Hearing the unheard:

A qualitative insight into the meaning and consequences of feeling (un)heard as a group in society

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Abstract

Various groups in current day societies around the world feel unheard by their government, other institutions (e.g., universities or companies) or their society at large. In news coverage about these groups, feeling unheard is often linked to (violent) protesting, populist voting, and even conspiratorial thinking. Interestingly, disregarding these important societal consequences, there is a lack of empirical research into what it means to feel unheard or heard as a collective, what are the consequences of this experience, and whether it has the same meaning and similar consequences for groups with different positions in society. We therefore aimed to gain a qualitative, participant-driven understanding of this experience through interviews (N_{total} = 61) with participants belonging to five different groups in the Netherlands that purportedly felt collectively unheard. Based on inductive thematic analyses, we define feeling collectively heard as "the experience of being able to directly or indirectly express one's group's identity and situation to others that respect the group and are motivated to know and understand its experiences". The results further show that feeling collectively unheard can have important intra- and interpersonal and intra- and intergroup consequences, ranging from giving up one's group identity to seeking out fellow group members for social support, and ranging from voicing in protest to becoming silent. We discuss the findings and their implications in light of the broader social psychological literature.

Keywords: feeling heard, collective, inductive thematic analysis, society

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The past decade has seen a surge in protests across the Western world (Brannen et al., 2020). These protests range from peaceful, such as climate change activists gluing themselves to artwork (Wang, 2023) and Black Lives Matter activists taking to the streets (Carthan, 2020; Zaveri, 2020), to more hostile forms of action, such as European farmers blocking highways with tractors and setting car tires on fire in response to stricter nitrogen emission measures (ANP, 2022). The protesting groups' declarations and the media reports about them, suggest that these groups protest because they collectively feel unheard by their government or society at large (D'Arcy, 2014; Leeson, 2022). This is reminiscent of the famous quote of Martin Luther King, Jr. (1968) "*a riot is the language of the unheard*".

These examples suggest that diverse groups of people feel insufficiently heard for different reasons, some in response to what can be considered structural disadvantage, e.g., people of color meeting discrimination, and some can be considered more incidentally disadvantaged, e.g., farmers confronting new emission measures. Crucially, however, we do not yet know what it means to people to feel collectively heard or unheard. It appears to be a *shared* experience, but does that mean that "I" do (not) feel heard because I am a member of a group, e.g., a climate activist, farmer, or that "we" are (not) heard, e.g., as climate activists, farmers? Also, the examples suggest that groups often feel unheard by a more powerful outgroup or entity, such as government or society at large, that puts them in a disadvantaged position. There is a rich literature looking into the experiences of marginalized or stigmatized groups in society. We know a lot about, for example, injustice, social exclusion and discrimination (e.g., Richman & Leary, 2009). But does feeling unheard mean the same? And, if that is the case, why do people rather refer to their experience as "feeling unheard"?

It is imperative to understand what feeling collectively (un)heard means, since it not only concerns protesting minorities or marginalized groups, but has also been connected to various forms of societal disengagement that could span large parts of Western societies. Populist parties appear very effective in gaining popularity by explicitly stating that they are there to represent the unheard and defend them against the corrupt establishment that does not care about the will of the people (Mudde, 2004; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). For example, in his acceptance speech during the 2016 presidential elections, Donald Trump proclaimed "I am your voice", referring to the "forgotten men and women" of America (CBS New York, 2016). Other than populist voting, there are indications that feeling collectively unheard might be a driving force between declining electoral turnouts (as Blais et al., 2014 found for not feeling represented). Feeling collectively unheard might even stimulate people to disengage from society altogether and withdraw into an alternate reality constructed of conspiratorial thinking (as Douglas et al., 2019; Graeupner & Coman, 2017 found for feeling left out or excluded). It thus appears that large parts of Western societies feel unheard and this might be associated with societal unrest, a crumbling participatory democracy and increasing social division (as also suggested in recent public opinion surveys, e.g., Miltenburg et al., 2023). To turn the tide, we need to know what these people would need to feel collectively heard. There is also a need to get a more precise understanding of what it does to people when they have the impression that the group with which they identify feels insufficiently heard. This we can only learn by asking people themselves.

