Answering extremity with extremity

A paradoxical thinking intervention for the unfreezing of extreme attitudes in the Black Pete issue

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Abstract

The Black Pete (BP) debate has grown into an intractable conflict in the Netherlands. The conflict is between individuals who are for or against the change of the appearance of BP. Particularly individuals having strong pro-BP attitudes are resistant toward conflict resolution. This research examined whether a paradoxical thinking (PT) intervention results in more unfreezing of held pro-BP attitudes. Unfreezing could lead to the re-evaluation of attitudes and could thereby lead to attitude change (Hameiri et al., 2019). Based on the research of Hameiri et al. (2018), this research examined whether the effect of the PT intervention on unfreezing was mediated by low levels of disagreement, high levels of surprise, and low levels of identity threat. Also was examined whether the PT intervention results in more unfreezing as individuals hold pro-BP attitudes with more confidence. In Study 1, 232 students were randomly assigned to the PT intervention or the control intervention. The results did not suggest that a PT intervention results in higher levels of unfreezing as students held stronger pro-BP attitudes. Similar to this, the results suggested no higher level of unfreezing for students that held these pro-BP attitudes with more confidence. A recommendation for future research is to add pre-measurements of conservatism to increase the likelihood that the sample is characterized by extreme attitudes. Study 2 had been discontinued because of the low response rate. A recommendation for future research is to find alternative ways to approach populations that show high levels of resistance.

keywords: PT intervention, attitudes, unfreezing, identity threat, surprise, paradoxical thinking

Foreword

For almost a year I devoted myself to this thesis. It is finally ready. I have delved into the Black Pete debate and the moral issues that are entangled within this debate. Although I belong to a minority group in the Netherlands, in the beginning of this debate even I felt a resistance to change. I have dived into the literature regarding the appearance of Black Pete and the movements that have grown out of this debate. I learned that determining the morality behind the appearance is not the greatest issue that should be solved. As a social psychologist, it is interesting to come up with alternatives to solve a conflict between social groups. Although I think that people who are involved in this conflict will sometimes hurt each other unintentionally and this cannot be prevented, I believe that change is near, and that we should welcome this change. I sincerely hope that my master's thesis will offer the reader insight, inspiration, and hope for everyone who embraces the diversity of Dutch society.

I want to thank Samra Zejnelagic for bringing me this fascinating topic. You have enriched me and my thesis with your constructive feedback and emotional support.

I want to thank my supervisor Madelijn Strick for always asking the right questions to organize my chaotic and sometimes overflowing thoughts. Without you and your expertise, this study would not have reached its full potential.

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Introduction

On the 5th of December, the return of *Sinterklaas* (Saint Nicholas) is celebrated annually by Dutch inhabitants. The celebration is a tradition where a white elderly male, Sinterklaas, visits the Netherlands and brings gifts for every child. He is accompanied by his servants, named *Zwarte Piet* (Black Pete). Sinterklaas appears as a white-bearded man dressed in a red robe and a miter hat, while Black Petes appear with their faces painted in black and lips colored in red, wearing a black afro-wig and golden earrings, and dressed in brightly colored clothes (Van Der Pijl & Goulordova, 2014). It is a well-loved celebration by all generations and for many years it has been celebrated peacefully in the Netherlands (Van der Pijl & Goulardova, 2014).

However, since 2011 a new and great wave of dissatisfaction broke out in the Netherlands regarding the appearance of the figure of Black Pete (Van der Pijl & Goulardova, 2014), who will now be addressed as BP. The parades that once were a joyous occasion, are now full of protesters, banners, and police-force (Bahara & Ezzeroili, 2019, 15 November). It is argued that the current tradition displays a seemingly white master/black servant relationship, which is based on the Dutch history of slavery (Van Der Pijl & Goulordova, 2014). A public debate has arisen between the two movements. One is the so-called *Anti Zwarte Piet*-movement, in which individuals propose a change in the appearance of BP. The other movement is called the *Pro Zwarte Piet* in which individuals are opposed to a change in the appearance of the figure of BP. While Anti-Black Petes follow the idea that the origin of BP is based on the Dutch history of slavery, Pro-Black Petes deny that there exists any form of a racial component in the appearance of BP (Van 't Spijker, 2019; Smith, 2014). Recently a Dutch poll measured the public's opinion on this matter, where only 26% voted for a change in appearance for BP (Klapwijk, 2019). This makes the pro-BP movement a majority group within the Netherlands. The debate about BP has grown to such an extent that it has become a national public debate (Van Der Pijl & Goulordova, 2014).

The course of this debate seems problematic. Various attempts have been made to distance the tradition from the black-faced appearances by introducing multi-colored *Rainbow Petes*, but individuals holding pro-BP attitudes argue that the black appearance of BP is innocent and that it is part of their culture (Van der Pijl & Gourdova, 2014), and dismiss racist associations in the appearance of BP (Essed & Hovenring, 2014). This tendency to be against

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change has been classified by Knowles and Riner (2007) as *inertial resistance*. It is characterized by being unmotivated to accept or achieve insight into a given issue (Messer, 2002). This inertial resistance is seen as a barrier to conflict resolution since new ideas or actions are effortlessly waved aside.

The debate is characterized by high levels of hostility and aggressive behaviors that in particular originate from Dutch natives (Van Der Pijl & Goulordova, 2014). The accusation that this tradition has racist elements, has evoked feelings of anger in a lot of Dutch natives (Van Der Pijl & Goulordova, 2014). Well-known celebrities, journalists, and politicians who publicly voiced criticism on the current appearance of the figure of BP have received insults and death threats from Dutch natives (Van Der Pijl & Gourdova, 2014). Even committee members of the United Nations received these death threats when they confirmed that the figure of BP contains stereotypical racist associations (Jouwe, 2015; Van der Pijl & Gourdova, 2014). A reason for these aggressive behaviors is that the identity of Dutch natives has been threatened by the debate (Wekker, 2006). As individuals defend the figure of BP, they may be portrayed as being prejudiced or racist (Van Breen, 2017). Perceiving a threat to one's identity from an outgroup can result in having even more extreme beliefs (Corneille, Yzerbyt, Rogier & Buidin, 2001). Within this issue, individuals holding pro-BP attitudes tend to hold these attitudes to an extreme extent (Slagter, 2014; Aartsen, 2016), and that these extreme attitudes originate from the experiences of moral identity threat (Van Breen, 2017).

