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When White people experience the weight of the past:

The role of White identity strategies in linking colonialism to current racial inequalities

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Keywords: European Whiteness, dominant identity, racial inequality, racial color-blindness, historical linking of colonialism.

Abstract

How do White Europeans address racial inequalities in times of burgeoning discussions about colonialism? The current research explores the strategies that White people in the Netherlands use to manage their racial-ethnic identity in relation to linking colonialism and current racial inequalities. With this, we examined how White identity strategies were related to ideologies legitimizing racial inequalities. Using mixed-methods consisting of qualitative interviews ($N = 24$) and quantitative surveys ($N = 564$), we found that White people exhibited different combinations of prideful (“I am a proud person of our ethnic heritage”), dissociated (“My ethnic group does not have a significant impact on how I see the world”), and power-cognizant (“I am a White person with privileges because of my ethnic group”) identity strategies. Moreover, these White identity strategies were associated with linking colonialism and racial inequalities and, thereby, with ideologies legitimizing them. Specifically, White people holding prideful and dissociated strategies were less likely to link colonialism and racial inequalities than White people who exclusively endorsed power-cognizance. Furthermore, power-cognizant people challenged current-day racial inequalities the most. We conclude by discussing how White European people legitimize or question racial inequalities by managing their Whiteness and the theoretical and practical implications of these findings.

Highlights

- Building on and extending previous research on settler colonial settings, this is the first study to show how White individuals in a European context manage their racial-ethnic identity in relation to historically (un)linking colonialism and current racial inequalities.
- In doing so, we show that White European people can legitimize current racial inequalities through various identity strategies beyond overt White supremacy, such as by dissociating from their dominant racial position in society.
- In taking on a White identity-cognizant approach, thus, policies aiming to promote anti-racism and allyship can be tailored to target a broader range of White identity profiles and thereby better harness psychological inclinations in the populace.
- Showing how Whiteness works differently in a former colonial center (i.e., the Netherlands) than it does in a settler colonial context (i.e., the U.S.), our work evinces how researchers can glean valuable knowledge to better counteract racial inequality by adapting the White identities framework to other European and Global South contexts.

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In Western countries, White people are increasingly exposed to reconsider their colonial history and its links with the present. Recently, the United Nations called upon State members to redress the enduring consequences of colonialism (Human Rights Council, 2022). Attributing current racial inequalities to colonial exploitation, however, remains controversial in Western countries (Selvanathan et al., 2023). In the Netherlands, for example, White people have mixed views on colonialism's impact on society. An exemplary case is Black Pete, a Dutch tradition where White people dress up as the Black servants of Saint Nicholas. Although this disguise implies caricatural and slave-related features such as black-facing and big golden earrings, some White people defend it by denying its relation to the slavery past. At the same time, historical scholarship suggests otherwise (Brienen, 2014). As the discussion on racial inequalities grows, White people take stances on how colonialism impacts the present.

How White European people link colonialism to current inequalities might reflect in how they entertain their White identity. For instance, people in Dutch refer to White individuals as “blanke mensen”; “blank” denoting to be a blank slate. Some have argued that “blank” conceals history and privilege by enabling White people to evade their racial position. To counteract these attempts, some have replaced the use of “blank” by utilizing the Dutch word “wit” (White in English) to refer to White people (Nzume, 2017). Taking different stances toward their Whiteness, Dutch people seem to elaborate on how colonialism impacts the present.

Linking of historical oppression to current inequalities is pivotal to disrupt its reproduction. Experimental and cross-sectional evidence has shown that historical linking of colonialism is strongly associated with curbing modern racism (Lastrego & Licata, 2010) and support for amending inequalities (Starzyk et al., 2019). Research in European contexts has linked people's view of colonialism to their national identity (Licata et al., 2018),

generational differences (Licata & Klein, 2010), and perception of enduring suffering (Lastrego et al., 2022). However, research has not distinguished their participants' racial-ethnic identity. As a result, how *White* European people manage their Whiteness and its implications has remained unaddressed. 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.

Addressing the Dutch case, we propose that White people manage their Whiteness in multiple ways to cope with the threat of being perceived as illegitimately privileged. In turn, White identities should differentially associate with historical linking of colonialism. As such, we seek to uncover White identity dynamics fostering (hindering) historical linking and, thereby, challenging (legitimizing) current racial inequalities. We address the following questions: (RQ 1) how White Dutch people manage their White identity; (RQ 2) how they (un)link colonialism and current racial inequalities; and (RQ 3) how White identity strategies are related to legitimizing these inequalities. In Study 1, we qualitatively address White identities and historical linking in interviews to explore our model in the Dutch context. In Study 2, we test our predictions in surveys, uncovering latent profiles of White identities and their associations with historical linking and ideologies legitimizing racial inequalities.

White Identity Strategies and Historical Linking of Colonialism

The oppression wielded by European empires has still-enduring consequences. Research has shown that extreme poverty dramatically rose in territories when invaded by Western colonizers, debunking the myth about the prosperity that colonialism would have brought about. Critically, some regions of Africa, Latin America, and Asia have not yet recovered up to their pre-colonial welfare trends (Baten & Maravall, 2021; Sullivan & Hickel, 2023). While descendants from Dutch colonies have inherited structural disadvantage

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due to colonial dispossession, we reason that White people from former colonial centers have also inherited structural advantage because of it (Oudshoorn-Tinga et al., 2021). Moreover, we propose that this structural inheritance is coupled with a psychological one (Wekker, 2016). For instance, White people in the U.S. living in states where more Black people were enslaved held more implicit bias favoring White people. Notably, this relation was partially driven by current racial inequalities (Payne et al., 2019). As such, inequalities created by colonialism not only underpin still-enduring consequences on descendants of oppressed people but also on the heirs of perpetrators.

