnic ingroup identification measure, followed up by the randomised advantaged identity strategies scale. The historical linking of colonialism scale and ideological measures were completed thereafter, all items randomised. We obtained ethical approval from the Ethics Review Board of the University of Amsterdam.

Analytical Strategy

LPA was conducted using the *tidyLPA* package in R (R Core Team, 2021; Rosenberg et al., 2019). Indicator variables for profile construction were the advantaged identity strategies scale: prideful, distancing, and power-cognisance. Models with one to seven profiles were tested in each sample. To ensure model parsimony, variances of indicators and residual covariances were constrained to zero. Following person-centred research standards in social psychology (Osborne & Sibley, 2017), we selected profile solutions considering best model fit (i.e., Akogul & Erisoglu, 2017 analytic hierarchy process based on AIC, AWE, BIC, CLC, KIC fit indices; smallest BIC; Bootstrap Likelihood Ratio Test <.05 relative to a simpler model with k – 1 classes), classification quality (i.e., entropy index 0.6-0.8 indicating that 80-90% of the sample has been correctly classified), and theoretical plausibility.

Fisher's exact tests were conducted to assess the association between profiles and racial self-identification odds (i.e., *blank* vs *wit*). Profiles' ethnic ingroup identification, historical linking of colonialism, and

ideological correlates were compared by regressing each variable on the profiles' posterior probabilities. Tukey's HSD tests were used to assess differences between profile indicators and profiles' outcome means and Cohen's *d* values were computed to reveal effect sizes.

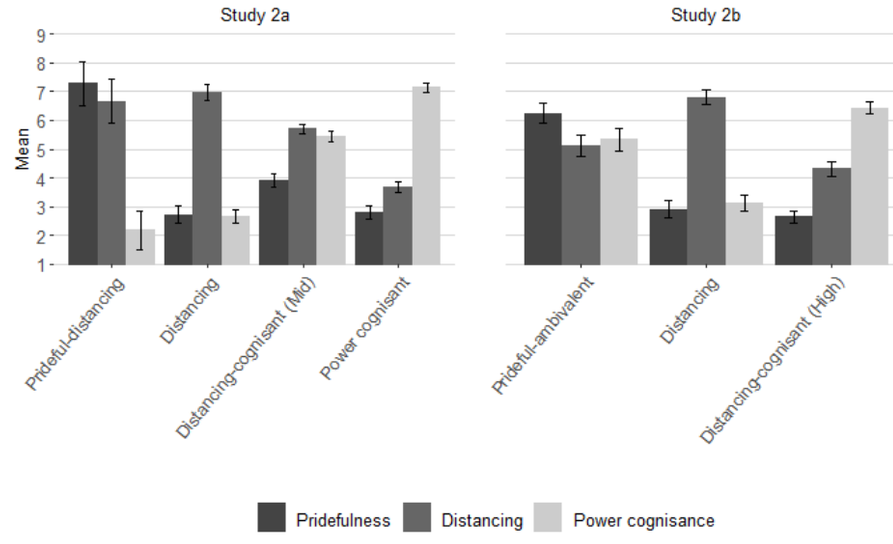
Results

We begin by describing profile selection in Studies 2a and 2b, followed by examining their likelihood of racial self-identification (i.e., *blank* vs. *wit*), correlates of ethnic ingroup identification, and associations with social dominance orientation and meritocratic beliefs, thereby addressing RQ1. Next, we present the profiles' associations with the historical linking of colonialism, addressing RQ2. We conclude by describing profiles' correlates of racial inequality legitimation, focusing on evasion of colour and racial inequality, addressing RQ3. For clarity, the study in which a profile was identified will be specified when comparing outcomes. Outcome means are interpreted as low/weak (< 4), medium (≥ 4 and < 6), and high/strong (≥ 6). Effect sizes are interpreted as small (d < 0.50), medium (0.50 ≤ d < 0.80), and large (d ≥ 0.80). See Table S18-S25 for raw Cohen's *d* values.

Latent Profiles Selection

Figure 1 illustrates the means of the indicator variables by profile in Studies 2a and 2b.

Figure 1: Indicator Means by Latent Profile



Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Study 2a

Using the prideful, distancing, and power-cognisant identity strategies as indicator variables, a four-profile solution was identified as the best-fitting model according to the analytic hierarchy process (see Table S12). This solution also exhibited the lowest BIC value and the highest entropy (0.72) and provided a significantly better fit than the simpler three-profile solution, as indicated by the Bootstrapped Likelihood Ratio Test (p < 0.01).

Table 2 presents the descriptives for each of the four profiles: (1) the prideful-distancing profile, characterised by high pridefulness, high distancing, and low power-cognisance; (2) the distancing profile, defined by low pridefulness, high distancing, and low power-cognisance; (3) the distancing-cognisant profile, marked by low pridefulness, mid distancing, and mid power-cognisance; and (4) the power-cognisant profile, distinguished by low pridefulness, low distancing, and high power-cognisance. Most profile indicators differed significantly (p < .001), with large to very large effect sizes. Exceptions were the prideful-distancing and distancing profiles' similarly high levels of distancing (p = 0.83) and similarly low levels of power-cognisance (p = 0.51), as well as the distancing and power-cognisant profiles' similarly low levels of pridefulness (p = 0.98). For full pairwise comparison statistics, see Table S13.