As a consequence of perceiving identity threat, this group is more prone to negatively evaluate the outgroup who poses this threat (Stephan, Ybarra, & Bachmann, 1999) and to have more negative attitudes held toward minority groups (McLaren, 2003). Ultimately, these negative attitudes can lead to more intergroup discrimination (McConnell & Leibold, 2001). In identity-related conflicts, collaboration for change seems more difficult to establish, since beliefs exist that mutually beneficial outcomes will require tradeoff and compromises that contradict the core of their identity (Wade-Benzoni, Hoffman, Thompson, Moore, Gillespie, & Bazerman, 2002). Ultimately, the discussion regarding the BP debate shows an increase of polarization between citizens, and increases of negative attitudes towards non-native Dutch citizens (Bergman & Ploegmakers, 2014). The polarization has been strengthened by the possibility to participate in the debate through social media, where individuals can declare their extreme opinions relatively anonymously (Hoekstra, 1999). The debate can be seen as an intractable conflict, as it is characterized by violence, the incompatibility of the desires between the two groups, and that the conflict is perceived as a zero-sum game, where one

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group can only gain something if the other group loses something (Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998).

Social issues like these may be solved by attitude change, because this may eventually lead to behavioral change (Eagley & Chaiken, 1993; Kraus, 1995). Nevertheless, attitude change is particularly problematic; in the context of an intractable conflict (Hameiri, Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2019); in cases where beliefs and attitudes have moral (Haidt, 2001; Skitka, 2010) and identity-related (Eagley & Chaiken, 1993) foundations; when beliefs and attitudes are socialized in individuals since they were born (Bar-Tal, 2017); and when beliefs and attitudes are held with high confidence (Eagley & Chaiken, 1993; Kruglanski, 2004). In these cases the resistance toward change is stronger, which leads to stronger emotional reactions and intolerance toward others who think differently (Hameiri et al., 2019). The tradition has been well socialized in Dutch society because the tradition dates back to the 15th century (Boer-Dirks, 1992). Dutch habitants view the figure of BP as as one of the most important cultural traditions by Dutch habitants (Kozijn, 2014), as a symbol of Dutch culture and identity (Smith, 2014), and the appearance of BP as an indispensable element of the tradition (Euwijk & Rensen, 2017; Van Stipriaan, 2014).

A conventional way to achieve attitude-change is by giving counter-arguments. This looks ineffective in the BP-issue, as giving counter-arguments leads to even stronger feelings of frustration, anger and discontent by individuals who perceive injustice (Bal & Van Den Bos, 2018). The *Social Judgement Theory* may explain why this approach is ineffective in the context of holding extreme attitudes. According to this theory, individuals rate messages between varying latitudes of what is most acceptable and what is most unacceptable (Sherif, Sherif, & Nebergall, 1965). The likelihood that a message will or will not fall within this latitude of acceptance depends on how congruent or incongruent a given message is with previously held beliefs of an individual. If one accepts a message, then the cognitive process of unfreezing is possible (Hameiri et al., 2018; 2019). This refers to the process that one is aware of one's own held beliefs and that one will try to examine or re-evaluate the necessity of changing these held beliefs (Lewin, 1951; Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2009). Unfreezing can lead to openness for alternative information, which is a readiness to recognize and search for new information about a particular topic (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2013).

Following this reasoning, giving counter-arguments would be ineffective as an attitude-change strategy, as it presents individuals with information that is incongruent with their held beliefs and attitudes (Hameiri, Nabet, Bar-Tal, & Halperin, 2018). Hameiri et al.

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(2018) argue that incongruent messages lead to more disagreement, which might prevent that these messages are considered. More importantly, giving incongruent messages seems not appropriate in cases where attitudes are entangled with one's identity, for the reason that incongruent messages may lead to identity threat. If one perceives a discrepancy between their held identity and the incongruent messages, one may feel threatened. Again, the perceived identity threat will lead to less likelihood to accept new ideas and considerations (Hameiri et al., 2019).

A new approach, the paradoxical thinking intervention has been suggested for individuals who hold extreme beliefs and attitudes, which now will be addressed as PT intervention. It is a method that can address these beliefs and attitudes by providing an extreme, exaggerated, or illogical message that is congruent with the beliefs of an individual (Hameiri et al., 2019). This intervention appears to be effective for extreme beliefs and attitudes as providing a congruent message reduces the possibility that one will perceive discrepancies between the messages and own held beliefs or attitudes (Hameiri et al., 2019). Another feature of this intervention is that these extreme, exaggerated, or illogical messages can evoke a sense of surprise in recipients. A sense of surprise forces deeper processing and acceptance of the given message (Petty, Fleming, Priester, & Feinstein, 2001; Ziegler, Diehl, & Ruther, 2002). Providing congruent messages, the messages will be experienced as less threatening, and less defensive mechanisms will be provoked (Hameiri et al., 2020). Together, this increases the likelihood of unfreezing. In contrast to this, for individuals who hold their beliefs and attitudes to a less extreme extent the intervention appears to be less effective as these PT messages will presumably fall outside their latitude of acceptance (Hameiri et al., 2019).

The effectiveness of this intervention has been proven before in the context of an intractable conflict between the Israeli and Palestinian in the study of Hameiri et al. (2018). Individuals holding conflict-supporting beliefs or attitudes to an extreme extent regarding the Israelian-Palestinian conflict showed more unfreezing in a PT intervention compared to giving counter-arguments. Hameiri et al. (2019) state that the PT intervention has proven to be particularly effective with individuals holding these attitudes with great confidence (Hameiri et al., 2018).

Although both groups are resisting to accept the other person's viewpoint, this research will focus particularly on interventions targeting the pro-BP attitudes of individuals. The identity of this majority has been threatened most by the BP-issue (Wekker, 2006). This can

result in even more extreme beliefs (Corneille, Yzerbyt, Rogier, & Buidin, 2001), which makes attitude change or conflict-resolution even more difficult. In short, the PT intervention looks to be effective in cases where people hold beliefs and attitudes with extremity, or with high confidence. This intervention tries to circumvent psychological defences which would normatively make them resist any information that would contradict their own held beliefs, and by creating a sense of surprise which triggers more unfreezing.