The current paper therefore aims to develop a qualitative, participant-driven understanding of the meaning and consequences of feeling collectively (un)heard across different groups in society. For this purpose, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with participants belonging to five groups that allegedly feel unheard in Dutch society. We ask groups that feel *un*heard since people are generally better able to pinpoint

what they miss. The five groups are: 1) people that identify as asexual (i.e., do not experience sexual attraction; “aces” hereafter), 2) Dutch citizens living close to a refugee shelter (AZC in Dutch; “citizens” hereafter), 3) Indo-Dutch people whose parents fled from Indonesia (a former Dutch colony) to the Netherlands in the mid nineties, 4) international University students with diverse cultural backgrounds, and 5) Dutch students belonging to the so-called “pechgeneratie” (“bad luck generation” in English) that do not get financially compensated for their studies. This sample provides a good reflection of the range of unheard groups in Dutch society. The sample is highly diverse, not only in terms of demographics (age, gender, nationality, education, sexual orientation), but also in terms of position in society and therefore reasons for feeling unheard. Some groups can be considered structurally disadvantaged and feel unheard due to being treated differently based on inherent and permanent characteristics that set them apart from the majority (some visible, such as skin color, some invisible, such as sexual orientation). Other groups are more incidentally disadvantaged and feel unheard due to a (temporary) situation, such as a refugee shelter or adapting to a new culture. Further, some groups are clearly dependent on an authority, such as government or University, and ask for concrete changes to policy (the students and citizens), while others appear more concerned with their general treatment in society (the Indo-Dutch and aces). Lastly, some groups just arrived in the Netherlands for a temporary stay (the international students), others settled here permanently decades ago (the Indo-Dutch), or are native Dutch (the citizens, Dutch students and most aces).

Through asking this diverse set of people what it meant to them to feel (un)heard as part of their group by a relevant outgroup, and to what extent and how this affects their behavior, we aim to answer the two central research questions of this paper: What does feeling collectively heard mean to people? And what are the consequences of feeling

collectively unheard? We will additionally explore whether feeling (un)heard means the same and has similar consequences for groups with different positions in society.

Meaning of feeling collectively heard

As indicated before, feeling collectively unheard might be related to the extensively studied experiences of feeling rejected based on one's group membership. As has been noted by Richman and Leary (2009), there are many diverse terms to refer to this same underlying experience, such as ostracism, exclusion, rejection, discrimination, stigmatization, prejudice, bullying and humiliation. Heeding this observation, we will consider these concepts together. These phenomena can be summarized as being treated differently and often more negatively because of being a member of a certain, often minority, ingroup by another, often majority and/or more powerful, outgroup. These negative treatments can be experiences of disadvantage or relative deprivation where people feel they get less than they deserve compared to other groups or to their past treatment (Smith et al., 2012). This disadvantage can be structural – pervasive and permanent – or more incidental – relatively recent and temporary (Van Zomeren et al., 2008; Van Zomeren, 2015). Being treated differently and more negatively communicates to group members that they do not belong to "the rest" (often of society) and/or that this "rest" considers them of less value or as not mattering (Flett, 2022).

Feeling unheard could refer to similar experiences of feeling rejected based on one's group membership (e.g., as a farmer, person of color). The other way around, feeling heard might be related to feeling included and respected by "the rest". But we would argue that feeling collectively heard requires an independent investigation for two main reasons. First, the fact that people themselves use "feeling unheard" to describe their experience, already warrants an in-depth study of this construct. What is it that people mean by using this term and what is it that they need to feel more heard? Second, there is reason to suspect that

feeling collectively heard differs from feeling socially included. The emerging empirical and theoretical work on feeling heard in interpersonal (one-on-one or small group) interactions, shows that, to feel heard, people do not only require attention and respect from their interaction partner(s), but also need to experience voice: be able to say what one wants to say, empathy: the impression that the other person takes one's perspective, and a sense of shared understanding: "we understand each other" (Roos et al., 2023). This suggests that one can feel included by others but still feel unheard due to a lack of voice or a lack of understanding. It is further plausible that people feeling collectively unheard, do not necessarily want to be included in the unhearing outgroup, but might "simply" want be able to make themselves known to and understood by this outgroup.

Feeling collectively heard might thus be related to feeling included and as such also tap into people's fundamental needs (for belongingness, control, meaningful existence; Williams, 2009). In fact, feeling interpersonally heard has been described as a fundamental human need in and of itself (Collins, 2022; Roos et al., 2023; Templeton & Wheatley, 2023). Feeling heard can be different from inclusion related concepts in that it might also involve a sense of collective voice and (emotional) understanding by and of other, more powerful, collectives. This remains to be seen, however, also considering that many diverse groups can feel unheard for many different reasons: is it at all possible to uncover *the* meaning of feeling heard or is its meaning context-dependent?