Table 2: Statistical Features per Latent Profile Study 2a

	Prideful-distancing (high-high-low)	Distancing (low-high-low)	Distancing-cognisant (low-mid-mid)	Power-cognisant (low-low-high)
N of respondents	9	61	166	111
Proportion of respondents	.03	.17	.48	.32
Age	32.55[a]	32.77[a]	31.17[a]	28.66[a]
Proportion female	.00	.33	.47	.65
Political orientation	7.00[a]	4.60[b]	4.13[b]	2.80[c]

Note. Below each whiteness profile the level on each identity strategy is described as follows Pridefulness, Distancing, and Power Cognisance. Values denote means unless otherwise stated. Values in a row not sharing a superscript are significantly different at p < .05. Political orientation ranged from 1-Left to 9-Right.

Study 2b

A three-profile solution was identified as the best-fitting model according to the analytic hierarchy process (see Table S12). This solution also exhibited the lowest BIC value, the highest entropy (0.69), and significantly outperformed a simpler, two-profile solution, as indicated by the Bootstrapped Likelihood Ratio Test (p < 0.01).

Table 3 presents the descriptives for each of the three profiles: (1) the prideful-ambivalent profile, characterised by high pridefulness, mid distancing, and mid power-cognisance; (2) the distancing profile, defined by low pridefulness, high distancing, and low power-cognisance; and (3) the distancing-cognisant profile, marked by low pridefulness, mid distancing, and high power-cognisance. Most profile indicators differed significantly (p < 0.001) and demonstrated medium-to-very-large effect sizes. Exceptions were the prideful-distancing and distancing profiles' similarly high levels of distancing (p = 0.83) and similarly low power-cognisance (p = 0.51); as well as the distancing and power-cognisant profiles' similarly low pridefulness (p = 0.98). For full pairwise comparison statistics, see Table S14.

Table 3: Statistical Features per Latent Profile Study 2b

	Prideful-ambivalent (high-mid-mid)	Distancing (low-high-low)	Distancing-cognisant (low-mid-high)
N of respondents	77	54	113
Proportion of respondents	.22	.31	.46
Age	66.77[a]	65.28[a]	64.43[a]
Proportion female	.39	.43	.43
Political orientation	5.07[a]	4.07[b]	2.86[c]

Note. Below each whiteness profile the level on each identity strategy is described as follows: Pridefulness, Distancing, and Power cognisance. Values denote means unless otherwise stated. Values in a row not sharing a superscript are significantly different at p < .05. Political orientation ranged from 1-Left to 9-Right.

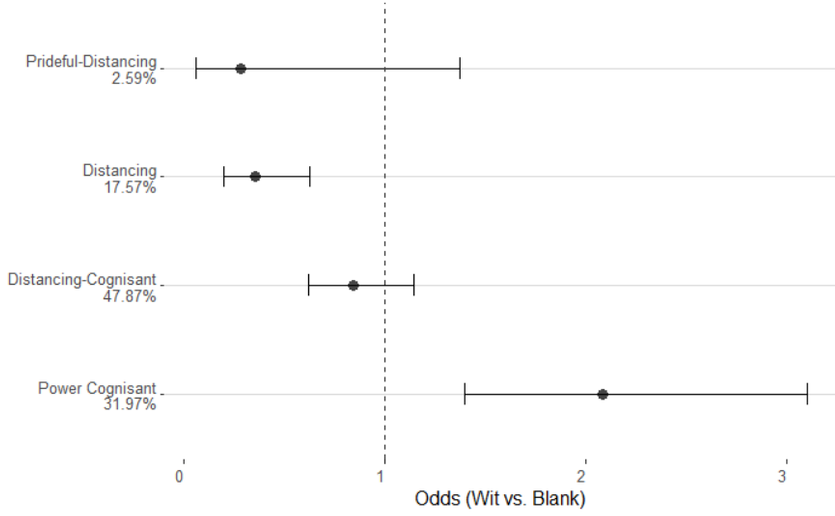
Latent Profiles' Correlates

Racial Self-Identification

Chi-squared tests revealed significant associations between profile membership and racial self-identification (*blank* vs. *wit*) in Study 2a, $\alpha^2(3, N = 347) = 31.24$, $p < .001$, and Study 2b, $\alpha^2(2, N = 244) = 16.85$, $p < .001$ (see Tables S15-16).