Access to life opportunities in the Netherlands is indeed higher for White people than for others (Felten et al., 2021). As for the labor market, for instance, 13.2 per cent of the non-White labor force was unemployed in 2016, whereas this dropped to 4.9 per cent for the majority of White people (Statistiek, 2018). Moreover, social networks channel opportunities to White people to attain job security whereas they do not work for non-White people to the same extent (Baalbergen & Jaspers, 2023). Furthermore, when it comes to education, non-White students were less likely to get scientific schooling advice in some Dutch schools, which is key to attain the most prestigious jobs (Lek, 2020). Thus, the inequality created by colonialism in overseas territories arguably also reflects in the Dutch social structure for the advantage of White people.

The extent to which White people believe their position in society is due to their individual effort relates to how they manage their White identity. Some White individuals might experience acknowledging racial inequalities as a threat to their self-perceived individual accomplishments. Grappling with racial inequalities, they can either *pridefully* embrace their racial-ethnic identity to defend their position or *dissociate* from their Whiteness to evade accountability (Knowles et al., 2014). For White people who do not hold meritocratic beliefs, in contrast, racial inequality can directly evoke an image-threat of

privilege. Menacing to taint their group's reputation, racial inequality might compel them to examine their privileges and be prone to dismantle inequalities by holding *power-cognizance* (Goren & Plaut, 2012). Thus, White people grapple with racial inequalities also by managing their Whiteness.

Groups' historical continuity shapes ingroup solidarity and shared reality. However, historical discontinuity can also play a strategic role in intergroup relations when dealing with inherited inequalities (Freel & Bilali, 2022). Stressing historical discontinuity, we argue that White people can draw moral distinctions between periods to prevent White people from being held accountable for colonialism. In line with this argument, negating the relevance of historical atrocities to the present decreased support for reparations through White people's motivations for collective security and social cohesion in New Zealand (Sibley et al., 2008). We complement this research and examine whether, beyond security and social cohesion motives, White people in a European context also neutralize group-based meritocratic threats regarding their dominance by historically unlinking colonialism. Hence, our main contribution is to explore whether and how White Dutch people in managing their Whiteness, legitimize or challenge current racial inequalities by straddling colonialism and the present. The following section outlines our model of White identity strategies and ideological correlates.

Prideful Whiteness.

White people who pridefully embrace their racial-ethnic identity are motivated to defend their position and thereby racial inequalities. For instance, White people in the U.S. who strongly identified with their racial-ethnic identity were more likely to deny systemic racism (Bonam et al., 2019). Thus, we expect prideful White people to highly identify with their racial-ethnic group. Furthermore, research in Chile and New Zealand found that the

extent to which people endorsed that some groups deserve a privileged position in society (e.g. social dominance), was strongly related to the extent to which they denied links between colonialism and the present (Castro et al., 2022; Sibley & Osborne, 2016). Therefore, we expect that prideful White people *unlink colonialism* from current inequalities.

Dissociated Whiteness.

Dominant groups can legitimize inequality not only by defending it but also by evading their role in it. Research has shown how White people reject racial-ethnic labels to refer to themselves by preferring to be seen as individuals or humans (Dottolo & Stewart, 2013). Indeed, acknowledging membership to a dominant group can induce group-based guilt when their privileges can be associated with ingroup atrocities such as colonial oppression (ANONYMOUS). Dissociating from their Whiteness, White people might tend to also construe other people as individuals at the expense of their group memberships by holding color-evasion. In doing so, they can reappraise racial inequalities as individually-driven trajectories and uphold meritocratic explanations of people's positions in society, including themselves (Knowles et al., 2014). Seeing others as individuals for the sake of evading color, White people can also circumvent accountability for the power imbalances they reap benefits from. Hence, we expect dissociated White people to identify the least with their ethnic group and to *unlink colonialism* from current inequalities.

Power-cognizant Whiteness.

Confronting racial inequalities, in contrast, some White people can recognize the impact of their racial-ethnic identity (Goren & Plaut, 2012). As such, we expect this group to highly identify with their racial-ethnic identity. Due to this galvanized cognizance, the assumption of White people's experiences as the universal or default is absent. Thus, power-cognizant people are expected to appreciate differences instead of evading color (Helms, 1993).

Moreover, power-cognizant people might develop a critical representation of White people's role in colonialism. Holding a critical representation of colonialism has been associated with support for amending inequalities (Lastrego et al., 2022). Thus, we expect power-cognizant White people to *link colonialism* with current inequalities and, thereby, challenge them. For hypotheses overview, see Table 1.

The Present Research

We adopt a mixed-methods approach in addressing Whiteness. In Study 1, we qualitatively explore our model in the Dutch context. We do so by addressing RQ 1 about how Dutch people manage their White identity, and RQ 2 on whether and how they link colonialism and current inequalities.