Consequences of feeling unheard

Besides the meaning of feeling collectively heard, we aim to gain empirical insight into the consequences of feeling insufficiently heard. For this, it might be informative to look at what we know about how people react to feeling socially rejected and excluded, which has mostly been studied at the individual level. First, these experiences evoke strong negative emotions (even physical pain; Eisenberger et al., 2005) and can lower the self-esteem of the

individual (for a review see Richman and Leary, 2009). This might be similar for feeling collectively unheard since it has already been shown that feeling interpersonally unheard is a negative experience that can reduce people's self-esteem (Roos et al., 2023).

Besides these emotional reactions, three classes of behavioral reactions to feeling socially rejected and excluded have been distinguished (Richman & Leary, 2009). A first prominent reaction is reaffiliation attempts where people seek social connectedness, often with the perpetrator but also with others that can provide acceptance and support (Maner et al., 2007). This could also take the form of seeking emotional support form fellow ingroup members (Stroebe et al., 2019). A second prominent reaction to social rejection is antisocial behavior towards the perpetrator to defend oneself or take revenge (Twenge et al., 2001). In a similar vein, feeling interpersonally unheard makes people more defensive and less open-minded in interaction (Roos et al., 2023; Itzchakov et al., 2017). A third and last category of behavioral reactions to social rejection and exclusion is avoidance of and withdrawal from the perpetrator to prevent further hurt (Richman & Leary, 2009). Similarly, we know that people feeling interpersonally unheard will try to avoid a next conversation with the same other(s) (Roos et al., 2023; Itzchakov et al., 2024). We might see similar behavioral reactions to feeling collectively unheard: people might seek acceptance from the unhearing outgroup or seek social support from the unheard ingroup, people might further engage in collective actions and take revenge, and/or people might (collectively) distance themselves from the unhearing outgroup (e.g., government, society).

As noted by Richman and Leary (2009), which of the reactions to social rejection occurs is dependent on various factors, such as the availability of alternatives, perceived injustice versus legitimacy of the rejection, the perception of the situation as pervasive and stable or changeable (also see collective efficacy; Van Zomeren et al., 2008), and the permeability of group boundaries (Branscombe et al., 2011; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). From

these literatures it follows that collectives might also react differently to feeling unheard, depending on their social standing vis-à-vis other groups in society. This is the second aim of this study: besides learning what different groups need to feel collectively heard, we also ask them how they cope with feeling collectively unheard.

Methods

Design

We conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with individuals belonging to a diverse set of groups in Dutch society that we expected, based on media coverage and their disadvantaged position, to feel collectively unheard. We interviewed members of *un*heard groups because people tend to be more sensitive to undesirable experiences (negativity effect, e.g., Peeters & Czapinski, 1990) and might be better able to pinpoint what they miss.

Participants

The sample consisted of a total of 61 participants aged between 17 and 91 years old; 31 female, 23 male and 7 other, distributed over five groups: 11 Indo-Dutch elderly, 10 Dutch students from diverse educational levels, 10 inhabitants of municipalities with AZCs, 15 International Bachelor or Master students studying in the Netherlands, and 15 asexual people. For each group, we aimed for a sample size between 10 and 15 participants since research shows this range is often required to achieve data saturation (Guest et al., 2006; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). See Appendix 1 for a more detailed overview of the demographics per group.

The data were collected by three of the authors together with two trained research assistants (in the context of their Master's thesis). Each interviewer was responsible for the recruitment and interviews of one group. All five interviewers were well-informed about the (historical) situation of the group they interviewed, either through having close relationships with people belonging to the group (Indo-Dutch; aces), being a member of the group themselves (Dutch and international students), or reading news articles and policy documents

about the group (citizens). Participants were recruited in various ways: via recruitment messages on social media, personal network engagement, actively approaching people in Facebook groups, and snowballing. The recruitment message informed prospective participants that the interview would be about their experiences of being heard as [international student, asexual person, Indonesian-Dutch person, Dutch student, inhabitant of a municipality with (plans for) an AZC] by [the government, society, the University system], so we did not specifically recruit individuals that reported to feel collectively unheard. The study was approved by the Ethical Committee of [MASKED FOR REVIEW]. Written as well as verbal Informed Consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation.

Procedure

The interviews were conducted in November 2022 in a location of the participants' choosing. Of the interviews, 36 were held face-to-face and 24 via an online video conversation or a regular phone call. The participants could decide on the exact location of the face-to-face interviews, which was mostly their home or a quiet public area (e.g., library, coffee shop). Also depending on the participants' preferences, the interviews were conducted in Dutch (45) or English (16). The interviews took on average 38:07 (*SD* = 12:35; range = 16:08 to 73:20) and were audio-recorded.

Prior to the interviews, participants received the study information either via email or at the interview location. They were then asked to sign an informed consent form. At the start of the interview, the interviewers first repeated the study information verbally and asked participants to provide a verbal statement of informed consent after the recording started.