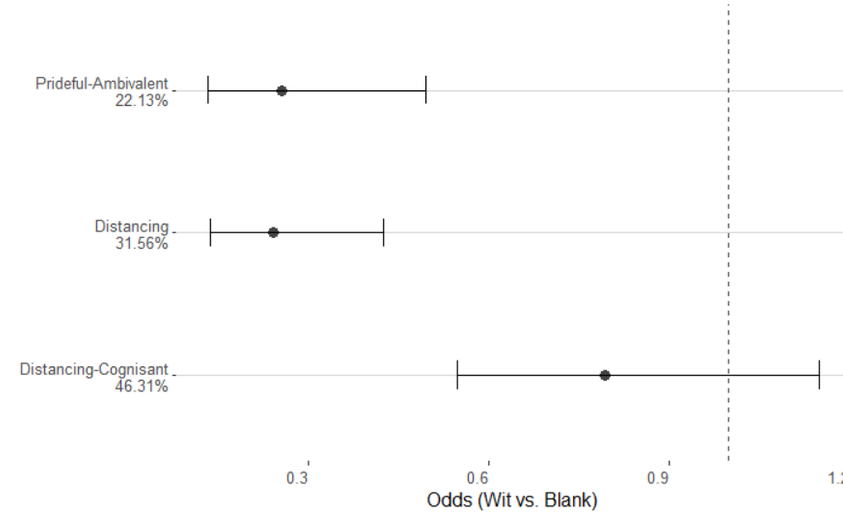
Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the odds of identifying as *wit* vs. *blank* by profile in each sample, respectively. Individuals with prideful and distancing identity profiles were more likely to identify as *blank* rather than *wit*. Those with distancing-cognisant identity profiles were equally likely to identify as *blank* or *wit*, while individuals with a power-cognisant identity profile were more likely to identify as *wit* than *blank* (for proportions and within-profile odds ratios, see Table S17).

Figure 2: *Odds of Identifying as Wit vs. Blank by Latent Profile Study 2a*



Note. The dashed line indicates equal likelihood between *Wit* and *Blank*. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 3: *Odds of Identifying as Wit vs. Blank by Latent Profile Study 2b*

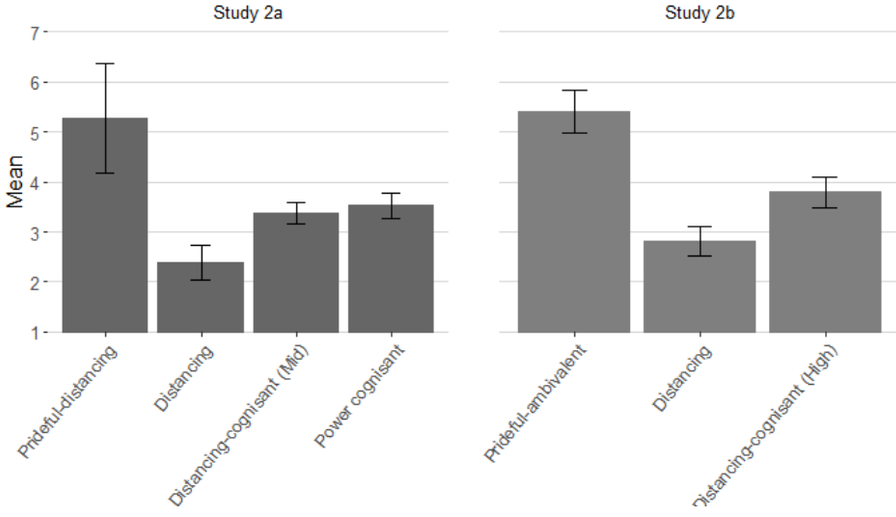


Note. The dashed line indicates equal likelihood between Wit and Blank. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Ethnic Ingroup Identification

Figure 4 illustrates means by profile. As expected, those endorsing prideful strategies predicted the strongest ethnic ingroup identification with large effect sizes, i.e., prideful-distancing ($p < .01$) and prideful-ambivalent profiles ($p < .001$) in Study 2a and 2b, respectively. Also, as expected, the distancing profiles predicted the weakest ethnic ingroup identification ($p < .001$), exhibiting medium-to-large effect sizes. The distancing-cognisant profiles exhibited low-to-mid levels, significantly lower than the prideful profiles and higher than the distancing profiles ($p < .001$). Contrary to expectations, the power-cognisant profile also predicted low-to-mid levels of ethnic ingroup identification, which did not statistically differ from the distancing-cognisant profile ($p = .811$). For full pairwise comparison statistics, see Tables S18-S19.

Figure 4: Latent Profiles' Means of Ethnic Ingroup Identification

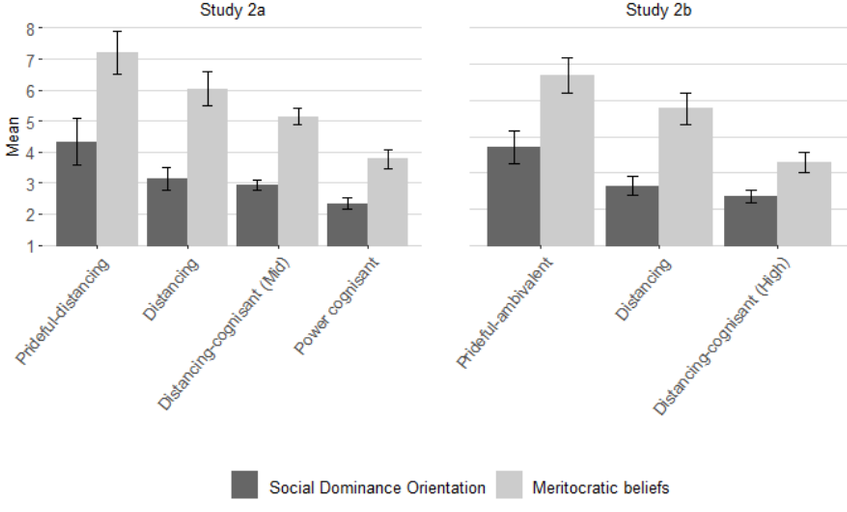


Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Legitimising Ideologies of General Inequality

Figure 5 illustrates means for social dominance orientation and meritocratic beliefs by profile. See Tables S20–S21 for full pairwise statistics.