We found in Study 1 that White Dutch people simultaneously used different identity strategies, emerging qualitative Whiteness profiles irreducible to one single identity strategy. In Study 2, therefore, we conduct surveys and employ Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) to identify subgroups of individuals utilizing White identity strategies similarly. Echoing previous research on bicultural attitudes from a latent class perspective in New Zealand (Sibley & Liu, 2013), we explored whether Whiteness profiles emerged quantitatively and whether these trickled down into categorical differences regarding historical linking and legitimizing racial inequalities. Taking a profile-oriented focus, thus, Study 2 extends to RQ 3 by uncovering Whiteness profiles' psychological and ideological correlates of racial inequality legitimization.

Constructing measures for the Dutch context, our first innovation was to adapt the White identities framework built in the U.S. settler colonial context to a former colonial empire, the Netherlands. Additionally, we created a measure of historical linking of colonialism to assess how people link colonialism in institutional, material, and relational

terms with the present (see online supporting information). Bridging the gap between individuals and structures of inequality, we explored for the first time whether and how White people by managing their Whiteness drive the contestation (legitimation) of inherited racial inequalities by historically linking (unlinking) colonialism to the present.

Study 1: Qualitative Accounts of White Identities

Method

Participants. 24 White Dutch self-identified participants were interviewed (54.16% cis men and 41.6% cis women, with 1 trans person). Their ages ranged from 23 to 68 ($M = 49.21$, $SD = 15.32$).

Participants were purposefully invited based on age representing three distinct generations and left-wing and right-wing political orientations (see online supporting information). Twelve interviews are recommended per analysis axis for data saturation (Guest et al., 2006). Thus, our analysis had 12 participants for each political orientation. We obtained ethical approval from the Ethics Review Board of [ANONYMOUS].

Procedure. 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 to 2 hours 34 minutes. They were conducted in Dutch or English based on participants preference, and were audio-recorded, anonymized, and transcribed. Transcriptions in Dutch were translated into English. The interviews comprised five sections on *Dutch groups and their shared past* (e.g., How would you summarize Dutch history to the

new generations?), *White ethnic 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 relationships* (e.g., To what extent are those events important to understand current-day Dutch society?) (for interview scheme see online supporting information).

Analytical Strategy. The first, fourth, and fifth authors analyzed the data following Thematic Analysis guidelines (Braun & Clarke, 2006) using ATLAS.ti (2023). We began by creating a deductively-driven codebook to ensure coding reliability and trustworthiness. Next, we familiarized ourselves with the data by reflectively reading the interviews. Later, we proceeded with an inductively-driven analytic phase by contrasting the codebook with the data allowing us to change existing codes and create new ones. Lastly, we tested codebook reliability by assessing intercoder reliability and agreement on a random subset of three interviews. Intercoder reliability was calculated by the proportion of overlap among coders, resulting in 73.88%. After discussing discrepancies, an intercoder agreement was calculated by the ratio of overlap among coders, resulting in 99.24%. The first author coded the remaining interviews using the validated codebook (for codebook creation see online supporting information).

Results

We first describe how our participants managed their dominant identity reflecting each White identity strategy, addressing RQ 1. We then describe how the White identity strategy related to the linking of colonialism and current racial inequality, addressing RQ 2.

Prideful Whiteness

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, pride signals resistance against non-white Dutch people (Peter, 61 years old, right-wing):

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. As such, this prideful utterance implicitly posits white skin color as the marker of Dutch identity. Moreover, this prideful response flips Whiteness's dominant

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position in society into one of disadvantage. In pridefully defending his identity, Peter conveys denial of privilege.

In contrast, younger participants convey ingroup pridefulness by explicitly disentangling it from skin color to incorporate non-white Dutch people, as articulated by Irine's quote (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 color, you can just say we are proud to be Dutch and you're also Dutch, so let's be proud together.

Historical repertoire of prideful White people: Historical unlinking of colonialism.

Prideful identity strategy was associated with the historical unlinking of colonialism.

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 paradigmatically reflects how historical discontinuity is asserted by stating colonialism as belonging to a different time. By separating "those people" from "us," he conveys an unbridgeable distinction between the past and the present. This periodization is followed by a call for perspective-taking, epistemically distancing the audience from the events. Bram's rationale implies that colonial settlements are part of a time that is not "ours," effectively unlinking colonialism from the present. As such, this is an exemplary case of historical unlinking.

Dissociated Whiteness

[Interviewer] *Would you recognize 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)

Dissociated people averted signaling skin color as an ethnic marker by presenting it as “normal” or “average.” In doing so, nine participants across generations and political orientations used the Dutch word "blank" instead of "wit" to describe themselves. As mentioned, using blank to refer to being White in Dutch culture has been contested since it is posited to conceal privilege and White positioning. Consequently, dissociated White participants emphasized individual characteristics instead of their racial-ethnic 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)

Dissociated people stressed lack of culture, as it strips individuals of a group-based perspective which might pollute their views. Accordingly, some participants rejected what they dubbed *group thinking* and *hooliganism*, which would hinder individuality and freedom of thought. Irine (26 years old, right-wing), for example, 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 individualized, I think which used to be I guess a core value right of the Western society. I really hate the group thinking.

Moreover, this participant actively refused to be singled out by their skin color.

Now they say we have to say white because “blank” is too positive. [...] I would say blank, because we also don't like to say Black actually, in Dutch culture [...] So because Blacks and Whites sounds kind of harsh to me.

Historical repertoire of dissociated White people: Claiming objectivity for historical (un)linking of colonialism.

Dissociated Whiteness was complexly related to historical linking. Two strands emerged: blatant historical unlinking and reluctant acknowledgement. Both called for neutrality to avoid historical linking.