The interview protocol consisted of seven blocks with different aims, see Appendix 2 for the full English version. In the first block, participants were asked a couple of demographic questions, depending on their target group. The second block of questions aimed at learning what feeling heard means to participants. To this end, participants were first

asked whether they felt heard or not by the relevant outgroup (government, society, University) as a member of their ingroup. We then asked participants to explain why this was the case and describe an example of both a situation in which they did feel heard and a situation in which they did not feel heard. In the third block, interviewers asked some target group specific questions concerning issues that might be related to feeling heard (e.g., the role of stigma, the effect of political apologies and compensation, the role of social media). The purpose of the fourth question block was to map the consequences of feeling (un)heard. Here, interviewers asked whether the experience of feeling (un)heard affected participants' daily life and in what way. Participants were also asked about the effect that feeling (un)heard had on themselves and on their relationship with the relevant outgroup. The fifth block contained questions about the actions that participants thought they themselves, their ingroup and the relevant outgroup could take to make them feel more heard. This was aimed at learning about the antecedents of feeling heard while at the same time giving extra insight into the consequences of feeling unheard (since that would be the motivator for these actions). The sixth block was a set of prompts to help participants think about feeling collectively (un)heard by asking them about factors that, based on related literature, might be connected to the experience: voice, influence, representation, attentive listening, empathy, respect, mutual understanding and effort. In case these topics were not yet mentioned by participants themselves, we asked participants whether they thought these concepts also played a role in feeling (un)heard and what these concepts meant to them. Lastly, in the seventh block, participants were given room to discuss any remaining issues and questions, and thanked for their participation in the study. Participants were not debriefed since we fully disclosed the study's purposes before the interviews started.

Since we are interested in participants' independent definitions of feeling heard and its consequences, we focused our analysis on the second block for the meaning of feeling heard,

and on the fourth and fifth blocks for the consequences of feeling unheard. We only coded participants' statements in response to our prompts in the third and sixth blocks when they clearly indicated that these aspects were important in shaping their feeling (un)heard experiences. We did not distinguish between (the meaning and consequences of) feeling heard versus unheard experiences in the analyses, since the results suggested these can be considered largely two sides of the same coin.

Data Analysis

The interview recordings were transcribed verbatim using GDPR compliant automated transcription tools (e.g., Microsoft Word Online). The resulting transcripts were manually corrected and modified to guarantee proper transcription and to remove identifiable information (e.g., names). Subsequently, the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti was used to code the interview transcripts. Considering that the aim of this research was to form a participant-led definition of feeling collectively heard and learn about the consequences that participants themselves experienced, we performed an inductive thematic analysis on the data. This means that the themes emerged from the data rather than being deduced from prior literature. For this, we followed the procedure as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2012).

The five interviewers first performed a rough analysis of their own set of interviews. We chose to not do this collaboratively as we wanted to get an accurate understanding of feeling heard from each group's own perspective, which might be particular to that group. The interviewers read through the interviews to identify a first set of themes for the meaning of feeling heard (see Appendix 3). With this in mind, the first author (the interviewers' Master's thesis supervisor) then performed the thematic analyses on each group separately. She reread all the interviews, applied open coding and clustered the codes, first into higher-level codes and then into themes. She coded separately for the meaning of feeling heard and its consequences (see Appendix 4 for an overview). Informed by these themes and the themes

identified by the five interviewers, the first author subsequently deduced themes for the meaning and consequences that were recurrent across all groups. See Appendix 5 and 6 for an overview of the final themes and subthemes, and Appendix 7 for a specification of the meaning of the final themes per group.

Results

The results will be presented in two parts, in accordance with the two research aims of this paper: Part I addresses the meaning and Part II covers the consequences of feeling collectively (un)heard. Contrary to expectations, some participants (especially in the Indo-Dutch group) indicated at the start of the interview that they *did* feel heard, or never thought about it. Later on in these interviews it became clear, however, that also these participants did feel unheard at times. As indicated before, we did not distinguish between feeling heard and unheard experiences since these appeared to be two sides of the same coin. In line with our conceptualization, we describe our findings in terms of (what people need to) feeling collectively heard. For the consequences, we rather focus on people's reactions to feeling *un*heard.

Results Part I: The meaning of Feeling Heard

Concerning the meaning of feeling heard as a collective, five recurrent themes emerged: Voice, Awareness, Understanding, Respect, and Responsiveness. Notwithstanding this overlap between the groups, there also was some variation between groups in the exact meaning of the themes, which adds nuance and depth to our understanding. Notably, this variation was mostly along the lines of authority-driven or structural factors versus more interpersonal or cultural factors. We will now describe and define all themes in turn. Figure 1 below shows a schematic overview of the themes and subthemes. See Appendix 5 for illustrative quotes per subtheme and Appendix 7 for the specification per group.