Figure 5: *Latent Profiles' Means of Social Dominance Orientation and Meritocratic Beliefs*



Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Social Dominance Orientation.

As expected, the prideful profiles exhibited the highest levels of SDO across studies. In Study 2a, the prideful-distancing profile exhibited significantly higher levels than the distancing ($p = .017$), distancing-cognisant ($p = .002$), and power-cognisant profiles ($p < .001$), with large-to-very-large effect sizes. In Study 2b, the prideful-ambivalent profile similarly exhibited higher levels than the distancing ($p < .001$) and distancing-cognisant profiles ($p < .001$), also with large effect sizes.

The distancing and distancing-cognisant profiles did not statistically differ in Study 2a ($p = .658$) or Study 2b ($p = .233$) and showed significantly higher levels than the power-cognisant profile in Study 2a ($p < .001$), with medium effect sizes. As expected, the power-cognisant profile exhibited the lowest levels of SDO.

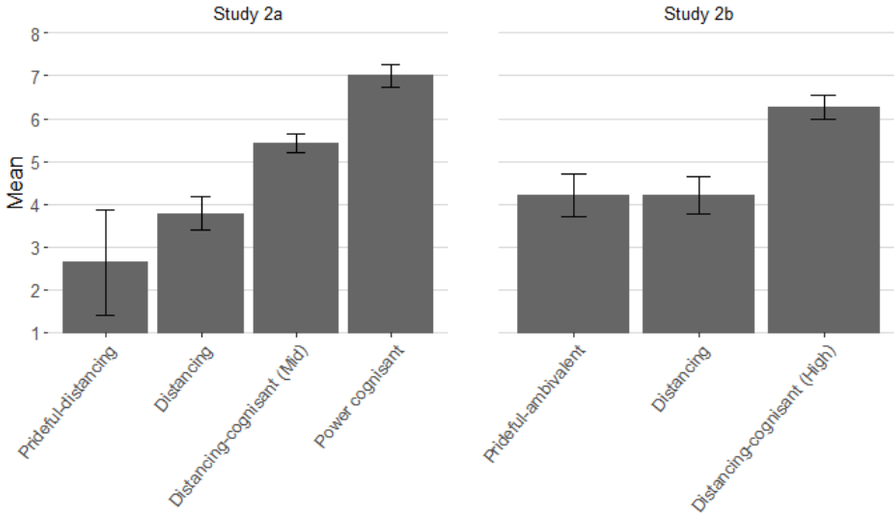
Meritocratic Beliefs.

As expected, the distancing profiles exhibited high levels of meritocratic beliefs across studies. Also, the prideful profiles demonstrated strong levels. Prideful and distancing profiles did not statistically differ in Study 2a ($p = .254$). In Study 2b, the prideful-ambivalent profile showed significantly higher levels of meritocratic beliefs than the distancing profile ($p = .008$). The prideful and distancing profiles showed in turn significantly higher levels of meritocratic beliefs than the distancing-cognisant profiles ($p < .01$), with medium-to-very-large effect sizes. As expected, all profiles exhibited significantly stronger meritocratic beliefs than the power-cognisant profile in Study 2a ($p < .001$), with large-to-very-large effect sizes.

Historical Linking of Colonialism

Figure 6 illustrates means for historical linking of colonialism by profile. As expected, in Study 2a, the prideful-distancing and distancing profiles predicted the weakest historical linking (p < .001), exhibiting large-to-very-large effect sizes, and did not statistically differ between them (p = 0.12). In Study 2b, the prideful-ambivalent and distancing profiles also predicted the weakest levels (p < .001), exhibiting large effect sizes, and did not differ between them either (p = 0.99).