[Referring to White settlers] *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, 62 years old, centrist)

Participants that blended prideful and dissociated Whiteness portray historical linking attempts as a source of bias that prevents people from holding an ‘objective’ point of view. As such, a claim for neutrality is made to address history. As Dan stated:

It contributes to hyperpolarization. [...] 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. (31 years old, centrist)

Lastly, a few of these participants reluctantly 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 appears as the litmus test to address the past.

Power-cognizant Whiteness

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)

These participants openly signaled their skin color by using the word *wit*. They acknowledged their privileged position. Ten participants conveyed these utterances, two politically centrist and eight left-wing. The implications of using *wit* or *blank* was even problematized during the interviews by some participants:

Blank I would translate it to like nude, so like neutral, without color. For me, it's like a color-blind 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)

Wit sheds light on their racial-ethnic identity, allowing them to stand out from other White people. For instances, these participants are able to describe norms and values of their White cultural upbringing, detaching themselves from this background. Individuality plays a pivotal role, but in a critical instead of an avoidant fashion.

But the way you see people react, like towards Sylvana Simons [Black left-wing Dutch Member of Parliament]. I see people [react] and it's so cringe "she's a chimp, and she should go back to her own country". She's Dutch, where do you want her to go? And I'm ashamed. That's why I never say I'm Dutch. (Loes, 52 years old, left-wing)

While they identify as part of their racial-ethnic group, this identification implies a critical distance. By galvanizing this perspective-taking, they seemed to also appreciate intergroup differences as enabling 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 repertoire of power-cognizant White people: Historical linking of colonialism.

We have this beautiful center 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 center, if not for the extortion of other ethnicities. [...] I mean you do need to take accountability for that. (Lucas, 23 years old, left-wing)

I feel that this whole racist history is never really stopped. [...] [Talking about how Dutch colonialism was taught to him] it seems that it was more part of the bigger narrative 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, 36 years old, left-wing)

These utterances reflect how people linked colonialism to current racial inequalities. Some viewed current racism as stemming from the belief that oppression was mechanically-driven during colonialism. As such, in historically linking, Aart contests the notion of inevitable dominance. Consequently, they explore alternative appraisals of colonialism by

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reflecting on material conditions that led to oppression and the attempts of colonized people to resist. For example, Eline (41 years old, centrist) elaborated counter-narrative efforts:

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 dissociation either with pridefulness or power-cognizance. On the one hand, some displayed a profile characterized by blending pridefulness with dissociated Whiteness, often giving up on their racial-ethnic membership (e.g., “*I don’t think you need to link it to skin color, 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 exclusively exhibited dissociated Whiteness (e.g., “*I don’t have the feeling that I belong to any particular culture at all.*” Aldo). Yet, both dissociated and prideful-dissociated people denied links with colonialism. On the other hand, some blended dissociated and power-cognizant Whiteness. They reluctantly 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 exclusively displayed power-cognizance, resulting in 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 engaged in prideful, dissociated, and power-cognizant identity strategies. In line with our expectations, participants conveying prideful and dissociated Whiteness were more likely to unlink colonialism from current inequalities, while power-cognizant people linked them strongly.

Our observations suggest two combinations we did not expect: prideful-dissociated and dissociated-cognizant profiles. The dissociated-cognizant profile was intriguing since these participants articulate two theoretically opposing strategies. Echoing these dissociated-cognizant individuals, however, research on racial color-blindness in the U.S. found that most people, while acknowledged inequalities (i.e., low power-evasion), a key feature of power-cognizance, still evaded color (i.e., high color-evasion), also reflecting a key feature of dissociation (Mekawi et al., 2020). Notably, these people were as reluctant as blatant deniers of inequality to counteract inequalities. We reason that such a disengagement coupled with acknowledging inequalities might be underpinned by blurring their White racial-ethnic distinctiveness, an identity dynamic reflected by upholding evasion of color as an intergroup outlook. However, White identity strategies and racial color-blindness have not been empirically linked yet.

In line with our findings, most White people in New Zealand upheld the symbolic inclusion of Māori as colonized people, but reject material redress towards them (Sibley & Liu, 2013). This pattern was associated with negating the relevance of colonialism to the present (Sibley et al., 2008). We therefore speculate that some White people might use symbolic inclusion to blur their White racial-ethnic distinctiveness as in dissociated Whiteness, evading being associated with their ancestry and thereby enabling them to unlink colonialism from the present. Nevertheless, dissociat Whiteness and historical unlinking have not been empirically linked either. Bridging these two gaps, in Study 2, we uncovered

profiles of White identities, their associations with historical linking, and their ideological correlates by also examining power- and color-evasion as subdimensions of racial color-blindness.

Study 2: Whiteness Profiles Ideological Correlates

We take on a profile-oriented focus in quantitatively assessing White identities. Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) will allow us to identify subgroups of individuals employing White identities simultaneously by empirically determining the profiles that most parsimoniously summarize the data. Moreover, we assess our expectations by examining Whiteness profiles' associations with ethnic identification, historical linking, and legitimizing of inequalities. Next to color-evasion and power-evasion, we measure meritocratic beliefs, system justification, and social dominance orientation. These constructs have shown strong associations with legitimizing racial inequalities (Jost & van der Toorn, 2012; Major et al., 2007; Mekawi et al., 2020; Unzueta et al., 2012). As such, we aim to provide evidence for Whiteness profiles' validity as psychological constructs by uncovering whether categorical differences in White identity dynamics trickle down into distinct psychological and ideological repertoires.