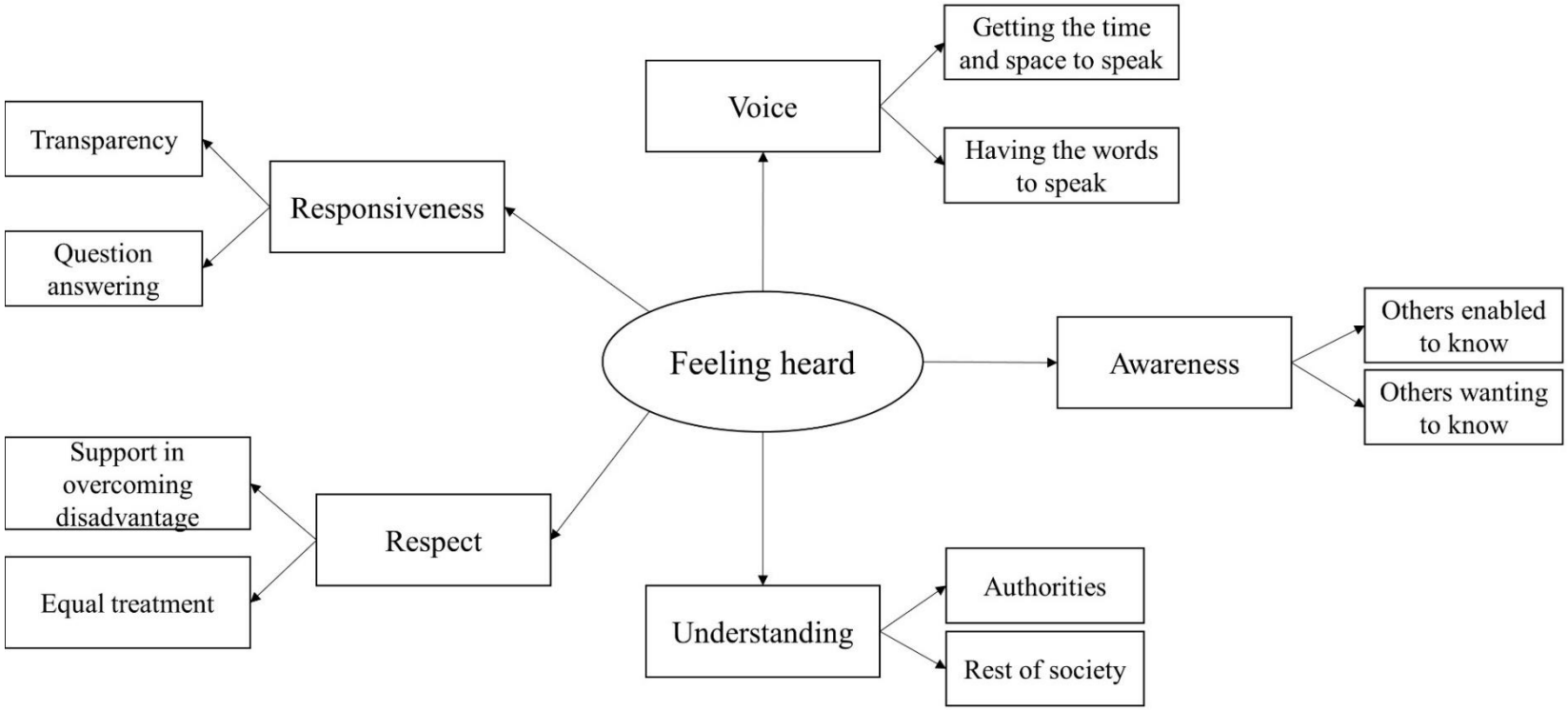

Figure 1. A schematic representation of the themes and subthemes that emerged concerning the meaning of feeling collectively heard.

Voice: being enabled and able to express the collective identity and situation

Voice is a first prominent theme that surfaced in all groups, and mostly early on in the interviews. This theme revolves around participants' perceptions of their group's ability to express their group's identity and/or situation. Participants talked about various barriers to or enablers of this collective voice, which can be classified as being either structural or cultural and will be elaborated upon below. Interestingly, all groups mentioned the importance of interpersonal interactions in fostering their sense of voice on a collective level. Importantly, this one-on-one contact did not need to take place with participants themselves but could also be accomplished via a group representative. So, participants could voice either directly (one-on-one) or indirectly (representative) in an interpersonal context.