Figure 6: *Latent Profiles' Means of Historical Linking of Colonialism*



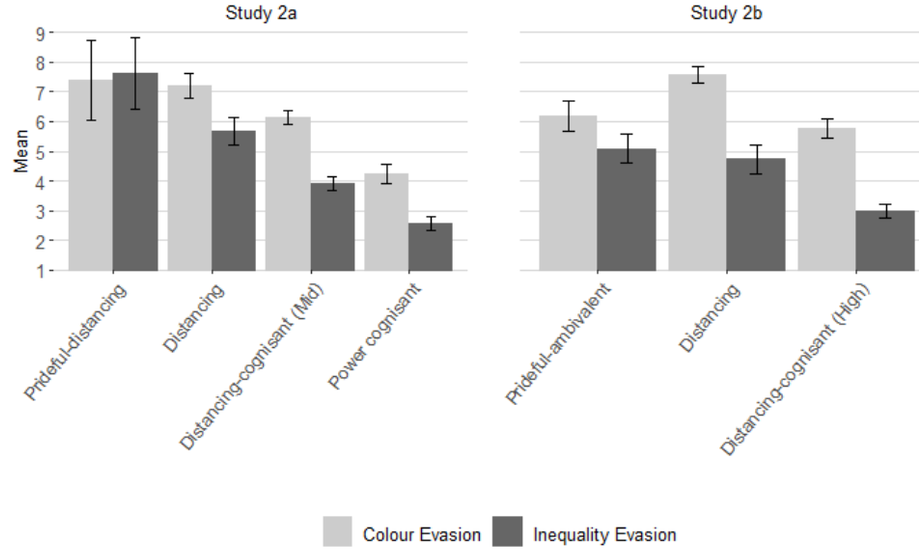
Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

The distancing-cognisant profiles predicted medium historical linking in Study 2a and mid-to-high levels in Study 2b, both at higher levels relative to the prideful and distancing profiles (p < 0.001), and exhibited large effect sizes. As expected, the power-cognisant profile predicted the strongest levels of historical linking in Study 2a (p < 0.001), exhibiting large-to-very-large effect sizes. For full pairwise comparison statistics, see Tables S22-S23.

Legitimising Ideologies of Racial Inequality

Figure 7 illustrates means for colour evasion and racial inequality evasion by profile. See Tables S24-S25 for full pairwise statistics.

Figure 7: *Latent Profiles' Means of Colour and Racial Inequality Evasion*



Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Colour Evasion.

As expected, the prideful, distancing, and distancing-cognisant profiles exhibited high to moderate levels of colour evasion. There were no statistical differences between the prideful and distancing-cognisant profiles in either study (p = .985–.288). In Study 2a, the distancing profile did not differ from the prideful-distancing profile (p = .985) and exhibited higher levels than the distancing-cognisant profile (p = <.001). In Study 2b, the distancing profile exhibited significantly higher levels than both the prideful-ambivalent and distancing-cognisant profiles (p < .001), with large effect sizes. As expected, the power-cognisant profile exhibited significantly lower levels of colour evasion compared to all other profiles in Study 2a (p < .001), with large-to-very-large effect sizes.

Racial Inequality Evasion.

As expected, the prideful profiles exhibited strong racial inequality evasion across studies. In Study 2a, the prideful-distancing profile exhibited significantly higher levels than the distancing, distancing-cognisant, and power-cognisant profiles ($p < .001$), with large-to-very-large effect sizes. In Study 2b, contrary to expectations, the prideful-ambivalent profile did not statistically differ from the distancing profile ($p = .479$) while exhibiting higher levels than the distancing-cognisant profile ($p < .001$), with a large effect size.

In contrast to expectations, the distancing profiles exhibited higher racial inequality evasion than the distancing-cognisant profiles across both studies ($p < .001$), with large effect sizes. In turn, both the distancing and distancing-cognisant profiles exhibited higher levels of racial inequality evasion than the power-cognisant profile in Study 2a ($p < .001$), with very large and large effect sizes, respectively. The power-cognisant profile thus exhibited the statistically lowest levels of racial inequality evasion in Study 2a ($p < .001$), with large-to-very-large effect sizes.

Discussion

White Dutch participants endorsed prideful, distancing, and power-cognisant identity strategies by blending them in categorically distinct ways. These advantaged identity profiles meaningfully distinguished correlates of racial self-identification, ethnic ingroup identification, inherent deservingness and meritocratic beliefs, historical linking of colonialism, and ideological legitimation of racial inequality.

Concerning advantaged identity strategies (RQ1), we distinguished profiles of white people endorsing pridefulness and blending it with distancing (i.e., prideful-distancing in Study 2a, prideful-ambivalent in Study 2b) and power-cognisance (i.e., prideful-ambivalent in Study 2b). The recurring profiles that combined prideful and distancing

identity strategies highlight a subset of participants who express ethnic-racial ingroup pride while distancing from explicit racial categories that signaled their group membership. The prideful profiles exhibited the strongest ethnic ingroup identification. Along with these prideful profiles, however, the distancing profiles—characterised by exclusively endorsing strong distancing—were most likely to self-identify as *blank*. Concurrently, the distancing profiles exhibited the weakest ethnic ingroup identification. Further validating our model, prideful profiles displayed the strongest endorsement of inherent deservingness (i.e., SDO), and in Study 2a demonstrated meritocratic beliefs as high as those of the distancing profile.

The distancing-cognisant profiles blended mid-level distancing and mid-to-high level power-cognisance and were the most prevalent. These profiles did not predict racial self-identification (i.e., equal likelihood of *blank* and *wit*). In turn, they exhibited mid-levels of ethnic ingroup identification. Our results show that the distancing-cognisant profiles did not differ in their endorsement of social dominance to the highly meritocratic distancing profile, while showed levels of meritocratic beliefs in-between the prideful and distancing profiles, on the one hand, and the power-cognisant profile, on the other hand.