Nevertheless, there are still uncertainties regarding the underlying mechanisms of the PT approach and the applicability of the intervention in other intergroup conflicts. This is why Hameiri et al. (2018) recommended to extend the external validity by examining the PT intervention in other intergroup conflicts. The current research will contribute to the existing literature on this topic by exposing individuals holding pro-BP attitudes to PT messages. Finally, this research aims at making a clearer distinction of the effectiveness of a PT intervention regarding individuals holding pro-BP attitudes by more or less confidence because Hameiri et al. (2019) argue that having more attitude confidence predicted more unfreezing. The findings of this study can give practical implications on how to handle this growing conflict in the Netherlands and will contribute to existing research on paradoxical thinking.

<div align="center">The present study</div>

A PT intervention has been suggested as an intervention that elicits the process of unfreezing with individuals holding pro-BP attitudes to an extreme extent by not stirring too much disagreement with the PT messages, and by the evocation of surprise. The research question is formulated as follows: 'Can a paradoxical thinking intervention predict higher levels of unfreezing to the extent that individuals hold extreme pro-BP attitudes compared to giving counter-arguments?'. Based on the literature of Hameiri et al. (2018) a PT intervention predicts less disagreement, more surprise, and less identity threat. This in turn predicts more unfreezing. Hameiri et al. (2019) argue that the PT intervention will be less effective in individuals being less confident of their attitudes.

The main question was answered in two studies. For Study 1, students were exposed to PT messages or to counter-arguments. Hereafter the level of unfreezing, the levels of disagreement, the levels of surprise, and the levels of identity threat were measured. For Study 2, individuals who are members of online pro-PB communities on Facebook were similarly exposed to PT messages or counter-arguments. These communities let one connect with others who share similar interests and emotional commitment (Reich, 2010). However, the

design of Study 2 has some alterations. First, the PT messages of this study contained a higher degree of extremeness. Second, the measurements of the level of disagreement, the level of surprise and the level of identity threat were excluded from Study 2.

The reason for this exclusion is that individuals who are members of pro-BP communities seem to be more involved in the BP-issue, and express relatively more extreme messages and conflict-supporting beliefs (Slagter, 2014). Social networking communities are built to support presentation of self (Zhang, Jiang, & Carroll, 2012), the identity could be more entangled in this population and therefore result in more resistance or negative feelings. This could mean that they are less accessible and ready to answer these questions about the underlying mechanisms of the PT theories.

Although the population of students may not hold this identity to an extreme extent, yet the results of the research report of the Dutch institute *Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau* (2018) show that the majority of the sample between 16 and 34 years had relatively similar opinions as older generations. The results suggest that the majority held beliefs and attitude about the fact that the tradition should remain unchanged because the Dutch majority wants to keep the appearance of BP, and because it is part of their national identity.

The hypotheses for Study 1 are formulated as follows:

Hypothesis I – To the extent students hold stronger pro-Black Pete attitudes, the PT messages will result in a higher level of unfreezing than the control messages (see Figure 1)
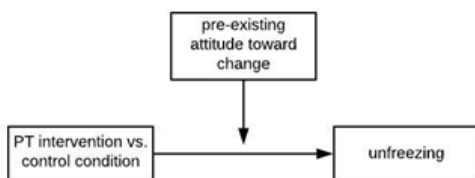

Figure 1. *A research model for unfreezing with students*

Hypothesis II – Lower levels of disagreement, higher levels of surprise and lower levels of identity threat mediate the relation between the PT messages and higher levels of unfreezing (see Figure 2)
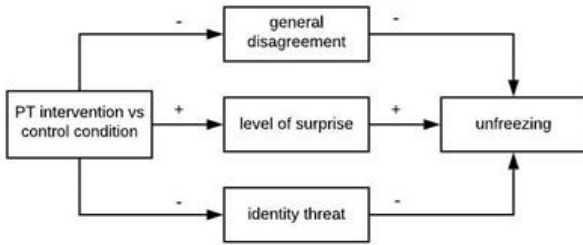
Figure 2. *A research model for unfreezing with mediators*

Hypothesis III – To the extent students hold pro-Black Pete attitudes with higher levels of confidence, the PT messages will result in higher levels of unfreezing than the control messages (see Figure 3)
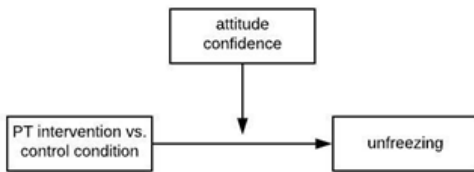

Figure 3. *A research model for unfreezing with a covariate*

And in Study 2:

Hypothesis IV - To the extent members of pro-Black Pete communities hold stronger pro-Black Pete attitudes, the PT messages will result in higher levels of unfreezing than the control messages (see Figure 1)

Study 1

Method

Participants

Thirty-four (4.5%) participants were excluded due to the fact they have not completed the survey. The final sample consisted of 232 participants. The characteristics of the sample have been presented in Table 1. Data was collected through an online survey over the course of two weeks through my social network. Additionally, an invitation to participate in this research was posted on a Facebook page named *Experiment UU Page.* This is a page where students can post or sign up for experiments in exchange for PPU. In exchange for participation, students could earn one €10 Bol.com voucher. Participation was voluntary and consent was obtained from each student.

Table 1. *Frequencies and percentages for demographic characteristics of participants*

Variable	N (232)	% of total
Gender		
Female	123	53,0
Male	104	44,8
Other	5	2,2
Age		
18-28	212	91,4
29-38	13	5,5
39-48	3	1,3
49-58	1	0,4
Unknown	3	0,4
Education		
University	109	47,0
HBO	44	19,0
VWO/HAVO	60	25,5
VMBO	6	2,6
other	13	6,9
Native/non-native		
Native	167	72,0
Non-native	65	28,0

Design.

This study had a between-subject design: PT versus control. The dependent variable unfreezing is continuous, and the independent variables condition, disagreement, surprise, threat, and attitude confidence are discrete.

Materials.

Pilot study.