First, participants talked about the structural factors of being provided with enough and the right space and time to express their concerns and needs, either directly or indirectly. The citizens and (Dutch and international) students considered it the authority's responsibility to provide the infrastructure for their group's questions and comments, for example at citizen participation evenings ("*inspraakavonden*" in Dutch) or through student surveys. Besides being given the space to express, timing seemed important for these groups: citizens and students mentioned that they should be enabled to voice *before* the authority made the decisions concerning their group. Participants appeared to see this as an indicator of sincerity. When they were invited to voice while the authorities already seemed to have made the decision, participants experienced this as a charade meant to silence them by letting them voice in vain. The experience that their voice is considered and has potential influence thus seemed to be essential.

The Indo-Dutch and aces (asexual participants) stressed a second type of voice barriers or enablers. These participants mentioned that they did not always have the words to express themselves. The Indo-Dutch participants not only talked about language barriers to

voice, but also about "Indo silence" ("*Indisch zwijgen*" in Dutch). This is the cultural phenomenon that the Indo-Dutch are not supposed to talk about their history, also not with close others. As a consequence, these participants felt it was mostly their own fault that they were not heard. Rather than internal culture, many aces indicated that they used to be unable to express their feelings since they were not aware of the existence of asexuality. But, once they learned about asexuality and as such found the words to voice, they still felt unable to talk about it due to the taboo surrounding asexuality and talking about sex in general. They tended to attribute this to the lack of representation or inaccurate representation in various societal domains, especially education, healthcare and the media. They felt their story was not told, or only told in a one-sided manner, and that this prevents aces from finding the words to express their identity.

Awareness: others being able and motivated to know the collective identity and situation

A second theme that was recurrent in all groups is awareness. Participants wanted their collective voice to be paid attention to in order for their group's identity and/or situation to be known by people outside their group. Participants in all groups mentioned that these others lacked accurate knowledge about their group, or were even completely unaware its existence. This ignorance was attributed to others either not being *enabled* to know or not *wanting* to know, which can again be considered structural versus cultural causes.

First, the lack of (accurate) knowledge was perceived as due to a lack of public education, most importantly via schools and the media. This can thus be seen as a consequence of a lack of structure for voice. For example, the aces struggled with a lack of awareness in society about the existence of their sexual identity and the exact meaning of it, which they attributed to the lack of (accurate) representation mentioned before. Further, the international students mentioned that many Dutch teachers and fellow students are not aware of the challenges they face in moving into a new and different culture. They thought the

University should make sure that Dutch students "*learn how to treat other people with different cultures or different backgrounds*" (international students, participant 7). Also the Indo-Dutch participants talked about their history and past suffering not being given sufficient attention in Dutch history class.

Aside from this form of ignorance that can be considered as systemic or institutionalized (due to the media, education, etcetera), participants also indicated that others sometimes did not *want* to know. Participants noticed that some people, even when confronted with information about the group's identity and/or situation, actively ignored it. They thought this was due to either conflicting interests, or simply not being able to fit the information in their belief system. A good example of the former are the citizens perceiving the authorities as intentionally looking the other way because ignorance is in their best interest. On the other hand, most aces related about others discarding information about asexuality as untrue because they just cannot integrate it into their image of reality: "*you grow up, you meet someone you love, you move in together, you have children, that whole concept. And if your identity breaks with that, people can't imagine that at all*" (aces, participant 9). Participants noticed that people therefore try to come up with alternative explanations of asexuality that do fit within their worldview, such as it being "*just a phase*" or a "*hormonal thing*", thereby, probably unintentionally, invalidating participants' sexual experiences.

Understanding: authorities and others understanding the collective identity and situation

A closely related following theme is understanding. Participants talked about their wish to be accurately understood and/or empathized with. This can be considered the next step after awareness: besides knowing it (the group and/or its situation) exists, knowing how it feels. Not surprisingly, a lack of (emotional) understanding was often described as a consequence of a lack of knowledge. Participants attributed other's lack of understanding and

empathy to the fact that these others did not experience the group's struggles themselves. In line with this, participants did feel heard by people from their ingroup, such as other students or other aces. Like the pervious themes, we can see a structural versus a cultural subtheme in the form of authorities versus the rest of society as a source of misunderstanding

First, participants noticed that the authorities that are tasked with defending their interests and/or taking measures to meet the group's needs, are usually not part of the group themselves and therefore do not fully understand the group's experiences. For example, the Dutch students noticed that government officials grew up in another time in which students got much more financial support than the current generation. Also the citizens felt the local government officials that are burdened with defending their interests do not understand their perspective because they do not experience the threats of a refugee shelter close to their home. This lack of understanding was experienced as problematic as it limits the authorities' ability to take the groups' needs into account. Besides authorities, participants also felt misunderstood by other individuals outside their group, which we might refer to as members of the rest of society. For example, citizens noticed that others that do not have a refugee shelter in "their backyard", often do not understand the citizens' opposition and think they are whining. The international students talked about the Dutch' lacking understanding of the internationals' limited understanding of the Dutch system: a lot of the things that are obvious to the Dutch are not so obvious to international students.