We therefore consider intergroup inequality not only theoretically but also empirically when assessing intergroup relations. While research has reported attitudinal profiles of individuals regarding symbolic and material redress toward colonized people (Sibley & Liu, 2013), profiles distinguishing how White people entertain their dominant position while assessing their intergroup attitudes have not been researched. Considering how individuals deal with their dominant identity when addressing intergroup attitudes can prevent researchers from concealing the material context making up the intergroup setting and, thereby, from uprooting psychological outcomes from their ideological underpinnings (for a review of experimental

social psychology role in naturalizing Israeli settler colonialism in Palestine, see Hakim et al., 2023). Thus, we take on a relational approach to Whiteness whereby self and alter are considered.

Method

Constructs Validation. Using an additional sample along with the ones described below, we constructed and validated measures of White identities and Historical linking (see online supporting information).

Participants Sample 1. Three-hundred and twenty-two self-identified White Dutch participants were recruited through Prolific (47 % cis men and 50 % cis women, with 8 trans people). Their ages ranged from 18 to 73 years old ($M = 30.36$, $SD = 10.21$). Their political orientations ranged from left (1) to right (9) ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 1.74$).

Participants Sample 2. Two-hundred and forty-two self-identified White Dutch participants were recruited through Facebook advertisements (55.78% cis men and 42.14% cis women, with 4 trans people). Participants' ages ranged from 19 to 83 years old ($M = 64.48$, $SD = 11.16$). Their political orientations ranged from left (1) to right (9) ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.88$).

Measures. Participants indicated their agreement with statements on 9-point scales ranging from "1-Strongly disagree" to "9-Strongly agree".

White identities were measured with four items each for Proud Whiteness (e.g., "I see myself as a proud Dutch person of our ethnic heritage"; α range: .79-.82), Dissociated Whiteness (e.g., "I feel that my ethnic group does not have a significant impact on how I see the world"; α range: .68-.71), and Power-cognizant Whiteness (e.g., "I see myself as a White Dutch person with associated privileges because of my ethnic group membership"; α range: .76-.81). Ethnic identification was measured using four items from Luhtanen & Crocker's

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identity subscale (1992) (e.g., "My ethnic group is an important reflection of who I am."; α range: .7-.72). Lastly, historical linking of colonialism was measured via six items (e.g., "Colonialism has had a lasting impact in the form of today's racism"; α range: .9).

Legitimizing ideologies of racial inequalities were measured as follows: Color-evasion, four items (e.g., "People preoccupied with ethnicity forget that we are all just humans"; α range: .83-.87) (Knowles et al., 2009). Power-evasion, four items (e.g., "Racism is a problem in the Netherlands" (reverse-coded); α range: .86-.88) (Brown et al., 2013). Social dominance orientation, eight items (e.g., "Group equality should not be our main goal"; α range: .81-.83) (Unzueta et al., 2012); System justification, six items (e.g., "Most policies serve the greater good"; α range: .72-.79) (Jost & van der Toorn, 2012), and Meritocracy, three items (e.g., "Anyone willing to work hard has a good chance of succeeding"; α range: .85-.86) (Major et al., 2007).

Procedure. Participants completed political orientation and ethnic identification measures, followed up by the randomized White identities scale. The historical linking of colonialism scale and ideological measures were also completed thereafter, all items randomized. Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Review Board of [ANONYMOUS]. We recruited participants from different sources to assess the reliability of our findings across independent samples. Accordingly, each sample was independently analyzed.

Analytical Strategy. We used the package tidyLPA in R (R Core Team, 2021; Rosenberg et al., 2019) to test LPA solutions for White identities. We assessed models with one to seven profiles, constraining the variances of the indicators and residuals covariance to zero. We examined up to seven profiles for the sake of theoretical soundness. We selected the best fitting number of profiles using an analytic hierarchy process based on AIC, AWE, BIC, CLC, and KIC fit indices (Akogul & Erisoglu, 2017). We then compared the demographic

characteristics, historical linking, and ideological correlates of each profile by regressing each variable on the profiles' posterior probabilities. Tukey's HSD tests were used to assess significance differences among profile indicator means.

Results

The analytic hierarchy process on fit indices suggested five profiles for Sample 1 and four profiles for Sample 2 (see online supporting information). Means of White identities for the profiles in each sample are depicted in Figures 1 and 2. We then describe each profile, their demographic characteristics, associations with historical linking, and ideological correlates (see Tables 2 and 3).

Profiles Sample 1. We identified five Whiteness profiles ($N = 322$): As suggested by our qualitative observations, a first profile emerged by blending high prideful with high dissociated Whiteness, coupled with low power-cognizance ($N = 12$, 4%). We labelled this profile prideful-dissociated. As expected, a dissociated profile emerged ($N = 48$, 15%) displaying low pridefulness, high dissociated Whiteness, and low power-cognizance. Echoing our qualitative observations, a third profile emerged by displaying low pridefulness, high dissociated Whiteness, and mid power-cognizance ($N = 81$, 25%). We termed this one the dissociated-cognizant profile. Lastly, as expected, we found a power-cognizant profile ($N = 103$, 32%) showing low pridefulness, low dissociated Whiteness, coupled with the highest power-cognizance. Unexpectedly, an ambivalent profile was found ($N = 78$, 24%). We will not address it here for brevity (see Figure 1 and Table S11 in online supporting information).