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Eventually, twelve PT messages and eleven control messages have been constructed. The goal of this pilot study was to select which of the twelve extreme messages and which of the eleven control messages would eventually be used for the two studies. The pilot study has been conducted through Google Survey. The participants were instructed to put twelve PT messages in chronological order of messages they found most surprising, extreme, or illogical to messages they found least surprising, extreme, or illogical. Based on the results of this pilot study, five messages that were considered most surprising, extreme, or illogical were selected for Study 2. The following five messages were selected for Study 1. The PT messages were differentiated for the two studies because the populations would presumably differ to the extent that they hold attitudes to an extreme extent. After this, participants were instructed to put ten control messages in chronological order of arguments they found most compelling to arguments they found least compelling. Based on the result of this pilot study five control messages that were most often chosen as most compelling or well-substantiated were chosen both for Study 1 and Study 2. The final sample of the pilot study consisted of 11 people from my social network. Participants who took part in the pilot study were excluded from participating in the main experiment. These eleven participants were selected from the same sample as Study 1. For more information about the pilot study, see Appendix 3.

Manipulation and control materials.

In the PT condition, participants viewed five hypothetical Facebook messages that were meant to evoke a sense of surprise, but with a congruent message that would not contradict one's held beliefs or attitudes. The composition of these messages has been based on the analysis of real-life encountered Facebook messages in online pro-BP communities. To cover the most common issues and topics that clash between the pro-BP and anti-BP movements, recurring topics and themes had been extracted from the discourse analyses of Haren (2019) and Aartsen (2016), and the media-analysis of Slagter (2014) about the way that the BP issue has been framed in Dutch talk shows and on Facebook. To evoke a sense of surprise the content was compared with the PT guidelines of Hameiri et al. (2019). An example of one of these guidelines is that the coherence in these messages are made more extreme, illogical, or absurd. An example of one PT message is '*If Black Pete is no longer black, then this tradition is no longer original. The characteristics of having a black painted face and wearing black curls lead to an original tradition. They have a false excuse and are just as deceptive as the Dutch cabinet*'.

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In the control condition, participants were asked to view five hypothetical Facebook messages which contained counter-arguments about the BP issue. The arguments include rebuttals of arguments generally given by individuals holding anti-BP attitudes. These control arguments were based on rebuttals and counter-arguments given in a study of Wekker (2016) and in a study of Haren (2019). An example of one control message is '*The assumption that you should not change something that has been around for a long time is not a good basis for an argument. This is more like a fallacy to maintain a habit. For example, we used to only have male suffrage in the Netherlands for a long time. That this has always been the case is no reason to keep something as it is forever'*. See Appendix 2 for the complete list of manipulations.

Measures.

Attitude toward appearance Black Pete.

For the explicit measure of pre-existing attitudes, participants indicated their level of agreement regarding the statement 'The appearance of the figure Black Pete should change*'.* Participants responded to this item using a 6-point Likert scale (from 1 = "Strongly disagree" to 6 = "Strongly agree"; Cross, 2005).

For the following variables, participants responded to all survey items using a 6-point Likert scale (from 1 = "Not at all" to 6 = "To a very large extent").

Attitude Confidence.

Attitude confidence was measured with the question 'How confident are you about the answer you just provided before?' to seek the extent that the participants are confident about their previously stated attitude (Krishnan & Smith, 1998).

General disagreement.

Participants ranked two items of the general disagreement scale of Hameiri et al. (2019) indicating the extent to which they generally disagreed with the presented messages (i.e., "The message conveyed in these messages do not represent me, or reflect my attitudes" and "The messages represent reality in a biased manner"; $\alpha = .607$).

Surprise.

The 4-item Surprise scale of Hameiri et al. (2018) was used and assesses the perceived levels of surprise (i.e., "The messages surprised me," "I did not expect to see what was displayed in the messages," "Viewing the messages left me quite amazed," and "The messages confused me"; $\alpha = .709$).

Identity threat.

The 3-item Identity threat scale of Hameiri et al., (2018) was used to indicate to what extent participants feel threatened by the messages (i.e., "*This type of message threatens me*," "This type of message threatens my worldview," and "This type of message threatens how I perceive the Dutch society"; $\alpha = .866$).

Unfreezing.

The unfreezing linear scale of Hameiri et al. (2018). Participants ranked one single item on a linear scale (from 0 = "Not at all" to 100 = "Very much so") to the question 'To what extent did the comments make you re-evaluate your beliefs concerning the Black Pete conflict?'.

Demographics.

The questionnaire included measurements of the participants' age, gender, educational attainment, the country of birth, and the country including from his or her parents and to what ethnic background the participant identifies. For more information, see Appendix 1.

Procedure.

First, all participants were instructed to read and sign informed consent. Then, they were randomly assigned to the between-subjects manipulation. In both conditions, participants were asked to report their attitude and attitude confidence and hereafter viewed the messages corresponding to their assigned condition. Then, participants were instructed to answer the scales assessing *general disagreement, surprise, identity threat,* and *unfreezing*. An open-ended question ('*Do you have any comments, or would you like to add something about the Facebook messages or the questions that have been asked?*' was added to the survey because the given messages could evoke negative feelings in participants. This question allowed participants to address any issues concerning the questionnaire. At last, the participants filled out the demographic measures.

Research ethics.

Participants were exposed to certain stimuli that could evoke negative feelings as feelings of anger or feelings of threat. Permission to conduct this study has been granted by the Ethical Commission of the Faculty of Sciences.

Analysis.

The data has been retrieved from Qualtrics and the data was prepared and checked using *SPSS Statistics 2016*. First, personal data (e.g., e-mail addresses) have been removed

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from the survey so no personal information of participants could be deducted from the given responses. Then, all participants who had not completed the whole survey were removed. A chi-square analysis was conducted to seek whether individuals holding any pro-BP or any anti-BP attitudes were equally distributed between the two conditions. The individual was considered to have more pro-BP attitudes if 1, 2, or 3 had been reported on the attitude scale. The individual was considered to have more anti-BP attitudes if 4, 5, or 6 had been reported on the attitude scale. Then, the required assumptions for a multiple regression as well as mediation and a moderation were checked (e.g., impact of outliers, normality, homogeneity of variances, sphericity; Field, 2013). The assumptions were not violated. No cases were excluded based on checking Mahalanobis, Cooks and the leverage values. A t-test has been conducted to seek whether the two conditions significantly differ in levels of unfreezing.

<div align="center">Results</div>

Preliminary analysis

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine whether individuals with pro-BP or anti-BP attitudes are equally distributed over the PT and the control condition. The relationship between these variables was not significant, X^2 (1, $N = 232$) = .192, $p = .661$. The results suggest that there is no significant difference between the ratio of individuals holding pro-BP and anti-BP attitudes, which means that the sample was equally distributed.