Lastly, the power-cognisant profile only identified in the younger sample (Study 2a) was the most prone to acknowledge their white ethnic-racial identity and their advantages, and the least prone to endorse prideful and distancing strategies. Accordingly, the power-cognisant profile was four times more likely to identify as *wit* than *blank*. However, they also exhibited mid-levels of ethnic ingroup identification. The power-cognisant profile predicted the significantly lowest endorsement of legitimising ideologies of general inequality, with medium-to-very-large effect sizes. Together, these findings confirm our qualitative observations and reveals that white Dutch people's racial self-identification as *blank* and *wit* were meaningfully associated with psychologically consistent advantaged identity strategies, ethnic ingroup identification, and ideological legitimation of general inequality.

Concerning the historical linking of colonialism (RQ2), participants exhibiting pridefulness and those exclusively distancing were the least prone to linking colonialism to current racial inequality. The distancing-cognisant profiles endorsed mid-to-high levels of historical linking. The power-cognisant profile exhibited high and the strongest linking of colonialism to the present. These findings confirm our qualitative observations and introduce nuance to our model by quantifying degrees of historical linking as a function of advantaged identity profile.

Concerning the legitimation of racial inequality (RQ3), we found that most participants strongly evaded colour except for those in the power-cognisant profile. Noting that the power-cognisant profile was the only profile exhibiting low levels of distancing strategy, this pattern confirms that those distancing from their advantaged ethnic-racial identity were also prone to evading colour.

Those who blended prideful with distancing as identity profile, or exclusively endorsed the distancing strategy, exhibited strong tendencies to evade racial inequality. Introducing nuance to our expectations, this finding shows that endorsing distancing strategy alone was likely to translate into evading racial inequality. In contrast, the distancing-cognisant profiles exhibited low racial inequality evasion. This aligns with the notion that some white individuals can evade ethnic-racial categories while still acknowledging outgroup disadvantage (Pratto & Stewart, 2012).

The power-cognisant profile uniquely exhibited the lowest levels of colour evasion and racial inequality evasion. These findings support the notion that those who uniquely endorsed power-cognisance conveyed a structural construal of social categories and, thereby, linked colonialism to current racial inequality (Vasilyeva & Ayala-López, 2019).

General Discussion

Colonial wealth and deeds continue to sustain former empires' global dominance to this day (Hickel et al., 2021). While white Dutch people often view colonialism and race as issues relevant only to the colonies, not to themselves (Wekker, 2016), descendants of colonised groups in the Netherlands (e.g., Surinamese, Antillean) faced wage penalties of 16%-21% compared to white Dutch people in 2019 (van Elk et al., 2019). Moreover, white individuals in the Netherlands benefit from positive discrimination and greater access to opportunities in education and the labour market over equally qualified non-white people with similar social networks (Baalbergen & Jaspers, 2023; Lek, 2020; Thijssen et al., 2021). As of 2024, only 2 out of the 150 members of the Dutch Parliament (1.33%) have a background linked to territories colonised by the Netherlands, while this population represents 6.3% of the total (Bosma, 2012; Twede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, n.d.). As extreme poverty rose in colonised territories, many of which still have not regained pre-colonial welfare trends (Sullivan & Hickel, 2023), European colonialism weighs on people's lives in the centres of the former colonial empires till today. In this context, we examined how white people manage their advantaged ethnic-racial identity (RQ1) in relation to linking colonialism to current racial inequality (RQ2). In doing so, we extended for the first time the advantaged identity strategies framework theorised in a settler colonial context, the U.S., to a European former colonial empire, the Netherlands. As such, we assessed whether and how advantaged ethnic-racial identity strategies were associated with the ideological legitimation of current racial inequality (RQ3). For an overview of findings, see Table 4.

Table 4: Summary of Findings

	Advantaged Identity Profiles			
	Prideful (Distancing/ Ambivalent)	Distancing	Distaning-cognisant	Power-cognisant
Ethnic Ingroup Identification	High	Low	Mid	Mid
General Inequality Legitimisation	High	High	Mid-Low	Low
Historical Linking	Low	Low	Mid	High
Colour Evasion	High	High	Mid-High	Low
Racial Inequality Evasion	High	High	Mid-Low	Low

Note. 'High,' 'Low,' and 'Mid' indicate outcome means in relative terms.

In Study 1, we conducted structured in-depth interviews (N = 24). Concerning RQ1, we found that white Dutch people meaningfully employed prideful (high identification), distancing (low identification), and power-cognisant (critical identification) strategies to manage their advantaged ethnic-racial identity, echoing previous findings and theorising (Goren & Plaut, 2012; Knowles et al., 2014; Shuman et al., 2024). Contrary to expectations, most participants either blended pridefulness with distancing or distancing with power-cognisance, and only a few exhibited one single identity strategy.