Profiles Sample 2. We found four Whiteness profiles, replicating those theorized and found in Sample 1 ($N = 242$). A mixture between the prideful and ambivalent profiles emerged here ($N = 40$, 16.52%), however, by showing high pridefulness, mid dissociated Whiteness, coupled with mid power-cognizance. Still, we labelled it as prideful-dissociated

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given its analogous ideological patterns to the prideful-dissociated one from Sample 1. A dissociated profile also emerged ($N = 51, 21.07\%$) displaying low pridefulness, the highest dissociated Whiteness, coupled with low power-cognizance. A dissociated-cognizant profile was also captured ($N = 104, 42.97\%$) blending low pridefulness, mid dissociated Whiteness, and mid power-cognizance. Lastly, a power-cognizant profile emerged ($N = 42, 17.35\%$) showing low pridefulness, low dissociated Whiteness, and the highest power-cognizance (see Figure 2 and Table S12 in online supporting information).

Age, political orientation, and ethnic identification

We found that power-cognizant people were more likely younger and left-leaning. In contrast, prideful-dissociated participants were more right-wing and strongly identified with their ethnic group, in line with our expectations. Individuals from the dissociated-cognizant and dissociated profiles were moderately left-leaning and centrist, respectively. As expected, they were the least ethnically identified. The profiles differed significantly in political orientation and ethnic identification at $p < .001$ (see Tables 2 and 3). Lastly, power-cognizant people were more likely to identify as *wit* (68.9% in Sample 1, 57.1% in Sample 2), while dissociated and prideful individuals were the least likely.

Historical linking of colonialism and ideological correlates

For an overview of psychological and ideological correlates per Whiteness profile, see Table 4. Figure 3 depicts historical linking by profile. As expected, prideful-dissociated and dissociated profiles predicted low historical linking ($M_{Prideful1} = 3.51; M_{Prideful2} = 3.67; M_{Dissociated1} = 3.16; M_{Dissociated2} = 3.64$). The dissociated-cognizant profile predicted medium historical linking ($M_{Sample 1} = 5.67; M_{Sample 2} = 5.74$)—significantly less than power-cognizant profile in Sample 1 at $p < .001$. As expected, power-cognizant profile predicted high levels of historical linking ($M_{Power-cognizant1} = 7.04; M_{Power-cognizant2} = 6.39$).

Figures 4 and 5 depict ideological correlates by Whiteness profile in Sample 1 and 2, respectively. As expected, prideful-dissociated and dissociated individuals strongly endorsed legitimizing ideologies of racial inequalities (i.e., color- and power-evasion, system justification, social dominance, and meritocracy) while power-cognizant people showed the lowest endorsement. In Sample 2, however, the power-cognizant profile held the least social dominance along with the dissociated-cognizant profile. As for the rest of ideologies, the dissociated-cognizant profile predicted levels located between those shown by the power-cognizant profile, and the prideful-dissociated and dissociated profiles.

As for the relation between color and power-evasion, dissociated-cognizant profile predicted high color-evasion ($M_{Sample\ 1} = 6.19$; $M_{Sample\ 2} = 6.45$) coupled with low power-evasion ($M_{Sample\ 1} = 3.59$; $M_{Sample\ 2} = 3.36$). As suggested in the discussion of our qualitative findings, this mismatch between high color-evasion and low power-evasion echoes the subgroup of White people observed in Study 1 and in the U.S. (Mekawi et al., 2020) for whom acknowledging inequalities goes along with dissociating from Whiteness and, therefore, color-evasion. In contrast, power-cognizant profile predicted the lowest color-evasion ($M_{Sample\ 1} = 4.34$; $M_{Sample\ 2} = 4.91$) coupled with the lowest power-evasion in both samples at $p < .001$ ($M_{Sample\ 1} = 2.44$; $M_{Sample\ 2} = 2.60$).

General Discussion

European colonialism weighs on the lives of people in the former centers of the colonial empires till today. We adapted for the first time the White identities framework constructed in a settler colonial context, the U.S., to a European context, the Netherlands, as the center of a former colonial empire. We investigated the relationship between how White people manage their Whiteness and how they historically link colonialism with current racial

inequalities. Also, we explored how White identities were associated with ideologies legitimizing these inequalities.

In Study 1, we conducted structured interviews ($N = 24$) and confirmed that White Dutch people employed prideful, dissociated, and power-cognizant White identities, echoing previous findings and theorizing (Goren & Plaut, 2012; Knowles et al., 2014). As expected, we found that conveying pridefulness or dissociation from Whiteness was strongly related to unlinking colonialism from racial inequalities. In contrast, only those who critically identified with their racial-ethnic identity, i.e., the power-cognizant participants, linked colonialism strongly with racial inequalities. Unexpectedly, most participants either blended pridefulness with dissociation or dissociation with power-cognizance and only a few exhibited one single identity strategy. This observation contrasts with prior work addressing White identities as discreet constructs. Moreover, our findings suggest that dissociating from Whiteness was the most utilized identity strategy by blending with other strategies.

Drawing on our observations, in Study 2 we used surveys from 2 samples ($N = 564$) to uncover profiles of White people employing simultaneously identity strategies. We found four distinct Whiteness profiles: the prideful-dissociated profile, blending pridefulness and dissociation; the dissociated profile, exclusively dissociating from Whiteness; the dissociated-cognizant profile, combining dissociation with power-cognizance; and lastly, the power-cognizant profile, exclusively endorsing power-cognizance. As expected, both high and low identifiers, i.e., prideful-dissociated and dissociated profiles, exhibited the weakest historical linking and the strongest endorsement of legitimizing ideologies. Unexpectedly, the power-cognizant individuals were moderate identifiers instead of high identifiers. Yet, as we hypothesized, they showed the strongest historical linking coupled with the most system-challenging ideological features.