A t-test was conducted to examine whether the two conditions differ in levels of unfreezing. The 117 individuals in the PT condition did not report higher levels of unfreezing ($M = 13,20$, $SD = 17,80$), than the 115 individuals ($M = 10,96$, $SD = 20,34$) in the control condition, $t(230) = -.893$, $p = .373$.

Hypothesis I

Hypothesized was that the PT messages will result in higher levels of unfreezing to the extent that students hold stronger pro-BP attitudes, compared to the control messages. A moderation analysis has been conducted through Hayes' PROCESS Model 1. Unfreezing was the dependent variable, condition was the independent variable, and attitude was the moderator. The results suggest a non-significant positive relationship between condition and unfreezing ($\beta = .031$, 95% CI [-11.123, 11.185], $t = .006$, $SE = 5.66$, $p = .996$). Further, there was a significant negative relationship between attitude and unfreezing ($\beta = -2.05$, 95% [-3.924, -.167], $t = -2.15$, $SE = .95$, $p = .033$). The results suggest that the PT messages predicted more unfreezing to the extent individuals hold more pro-BP attitudes. When attitude and condition were tested together in one model, no positive significant relationship has been found between unfreezing, condition and attitude ($\beta = .393$, 95% [-2.178, 2.964], $t = .301$, SE = 1.31, $p = .764$). Overall, the results suggest that the hypothesis was not confirmed.

Hypothesis II

Hypothesized was that individuals who have lower levels of disagreement, higher levels of surprise, and lower levels of identity threat mediate the relationship between the paradoxical thinking messages and unfreezing. Expected was that the PT messages predict lower levels of disagreement, higher levels of surprise, and lower levels of identity threat in individuals. A PROCESS mediation analysis has been conducted to examine this model. Total, direct and indirect effects are listed in Figure 4. In step 1 of the analysis, the total effect

<div align="center">15</div>

of condition on unfreezing (path c') appeared to be non-significant, $c' = 2.24$, $t(232) = .89$, 95% CI [-2.704, .117], $p = .373$. This suggests that the hypothesis was not confirmed.

In step 2 of the analysis, the indirect effect of condition on disagreement, level of surprise and identity threat (path $a1$, $a2$ and $a3$) has been examined. For the first mediator, a non-significant relationship between condition and disagreement has been found ($\beta = -1.79$, $t(232) = -10.77$, 95% [-2.1188, -1.4633], $p < .001$). For the second mediator, a non-significant relationship between condition and level of surprise has been found ($\beta = -.42$, $t(232) = -4.64$, CI [-.6067, -.2293], $p < .001$). For the third mediator, a significant relationship has been found between condition and identity threat ($\beta = 1.29$, $t(232) = -8.56$, CI [1.5808, .9890], $p < .001$).

In step 3 of the analysis, the indirect effects of the mediators disagreement, level of surprise and identity threat on the dependent variable unfreezing have been examined (path $b1$, $b2$ and $b3$). For the first mediator, non-significant effect of disagreement on unfreezing has been found ($\beta = -1.70$, $t(232) = -1.68$, 95% CI [-3.702, .300], $p = .095$). For the second mediator, a significant effect of surprise on unfreezing has been found ($\beta = 5.22$, $t(232) = 2.81$, CI [1,560, 8.878], $p < .005$). Overall, this means that PT messages and unfreezing are mediated by more surprise. For the third mediator, a non-significant relationship between identity threat and unfreezing has been found ($\beta = 1.84$, $t(232) = 1.50$, CI [-.5821, 4.2690], $p = .136$).

The last step of the analysis (path c) could not be performed because of the non-significant effect of path c'. Overall, the hypothesis was not confirmed.
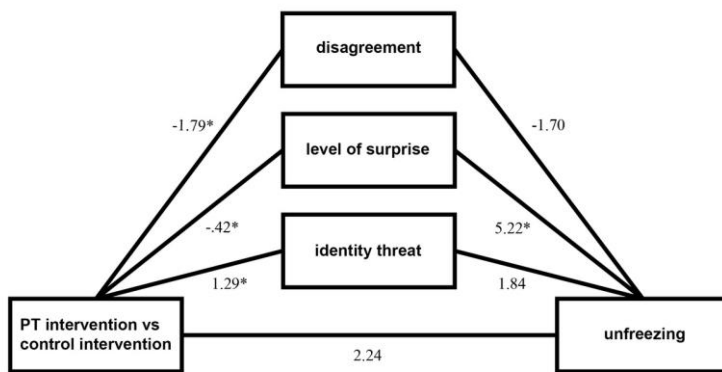
Figure 4. Standardized regression coefficients and the standard error means of the mediation analysis between condition and unfreezing, with the mediators' disagreement, level of surprise and identity threat

Hypothesis III

Hypothesized was that to the extent that students hold pro-BP attitudes with higher levels of confidence, the PT messages will predict higher levels of unfreezing than the control messages. A one-way ANCOVA has been conducted. Unfreezing was the dependent variable, condition was the between-participants factor, and confidence was the covariable that was calculated to a z-score. For testing hypothesis 3, only participants holding pro-BP attitudes were selected. Thus, to perform the analysis, individuals scoring 1, 2, or 3 on the attitude scale were included in this analysis as this indicates a relatively more pro-BP attitude. The covariate, confidence, was significantly related to the level of unfreezing, $F(1, 88) = 40.82$, $MS = 17697.33$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta2 = .324$. The results suggest that as participants held pro-BP-attitudes with more confidence, both type of messages predicted more unfreezing. However, there was no significant effect of attitude after controlling for the effect of confidence $F(1, 88) = .034$, $MS = 14.83$, $p = .854$, $\eta2 = .000$.

Study 2

For study 2, the purpose was to test the effectiveness of the PT intervention with individuals of pro-BP communities. It has been hypothesized that to the extent that students hold pro-BP attitudes with more confidence, the PT messages will result in a higher level of unfreezing than the control messages. Through a private message, 470 members of online pro-BP communities have been invited to participate in this study. Unfortunately, the study has been discontinued since there was a low response rate (0,8%). Thirteen individuals opened the survey and six people filled in the survey. The layout and operation of this study were similar to Study 1. The psychological measures were excluded to prevent feelings of resistance or any negative feelings as feelings of threat, as this group shows more extreme attitudes and resistance toward change.