Respect: being treated equally and supported in overcoming disadvantage

A prominent fourth theme in all groups was respect. This theme differs from the previous themes in that it adds a value judgement. It is about the feeling that one's group is treated equally in equal circumstances (i.e., equity) which communicates they are considered a *valued part* of society. All groups found themselves in a relatively disadvantaged position and experienced this as unfair, which made them feel excluded. This position could be

relative to the rest of society or to other groups that found or find themselves in similar circumstances. As an example of the latter, the Dutch-Indos felt treated unjust in hindsight when comparing their past treatment as being "*actually the first immigrants*" (Indo-Dutch, participant 5) with current day refugees that get much more free material support (e.g., accommodation, transportation). Lack of respect could again either be structural or cultural.

First, participants felt that there was a lack of structural support for their group that effectively put them in a disadvantaged position. This was a frequent subtheme for the international students that mentioned that some of the school policies were not inclusive to their special needs. For example, students talked about events not being in English, Dutch teachers speaking Dutch with Dutch students in their presence, limited food choices in the canteen, not taking into account special holidays or international students' wish to travel home, and a lack of support in finding accommodation. This made the international students feel they were not being cared about and not welcomed. Similarly, the citizens felt they "*are occasionally being treated as second-class citizens*" (citizens, participant 9) and abandoned. They mentioned that government and the rest of society imposed upon them the responsibility for solving collective problems that they only had a very small part in causing, such as climate change and the housing crisis.

Second, participants mentioned they were treated differently in a way that made them feel they were of less worth or value compared to the rest of society. They often associated this with the stereotypes surrounding their group. For example, a Indo-Dutch participant noticed that cashiers tend to watch her more closely due to the stereotype of darker skinned people being criminal. As another example, both the "lower" or practically educated Dutch students and some of the international students talked about their group generally being seen and therefore treated as less educated and less capable. The aces mentioned that they sometimes felt others considered them sick, childish or even non-human. These participants

indicated they felt they did not belong in a world where sex is omnipresent and perceived as inherently human.

Responsiveness: receiving transparent communication and answers from the authority

The fifth and last theme is different from the previous themes in that it does *not* apply to the only group that did not feel (un)heard by an authority: the aces. Responsiveness is still described here because it was a prominent theme for the other four groups. Responsiveness involves participants' perceptions of whether and how the authority interacts with their group, and as such only has a structural and, unlike the other themes, not a cultural component. Responsiveness could take a proactive and a reactive form.

First, participants talked about transparent communication on the side of the authority. Participants wanted insight into the reasons for the decisions that concern them. This subtheme was most prominent for the citizens who felt it was important to be informed personally and timely. As mentioned under Voice, citizens mentioned they were only informed after the decision and indirectly via others or via the media. They referred in this context to "backroom politics": the decisioning process happening behind their backs, which made them suspect that their interests were not taken into account.

Secondly, participants talked about the authorities' willingness to respond to their questions and feedback. Participants felt unheard when they received unclear, incomplete and/or impersonal answers, or no answers at all. Similarly, participants described experiences of answers taking a long time and/or being sent from pillar to post, again raising suspicions that the authorities did not want to support them. For some participants satisfactory answers required that the authority took measures to improve the group's situation, such as bringing back student loans or replacing refugee shelters. Notably, most of these participants said it would not be a problem if the authority fails to act upon their requests, as long as it is clearly explained why this is impossible. So, also here, transparency on the side of the authority

seemed to be key. But also the sincerity of action was important. This was very prominent for the Dutch-Indo participants that felt the monetary compensation and governmental excuses for the acts of violence perpetrated by the Dutch army in Indonesia between 1945 and 1949 were clearly too late, since the previous generation that suffered the most has already died. It seemed to participants that the Dutch government finally succumbed to the pressure of public opinion to make the excuses. Further, the procedures for getting compensation appeared haphazard and mostly focused on minimizing the costs for government while upholding a positive reputation. Consequently, participants experienced these measures as half-hearted and insincere, making them feel less heard.