Drawing on our qualitative observations, in Studies 2a and 2b, we conducted surveys in two independent samples (N2a = 347; N2b = 244) to measure the advantaged identity strategies of pridefulness (e.g., "I see myself as a proud Dutch person of our ethnic heritage"), distancing (e.g., "I feel that my ethnic group does not have a significant impact on how I see the world"), and power-cognisance (e.g., "I see myself as a white Dutch person with associated privileges because of my ethnic group membership"). Latent Profile Analyses allowed to confirm whether and how white people employed simultaneously distinct identity strategies. Four distinct identity profiles emerged: the prideful profiles (distancing-ambivalent), characterised by high levels of pridefulness coupled either with high distancing or medium distancing and power-cognisance; the distancing profiles, marked by strong endorsement of the distancing strategy alone; the distancing-cognisant profiles, blending distancing with power-cognisance; and finally, the power-cognisant profile, characterised by high endorsement of power-cognisance only. Our results thus revealed unexpected combinations of advantaged identity strategies among white individuals in the Dutch context, introducing nuance to previous work that addressed advantaged identity strategies as discrete constructs (Goren & Plaut, 2012; Shuman et al., 2024).

Concerning RQ2, our qualitative and quantitative analyses revealed that individuals endorsing prideful or distancing strategies exhibited relatively lower historical linking of colonialism to current racial inequality. In contrast, those who critically identified with their advantaged ethnic-racial identity—i.e., power-cognisant participants—demonstrated a strong connection between colonialism and current racial inequality. Concerning RQ3, the prideful profiles exhibited the strongest beliefs in inherent deservingness (i.e., SDO), and along with the distancing profiles, exhibited the highest levels of meritocratic beliefs, as well as ideological legitimation of racial inequality (i.e., high colour evasion and racial inequality evasion). The distancing-cognisant profiles showed lower levels of general and racial inequality legitimation, although conspicuously exhibiting mid-to-high colour evasion. The power-cognisant profile exhibited the lowest levels across ideologies.

Theoretical Implications

Colonialism has been historically justified by white supremacist narratives (Human Rights Council, 2022). However, explicit white supremacism became socially unacceptable in Europe post-WWII, and along with it, the naming of race as a meaningful category (Essed & Trienekens, 2008; Juang et al., 2021; Jugert et al., 2022; Simon, 2017). Our findings suggest how white Dutch individuals may legitimise racial inequality through various identity profiles bypassing overt white supremacism, such as taking pride in their ethnic-racial group while distancing from their advantaged ethnic-racial status (i.e., prideful profiles) or distancing altogether from it (i.e., distancing profiles). This absence of blatant white supremacism has often served to downplay racism in the Netherlands (Wekker, 2016). Yet, blatant racial discrimination does not equate open supremacism and coexists in Western contexts alongside system-justifying outlooks like racial colourblindness (Knowles et al., 2009). Indeed, prideful profiles exhibited the strongest beliefs in inherent deservingness (i.e., SDO) and high meritocratic beliefs, aligning with unlinking colonialism from the present, as well as with colour evasion and racial inequality evasion. Those endorsing the distancing strategy alone exhibited high meritocratic beliefs, also aligning with unlinking colonialism from the present, as well as with colour evasion and racial inequality evasion.

The distancing-cognisant profiles demonstrate that distancing from an advantaged status and evading colour can coexist with acknowledging racial inequality. Notably, these profiles comprised the largest proportion of participants. This aligns with findings from the United States, where individuals frequently acknowledged racial inequality while evading colour (Mekawi et al., 2020). Distancing-cognisant individuals exhibited levels of colour evasion similar to those in the prideful and distancing profiles, yet their acknowledgment of inequality aligned more closely with the power-cognisant profile—albeit at higher levels. Consequently, two distinct approaches emerged through which white Dutch individuals tended to acknowledge racial inequality: distancing-cognisant individuals did so while distancing themselves from their ethnic-racial status, and power-cognisant individuals acknowledged racial inequality while recognising their ethnic-racial status as a source of privilege, dispensing with distancing as an identity strategy.

Both the distancing-cognisant and power-cognisant profiles were associated with low-to-medium levels of ethnic ingroup identification and a tendency to link colonialism to the present. These patterns align with prior research in Belgium, where mid-identifiers— compared to both low and high identifiers—were most likely to experience group-based guilt related to colonialism (Klein et al., 2011). Complementing this previous work, our findings revealed categorical distinctions between these profiles of mid-identifiers. In Study 2a, the distancing-cognisant profile predicted moderate historical linking, while the power-cognisant profile demonstrated stronger historical linking and a distinctive system-challenging ideological stance. Also, while the distancing-cognisant profile in Study 2b descriptively showed similar low endorsement of general legitimising ideologies as the power-cognisant profile in Study 2a, it exhibited colour evasion levels as high as the prideful-ambivalent profile. Thus, taking a person-centred approach revealed categorically distinct advantaged identity profiles among mid-identifiers, which translated into statistically different attitudinal outcomes—differences that a one-dimensional measure of ingroup identification would have obscured.

Supporting the notion that a structural construal of social categories is favoured when inherent deservingness and meritocratic beliefs are low, the power-cognisant profile employed the racial category wit the most, acknowledged the impact of race in shaping people's lives (i.e., lowest colour evasion), and strongly linked colonialism to current racial inequality. As observed in Study 1, those who displayed power-cognisance integrated the consequences of colonialism into their daily lives. In temporally linking colonialism to current racial inequality, they spatially connected distal colonial dispossession with their present

traces in the metropole, such as recognising that iconic Dutch urban architecture was funded through colonial exploitation and, in turn, acknowledging accountability.