Discussion

The PT intervention is a relatively new concept in the literature of attitude-change strategies, and is suggested to be highly applicable in the context of an intractable conflict where individuals hold beliefs and attitudes to an extreme extent. The current BP-debate appears to be an intractable conflict as it is characterized by violence and the incompatibility of the desires between groups. The present study examined whether a PT intervention led to higher levels of unfreezing to the extent that individuals hold stronger pro-BP attitudes compared to giving counter-arguments. There were three hypotheses. Note, that none of the following hypotheses could be confirmed entirely, as the preliminary analysis demonstrated that the PT messages did not significantly predict more unfreezing.

The hypothesis that viewing PT messages would predict more unfreezing as students hold stronger BP-attitudes, was not confirmed. Results suggest that PT messages did not significantly lead to more unfreezing in individuals holding more pro-BP attitudes. However, as participants held more pro-BP attitudes, both types of messages made them more likely to revise their beliefs. The hypothesis that the PT messages result in less disagreement, more surprise, less identity threat, and eventually in more unfreezing, was not confirmed. The results suggest that the PT messages significantly resulted in less disagreement. Further, as participants held more pro-BP attitudes, experiencing more feelings of surprise predicted more revision of held beliefs. There were some unexpected results that contradict the given hypothesis. Unexpected was that the PT messages significantly predicted less feelings of surprise and more feelings of identity threat. Finally, the hypothesis that the effect of PT messages would predict more unfreezing as these pro-BP attitudes are held with higher confidence, was not confirmed. The results suggest that PT messages did not predict more unfreezing as participants held pro-BP attitude with more confidence. By way of contrast, being more confident significantly predicted more revision of beliefs in individuals holding pro-BP attitudes. Even though this was significant, statistical power was relatively lost by the decision to exclude participants holding more anti-BP attitudes from this analysis.

Overall, this research cannot replicate the findings of Hameiri et al. (2018). One interesting finding was that having more pro-BP attitudes, both type of messages made them more likely to revise their beliefs. One possible explanation may be that the current sample was characterized by an openness to alternative information. As individuals are more open, they are more willing to seek incongruent information (Hameiri et al., 2019), which may have led to the fact that giving counter-arguments were effective in unfreezing attitudes. Nevertheless, it is not clear how this unfreezing was manifested for both type of interventions.

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Unfreezing means that attitudes may shift to less extreme attitudes, but this also means that attitudes may shift to more extreme attitudes.

This study could not show that PT messages lead to more unfreezing as individuals show less disagreement, more surprise and less identity threat. A possible factor that might have played a role, is that the messages were too extreme. In a novel article of Hameiri et al. (2020) the results suggested that PT messages that are phrased too extreme may automatically be rejected. When a message is framed too extreme, this might impede the persuasiveness of a message, and less cognitive examination occurs (Craig & Blankenship, 2011). As these PT messages were less examined, this could have interfered in the evocation of a sense of surprise in individuals. From a different perspective, it could also be argued that the PT messages were not too extreme, but that the current sample did not hold beliefs and attitudes to an extreme extent. Results in the current sample showed that a number of students held pro-BP attitudes, but these attitudes were relatively centred. Attitudes that are more centred are generally less extreme, which decreases the likelihood that an extreme message will fall into the latitude of acceptance (Hameiri et al., 2019). In turn, the message will not be cognitively examined.

Following this reasoning, one would expect that the individuals will disagree more with the PT messages, as these messages did not fall into the latitude of acceptance. However, the results of this study suggest the opposite, as individuals significantly disagreed less with the PT messages than the control messages. One factor that may explain this unexpected result is the low reliability scores of the disagreement scale. Participants reported that they had difficulties with understanding how to fill out these questions. The scale contained double negatives in connection with the response format which makes interpretation more confusing.

This research has some limitations. The first limitation is that the use of exclusively one single-item scale of unfreezing was insufficient for detecting differences between groups. Hameiri et al. (2018) measured their positions on three conflict-supporting beliefs to different ethos of conflict themes (e.g., *To what extent did the movie clips make you doubt the saying: 'Israel is the ultimate victim of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict'?*". Second, a limitation may be that the level of conservatism had not been measured. In the study of Hameiri et al. (2018), only participants who scored high on conservatism were included in the PT study. Generally, individuals who score high on conservatism are generally more closed minded, and are more hardened in their positions (Rokeach, 1960). Closed mindedness has been associated with having the tendency to reject incongruent information (Dal Cin, Zanna, & Fong, 2004), which can impede the effectiveness of a PT intervention. As there was no distinction between the

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level of conservatism, it may be that the sample was characterized by low levels of conservatism. This could explain that participants who held more pro-BP attitudes, both types of messages made them more likely to revise their beliefs. Second, a limitation may be that this study did not have multiple time measurements, which increases the likelihood to find significant differences for unfreezing. As attitudes are relatively stable over time and context (Wood, 2002), one could argue that attitude change takes time and effort. Additionally, the study of Hameiri et al. (2018) showed that one single exposure to PT messages could not predict unfreezing. In addition to this, the current scale could not determine the direction of the reported unfreezing. As individuals experience unfreezing, the individuals can shift towards, or can shift away from the position in the expressed message (Atkins, Deaux & Bieiri, 1976; Peterson & Koulack, 1969).

Study 2 had been discontinued because of the low response rate. There are some possible explanations for the low response rate. One may be that the private messages have not arrived or have not been seen by participants. In this online platform, when one is not connected with an others' profile, one is not able to view whether others have explicitly seen the messages that have been sent. Another explanation is that individuals did not want to participate in this study, and ignored the invitation. Derived from this speculation, a limitation may be that members of the online pro-BP communities might experience a high level of resistance to participate in this research. Individuals who hold extreme pro-BP attitudes mostly descend from conservative right-wing movements (Roks & Schoot, 2019; Gravenberch, & Helder, 1998). In the contexts of individuals from right-wing movements seem to have a significant distaste of the elite and the status quo (Hulst, Van den Bos, Robijn, Romijn, & Schroen, 2018). One of the participants from this research requested to know the purpose of this study to ensure that the information would not be applied to lawsuits concerning current trials of individuals holding pro-BP attitudes. As this research was associated with the University of Utrecht it may be that these participants did not participate in this study, for the reason that they may be relatively right-winged and distrustful regarding the status quo.