These findings contrast with traditional understandings of ingroup identification, whereby identifying with one's dominant group is associated with upholding higher prejudice and uncritically embracing the ingroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Consequently, identifying with the ingroup has been unequivocally associated with pridefulness. This not only conceals those individuals whose ingroup identification allows them to critically acknowledge their position in society, i.e., the power-cognizant profile, but also equivocally posits low identification as the correlate of lack of prejudice—that is, distancing as in dissociated Whiteness. Offering construct validity evidence of Whiteness profiles, our findings uncovered categorical differences in White identity dynamics that cannot be reduced to a one-dimensional ethnic identification. These categorical differences, in turn, trickle down to differences in historical linking and racial inequality legitimation (see Table 4).

Our findings expand on documented and theorized White identities with some unexpected results. In particular, we uncovered two unexpected profiles of White people, one blending pridefulness and dissociation and another blending dissociation and power-cognizance. Proudful-dissociated participants, on the one hand, showed how pridefulness in the Netherlands circumvents White supremacist undertones while still being associated with denying racial inequalities and the historical unlinking of colonialism. Dissociated-cognizant participants, on the other hand, evinced that acknowledging racial inequalities can also be coupled with dissociating from Whiteness, representing the largest proportion of participants. While dissociated-cognizant individuals displayed low ethnic identification coupled with high color-evasion and system justification endorsement as the dissociated profile, they showed strong acknowledgement of inequalities as power-cognizant people. As such, dissociated-cognizant individuals mirror profile-oriented research findings in settler colonial contexts, whereby people acknowledging racial inequalities coupled with upholding color-evasion were the most prevalent. Critically, these people were as reluctant to counteract racial

inequalities as blatant deniers were (Mekawi et al., 2020). Moreover, the dissociated-cognizant profile predicted statistically (Sample 1) and descriptively (Sample 2) lower mid-levels of historical linking than the power-cognizant profile, echoing those participants in Study 1 who reluctantly linked colonialism to current inequalities under the guise of objectivity while dissociated from their Whiteness. By blurring White racial-ethnic distinctiveness, the dissociated-cognizant profile arguably reflects White identity dynamics compatible with negating the relevance of colonialism to the present while endorsing the symbolic inclusion of colonized people (Sibley et al., 2008; Sibley & Liu, 2013).

Our results therefore distinguish two ways in which White Dutch people acknowledged racial inequalities. On the one hand, dissociated-cognizant people acknowledged inequalities by dissociating from their Whiteness. On the other hand, power-cognizant people acknowledged inequality by recognizing their Whiteness as privilege. All in all, power-cognizant people showed qualitatively (Study 1), statistically (Study 2, Sample 1) and descriptively (Study 2, Sample 2) stronger endorsement of historical linking of colonialism than dissociated-cognizant people. Accordingly, in Study 2, they showed stronger system-challenging attitudes than dissociated-cognizant people. Thus, our results showcase that endorsing a White-cognizant outlook was associated with appreciating group differences the most (i.e., lowest color-evasion), coupled with the strongest historical linking and system-challenging attitudes. Adapting the White identities framework to this former colonial empire, we demonstrate how White Dutch people can counteract the secluding of colonialism's consequences which have been portrayed as occurring elsewhere. By *temporally* linking colonialism to current racial inequalities, White Dutch individuals can manage their identity in order to also link distal elements *spatially* with present traces in the metropole. For example, they recognize that celebrated Dutch urban architecture was built

with colonial funds drawn from overseas exploitation, and therefore, accountability is to be held.

Colonialism was historically justified by White supremacist narratives, but explicit White supremacy in Europe became socially unacceptable after the defeat of fascism. Our study reveals that White Dutch individuals can legitimize racial inequalities through various identity strategies beyond overt White supremacy, either by distancing from their White skin color when taking pride in their racial-ethnic identity or by dissociating altogether from their group membership. This alleged absence of White supremacy has been used to downplay racism in the Netherlands (Wekker, 2016). Indeed, hierarchy-enhancing blatant racial discrimination coexists in Western contexts with system-justifying outlooks that better align with meritocratic liberal principles such as racial color-blindness (Knowles et al., 2009). Also, symbolically including minoritized groups by blurring White racial-ethnic distinctiveness can result in legitimizing current inequalities via negating the relevance of colonialism to the present (Sibley et al., 2008). By allowing to evade accountability, our findings demonstrate that dissociating from Whiteness can be considered a pervasive identity strategy in the Dutch context aligned with privilege maintenance (Täuber & Moughalian, 2021).

Practical Implications

Our results show that White people taking an identity-cognizant approach to intergroup relations are prone to link past oppression and present inequalities. Hence, our findings offer support for practitioners prioritizing an identity-conscious approach. Moreover, our findings may be harnessed by policies addressing racism to target White people strategically. For instance, for prideful-dissociated people, an essential aim of an intervention could be that they learn how their culture has been built by the influx of multiple racial-ethnic

groups and thereby counteract ethnonationalist nostalgia; dissociated people may benefit most from learning how social structures shape people's lives which could counteract meritocratic outlooks stripped from considering inequality; dissociated-cognizant individuals may benefit most from learning to acknowledge privilege instead of evading difference to protect their self-esteem; and power-cognizant people could benefit most from learning about concrete ways to undo privilege without tokenizing minoritized group members. Such interventions require a customized approach to have any effect. Experiments testing interventions are to devise to tailor anti-racist strategies for different profiles of White individuals.