Integrating self-categorisation processes (Oakes, 2001) into the study of how white people manage their advantaged ethnic-racial identity, our findings add ecological validity to this framework by demonstrating how distinct self-categorisations (e.g., blank vs wit) consistently related to advantaged identity profiles in the Dutch context. These profiles, in turn, were meaningfully associated with theoretically consistent ideological correlates. By disambiguating self-construals (i.e., advantaged identity strategies) from intergroup construals (e.g., colour evasion, inequality evasion), we also provide enhanced conceptual clarity to prior work that has equated advantaged identity strategies (e.g., pridefulness, power-cognisance) with attitudes toward intergroup inequality (e.g., deny, dismantling) (Shuman et al., 2024).

Person-centred social psychological research has traditionally focused on attitudes or ideologies (Rivera Pichardo et al., 2023; Sibley & Liu, 2013). Our work contributes to this burgeoning literature by examining how advantaged individuals manage their structural position while distinctly uncovering their intergroup attitudes. This approach can prevent researchers from overlooking the material context (e.g., inequality) that shapes intergroup dynamics and participants' construals of these settings. By grounding participants' ideological outlooks in their socio-psychological and historical foundations (Hakim et al., 2023), we aimed to address white people's advantaged identity strategies in relation to colonialism. In doing so, we offer a distinctly intergroup perspective to study whether and how advantaged group members link historical oppression to current inequality.

Practical Implications

Our results demonstrate that white individuals adopting an identity-cognisant outlook on intergroup relations were more likely to link historical oppression to current inequality. These findings support the value of an identity-cognisant approach among advantaged group members to foster structural thinking and epistemic justice (Vasilyeva & Ayala-López, 2019). Thus, these insights could be used to create targeted anti-racist interventions. For prideful individuals, interventions would focus on educating them about the historical contributions of multiple ethnic groups to the current national culture, thereby countering ethnonationalist nostalgia. For distancing individuals, interventions that highlight the role of social structures in perpetuating inequality may prove effective. For distancing-cognisant individuals, interventions that promote awareness of structural advantage while safeguarding self-esteem could help prevent them from evading colour. Finally, for power-cognisant individuals, teaching concrete strategies to counter racial inequality while avoiding tokenism would be beneficial.

Limitations and Future Directions

While Latent Profile Analysis can predict outcomes, it does not establish causality. We reason that advantaged identity strategies and historical linking likely hold a bidirectional relationship. For instance, nudging certain identity strategies could either foster or hinder historical linking, while priming historical linking may activate specific identity profiles depending on people's ideological outlook. Future studies could explore these relationships and their moderators, experimentally and longitudinally (for examples of manipulating historical linking, see Sibley et al., 2008; Lastrego & Licata, 2010).

Our studies did not account for attitudes toward immigration, which may also influence the observed pattern of results. In the Netherlands and other Western European countries, national histories are often invoked to racialise who belongs and who is seen as incompatible in

the context of migration (Duyvendak, 2021; Smeekes et al., 2018). While our findings provide strong evidence for the construct validity of advantaged ethnic-racial identity strategies, future research could account for attitudes toward immigrants and assess the incremental validity of advantaged identity strategies in explaining the historical linking of colonialism. Finally, the non-representativeness of our sample limits the generalisability of these findings.

Our measures are ecologically valid for Dutch speakers. Future research could adapt and validate them for broader use in other European countries with colonial histories as well as in former colonies and settler nations where racial dominance may operate differently. For instance, in contexts where the national identity is rooted in ethnic-racial mixing (i.e., mestizaje) between colonisers and colonised Indigenous people, as in regions of the Americas, the figure of the mestizo/a might function similarly to the distancing strategy, glossing over ethnic-racial distinctiveness and, thus, the positioning of colonisers' descendants (Walsh, 2019). Mirroring how the distancing strategy operates among white people in former colonial empires, the identity dynamics of mestizaje in settler societies could be investigated in relation to neo-colonial versus pro-egalitarian support for Indigenous people (Rivera Pichardo et al., 2023).

Conclusion

In examining how white people in a European context manage their ethnic-racial identity amidst burgeoning discussions about colonialism, we found that white Dutch people adopted distinct combinations of prideful, distancing, and power-cognisant identity strategies. Extending on previous research in settler colonial settings, we uncovered some unexpected combinations of advantaged identity strategies: prideful-distancing, prideful-ambivalent, and distancing-cognisant profiles. Those employing prideful and distancing strategies were less prone to link colonialism to current racial inequality than white people who endorsed power-cognisance alone. Concurrently, those endorsing power-cognisance while dispensing with distancing and pridefulness questioned current racial inequality the most. We conclude by arguing that white people can legitimise racial inequality not only by pridefully identifying but also by distancing from their advantaged ethnic-racial identity. By critically examining their whiteness, in contrast, white people could be better positioned to acknowledge the enduring impact of the past on the present and to challenge its ongoing effects.