Based on these limitations, a number of recommendations were made for future studies. Recommended is to design a pre-study to exclude participants who score low on conservatism for the main study. This would increase the likelihood that the sample is characterized with more extreme attitudes. Further, recommended is to integrate multiple time measures, as attitude change needs repeated exposure and more time (Hameiri et al., 2019). Lastly, adding more items for the measurement of unfreezing of individuals gives higher

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probability of detecting attitude-change. When more unfreezing scales are added, one could give a more differentiated perspective and increase the likelihood to detect significant differences in different kinds of unfreezing.

The results of these two studies show that a PT intervention is a complex intervention to carry out. It might be valuable to collaborate with other parties that seem more able to carry out the research. For example, a party that has more right-wing ideals which fit with the ideals of the population, but is willing to reach conflict-resolution for both groups. An alternative is to design the intervention as a campaign, as Hameiri et al. (2018) did in the first study. Study 2 suggests that it is difficult to reach a population that is characterized by extreme attitudes and high resistance. Different groups of people demand different approaches to attitude-change, which is why Hameiri et al. (2020) plead that one needs to know the characteristics of one group in order to increase the likelihood that a PT intervention is effective in unfreezing attitudes and to learn how the underlying mechanisms are involved for these different groups.

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APPENDIX 1. Informed consent, measures, and demographics of the questionnaire from the pilot study,

Informed consent

Page1: Geachte deelnemer,

Voordat u aan het onderzoek mee kan doen, leest u alstublieft de onderstaande introductie. Het onderzoek gaat over de verschillende houdingen ten opzichte van het uiterlijk van Zwarte Piet, waarbij u de geldigheid van een reeks berichten zult beoordelen. Ik ben benieuwd naar uw mening over deze berichten. Er zijn geen goede of foute antwoorden, het gaat enkel om uw mening.

Voor dit onderzoek worden een aantal van uw persoonlijke gegevens verzameld, zoals uw leeftijd, opleidingsniveau en land van herkomst. Uw gegevens worden anoniem verwerkt. Dit betekent dat uw antwoorden op de vragen op geen enkele manier naar u kunnen worden herleid.

Deelname aan dit onderzoek is vrijwillig. U kunt uw deelname aan het onderzoek op elk moment beëindigen, zonder uitleg en zonder negatieve gevolgen. Als u uw deelname beëindigt, zal ik de tot dat moment verzamelde gegevens gebruiken, tenzij u mij anders informeert.

Het onderzoek zal ongeveer 7 minuten duren. Voor het afronden van de vragenlijst, kunt u 0,5 PPU vergoed krijgen. Ook zullen er 2 Bol.com tegoedbonnen t.w.v. 10 euro verloot worden onder de geïnteresseerde deelnemers die het onderzoek afronden!

Voor vragen of opmerkingen over het onderzoek, kunt u terecht bij Elma Nokic (e.nokic@students.uu.nl) of bij mijn supervisor Madelijn Strick (m.strick@uu.nl)

Wanneer u instemt, betekent dit dat u de bovenstaande informatie hebt gelezen en begrepen.

Page2: Er volgen nu twee vragen die gaan over uw houding ten opzichte van Zwarte Piet.

Page3: Het uiterlijk van Zwarte Piet zou moeten veranderen

1 = helemaal mee oneens, 2 = mee oneens, 3 = enigszins mee oneens, 4 = enigszins mee eens, 5 = mee eens, 6 = helemaal mee eens

Page3: Hoe zeker ben je van het antwoord dat je zojuist hebt gegeven?

1 = helemaal niet, 2 = in geringe mate, 3 = tot op zekere hoogte, 4 = tamelijk hoog, 5 = in hoge mate, 6 = in zeer hoge mate

Page4: U krijgt 5 berichten te zien die op Facebook hebben kunnen staan. Lees deze goed door. Hierna volgen er 10 vragen met betrekking tot deze Facebook-berichten. Druk op OK om verder te gaan.

Page5: De Facebook-berichten hebben me verrast

Ik had niet verwacht te zien wat er in de Facebook-berichten werd getoond

Het bekijken van de Facebook-berichten liet me behoorlijk versteld staan

De Facebook berichten brachten me in verwarring

De boodschap die in de Facebook-berichten worden overgebracht, vertegenwoordigen mij of weerspiegelen mijn houding niet

De Facebook-berichten geven de werkelijkheid op een bevooroordeelde manier weer

Dit soort Facebook-berichten komen bedreigend op mij over

Dit soort Facebook-berichten bedreigt mijn wereldbeeld

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Dit soort Facebook-berichten bedreigt hoe ik de Nederlandse samenleving zie

1 = helemaal niet, 2 = in geringe mate, 3 = tot op zekere hoogte, 4 = tamelijk hoog, 5 = in hoge mate, 6 = in zeer hoge mate

Page6: In hoeverre hebben de Facebook-berichten u ertoe gebracht uw overtuigingen met betrekking tot het Zwarte Piet-conflict opnieuw te evalueren?

1 = helemaal niet, 100 = heel erg

Page7: Heeft u eventuele opmerkingen, of wilt u zelf nog iets kwijt over de Facebook-berichten of de vragen die gesteld zijn? Zo nee, dan kunt u op 'verder' klikken.

Open-ended question

Page8: Ten slotte volgen er nog vragen over de persoonsgegevens.

Wat is uw leeftijd? (18-28, 29-38, 39-48, 49-58, 59-68, 69-78, 79-88)

Wat is uw geslacht? (man-vrouw-anders)
an (Lwoo – vmbo-b – vmbo-k – vmbo-t – havo – vwo – Gymnasium – HBO opleiding – Universitaire opleiding – anders,namelijk..)

Bent u in Nederland geboren? (ja/nee)

Zijn een van uw ouders in Nederland geboren? (beide ouders/één van mijn ouders/geen van beide ouders in Nederland geboren/ wil ik niet zeggen)

Welke etnische afkomst beschrijft u het beste (kies er een)? (wit, zwart, mediterraan, aziatisch, anders, namelijk, wil ik liever niet zeggen)

Page9: Heeft u nog eventuele opmerkingen of wilt u iets kwijt over het onderzoek?

Open-ended question

Page10: Hartelijk dank voor het meedoen met dit onderzoek! Dit is het einde van het onderzoek. Wilt u nog kans maken op een Bol.com tegoedkaart of de PPU

vergoed krijgen? Vul dan uw e-mailadres in. Wilt u de PPU vergoed krijgen? Vul dan uw studentnummer in. Dit is het einde van de vragenlijst.