Limitations and Future Directions

While Latent Profile Analysis can predict outcome variables, causality cannot be established. We believe that White identities and historical linking hold a bidirectional relation. In nudging different White identities, historical linking might be altered. Alternatively, priming historical linking might ignite identity strategies. Future research can test these relations experimentally and longitudinally (For examples of manipulating historical accounts see Sibley et al., 2008; Lastrego & Licata, 2010). Lastly, the non-representativeness of our samples limits generalizability.

Our measures are ecologically valid for Dutch speakers. Future research could adapt and validate these measures for use not only in other European countries with a history of colonial imperialism, but also in former colonies and settler colonial nations, where racial dominance might work differently. For instance, the metaphor of the melting pot or mestizaje, where the national project is tied to the mixing between colonizers and colonized indigenous people (e.g., countries in the Americas) might play a similar role as dissociated

Whiteness by glossing over racial-ethnic distinctiveness and, thereby, colonizers' heirs positioning (Walsh, 2019).

Conclusion

In examining how White people in a European context address racial inequalities in times of burgeoning discussions about colonialism, we found that White Dutch people exhibited different combinations of prideful, dissociated, and power-cognizant identity strategies. Moreover, White people exhibited categorical differences in combining identity strategies to entertain their dominant position in Dutch society. Extending on previous research on settler colonial settings, we uncovered two unexpected combinations of identity strategies, prideful-dissociated and dissociated-cognizant profiles of White people. In turn, people employing prideful and dissociated strategies were less likely to link colonialism and racial inequalities than White people who exclusively endorsed power-cognizance. Furthermore, power-cognizant people challenged current-day racial inequalities the most. Thus, we conclude by arguing that White people dissociating from Whiteness might equate its glorification in terms of legitimizing racial inequalities. By critically examining their Whiteness, in contrast, White people can acknowledge the weight of the past on the present and unsettle its enduring effects.

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Table 1. Hypothesized theoretical relations

	White Identity Strategy		
	Prideful	Dissociated	Power-cognizant
Ethnic identification	High	Low	High
Historical Linking	Low	Low	High
Color-evasion	Mid	High	Low
Racial inequality legitimization	High	High	Low

Table 2. Demographic and psychological characteristics of Whiteness profiles (Sample 1)

	Prideful- Dissociated (high-high- low)	Dissociated (low-high- low)	Dissociated -Cognizant (low-high- mid)	Power- Cognizant (low-low- high)	Ambivalent (mid-mid- mid)
N of respondents	12	48	81	103	78
% of respondents	4	15	25	32	24
Ethnic identification	$M = 4.87^a$ $SD = 1.43$	$M = 2.24^b$ $SD = 1.17$	$M = 2.66^b$ $SD = 1.30$	$M = 3.47^c$ $SD = 1.31$	$M = 4.10^b$ $SD = 1.44$
Mean age	36.6 ^a	32.2 ^{a b}	31.2 ^{a b}	27.8 ^b	30.6 ^{a b}
Likelihood female	0%	31.25%	53.0%	67.9%	43.5%
Likelihood <i>Wit</i>	25%	22.9%	53.0%	68.9%	38.4%
Political Orientation	6.08 ^a	4.85 ^b	3.60 ^c	2.78 ^d	4.47 ^b

Note: Below each Whiteness profile the level on each identity strategy is described as follows Pridefulness, Dissociation, and Power cognizance. Values in a row not sharing a superscript are significantly different at $p < .05$. Political orientation was coded as 1-Left to 9-Right.

Table 3. Demographic and psychological characteristics of Whiteness profiles (Sample 2)

	Prideful- Dissociated (high-mid-mid)	Dissociated (low-high-low)	Dissociated- Cognizant (low-mid-mid)	Power cognizant (low-low-high)
N of respondents	40	56	104	42
% of respondents	16.5	21	42.9	17.3
Ethnic identification	$M = 5.63^a$ $SD = 1.69$	$M = 2.83^b$ $SD = 1.34$	$M = 3.41^b$ $SD = 1.39$	$M = 4.47^c$ $SD = 1.84$
Mean age	67.65 ^a	63.85 ^{a b}	65.84 ^a	58.9 ^b
Likelihood female	35%	48.2%	39%	47%
Likelihood <i>Wit</i>	22.5%	17.8%	31.7%	57.1%
Political Orientation (1-Left to 9-Right)	5.37 ^a	4.48 ^b	3.02 ^c	2.88 ^c

Note: Below each Whiteness profile the level on each identity strategy is described as follows Pridefulness, Dissociation, and Power cognizance. Values in a row not sharing a superscript are significantly different at $p < .05$. Political orientation was coded as 1-Left to 9-Right.

Table 4. Summary of psychological and ideological correlates

	Whiteness profile			
	Prideful- dissociated	Dissociated	Dissociated- cognizant	Power-cognizant
Ethnic identification	High	Low	Low	Mid
Historical Linking	Low	Low	Mid	High
Color-evasion	High	High	High	Low
Racial inequality legitimization	High	High	Mid	Low