Open vraag

APPENDIX 2. Pilot study of the PT messages and the control messages

PT messages

1. Omdat een traditie altijd al zo is geweest, dan moet zo een traditie ook altijd zo blijven. Geen enkele traditie moet op geen enkele manier veranderen. Als hun het hier niet bevalt, dan moeten ze hun spullen pakken en terug gaan naar hun eigen oorlogsland of een ander land.

2. Waarom beledigd worden door een cultuur die je niet kent? We laten jullie jullie zijn, laten jullie ons onszelf zijn? Alle immigranten die naar NL zijn gekomen zijn gekomen voor een beter leven, waarom willen ze nu dan iemands cultuur veranderen? Ze nemen hun eigen problemen mee en maken van NL precies het land waarvoor ze gevlucht zijn. Nederland wordt verpest.

3. Toen bij het evenement The Passion onze Jezus zwart was en de andere keer Maria zwart was, hebben we toen de christenen horen klagen? Nee, dat heet verdraagzaamheid. Dit betekent dat je tolerant en respectvol bent naar anderen toe en anderen in hun waarde laat. Daar kunnen de anti-pieten nog iets van leren!

4. Het is nog niet aangekondigd, maar anti-pieten gaan straks ook onze rust verstoren op Koningsdag. Carnaval en Kerst zullen worden afgeschaft. Alleen maar omdat een aantal bezetters in ons land onze echte geschiedenis niet willen erkennen. Allemaal door een niet-bestaande associatie tussen de slavernij uit de geschiedenis en Zwarte Piet.

5. Als zwarte piet niet meer zwart is, dan is deze traditie ook niet meer origineel. Juist die zwart geschminkte gezicht en die zwarte krullen leiden tot een originele traditie. Ze hebben een vals excuus en zijn net zo bedrieglijk als het kabinet.

Control messages

1. Bericht 1: 'De aanname dat iets dat al heel lang bestaat en je het hierom niet moet veranderen, is geen goede onderbouwing van een argument. Dit lijkt meer op een drogreden om zo een gewoonte aan te houden. Zo hadden we vroeger in NL een lange tijd alleen mannenkiesrecht. Dat dit altijd al zo is geweest, is geen reden om iets voor altijd te houden zoals het is.'

2. Bericht 2: 'Ik kom zo vaak tegen dat men zegt dat het sinterklaasfeest niet meer gevierd mag worden. Maar geen een anti-zwarte piet beweging heeft ooit beweerd dat Sinterklaas niet meer gevierd mag worden. Er wordt gewoon gepleit voor wat aanpassingen in het uiterlijk van zwarte piet, die veel trekjes heeft van onze slavernijgeschiedenis.'

3. Bericht 3: 'Ik snap het argument 'als het je niet bevalt, dan rot je maar op naar je eigen land' niet zo goed. 500 jaar geleden vonden inwoners in Afrika dit net zo goed van de Nederlanders, die hun land kwamen bezetten. Die mochten hun tradities ook niet houden. De meesten zitten hier door onze voorouders en zeker niet vrijwillig. Dus het recht om te blijven en spreken hebben ze wèl..'

4. Bericht 4: 'Je kan juist wel het historische stereotype beeld van de zwarte mens in het uiterlijk van zwarte piet zien. Niet voor niets hebben er teksten bestaan als 'ook al ben ik zwart als roet, ik meen het toch goed'. Alsof zwart gelijkstond aan het hebben van slechte bedoelingen.'

5. Bericht 5: 'Wat, je hebt er moeite mee dat je niet weet hoe je het je kinderen zou vertellen? De andere kant lijkt me nog net lastiger: hoe ga je je kinderen vertellen dat zwarte piet zwart is geworden door de schoorsteen, terwijl er helemaal geen schoorstenen meer zijn? Hoe ga je ze vertellen dat zwarte piet door de schoorsteen ineens rode lippen en zwart kroeshaar heeft?'

APPENDIX 3. Pilot study results and questionnaire

Link to pilot study:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1qJxEXFCHz90QMVwVPePEjumlPsTOjehhZ4fag1ljgM8/edit

Sample

The final sample of the pilot study consisted of 11 people from my social network (5 women and 6 men) with $M = 22,1$ years. 27% held a more pro-Black Pete attitude, 9,1% was neutral and 63,7% held a more anti-Black Pete attitude. From the sample, 22% finished a university education, 22% HBO, 22% MBO and 33% HAVO/VWO. Participants who took part in the pilot study were excluded from participating in the main experiment. The demographics of the participants in the pilot sample were similar to the final sample of the study.

> **Commented [1]:** wat zei ik over similarity?

Method

Hameiri et al. (2019) stated in the PT guidelines that extreme, illogical and absurd sentences evoke a sense of surprise in individuals. Twelve messages were created for the PT manipulation and eleven for the control condition. Two least surprising PT messages were excluded from the study and six control messages were excluded. The most surprising messages were used in Study 1 and the following five hereafter were used in Study 2. For both studies, the same control messages have been used.

> **Commented [2]:** vage beschrijving

Questions pilot study

1. Ben jij voor het behouden van zwarte piet of voor het veranderen van de uiterlijk van zwarte piet?

2. Nu volgen er argumenten vóór het behoud van zwarte piet. Lees deze even door. Ik zou graag willen dat je in chronologische volgorde aangeeft welke reactie je het meest extreem, verrassend of niet-logisch vindt, tot welke je het minst extreem, verrassend of niet-logisch vindt. (voorbeeld: C-A-D...)

3. Er volgen weer allerlei argumenten vóór het behoud van zwarte piet. Geef weer aan welke reactie je het meest extreem, verrassend of niet-logisch vindt, tot welke je het minst extreem, verrassend of niet-logisch vindt. (voorbeeld: C-A-D...)

4. Dit zijn tegenargumenten die vaak worden gegeven als onderbouwing waarom zwarte piet zou moeten veranderen. Vink de beste 5 argumenten aan (de argumenten die jij het best onderbouwd vindt)

5. Welke vraag lijkt jou een betere manier om deze Engelse vraag te vertalen 'to what extent did the comments make you re-evaluate your beliefs with respect to the Black Pete conflict?

6. Wat is je geslacht?

7. Wat is je hoogst genoten opleiding?

8. Wat is je leeftijd?