Results Part II: The Consequences of Feeling Unheard

Participants often found the questions regarding the consequences of feeling unheard, in terms of the effects on their everyday lives and the actions they took, difficult to answer. When first asked, many participants mentioned that feeling unheard did not affect them, but often in their later answers it appeared that it did. The consequences and actions participants mentioned are classified in four themes corresponding to the parties involved: self, ingroup, outgroup, and third party. Figure 2 below shows a schematic overview of the themes and subthemes. See Appendix 6 for illustrative quotes per subtheme and Appendix 7 for the specification per group.

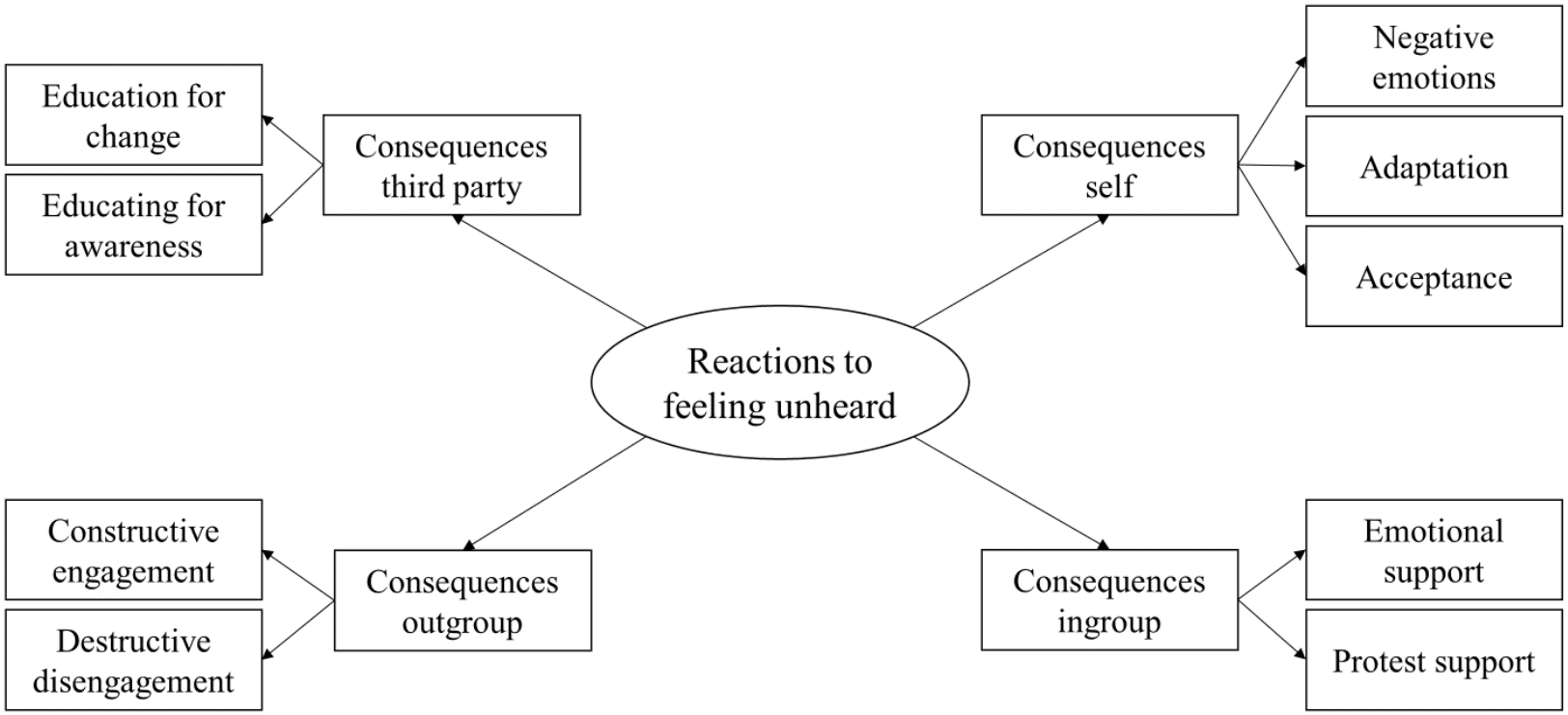

Figure 2. A schematic representation of the themes and subthemes that emerged concerning the consequences of feeling collectively unheard.

Consequences Self: negative emotions, adaptation or acceptance

Feeling unheard appeared to have consequences for participants' internal experiences and private behaviors. Three main themes here were negative emotions, adapting and acceptance. First of all, not feeling heard could induce strong negative emotions in participants, most prominently anger and frustration, but also insecurity and sadness. A few citizens even talked about the health issues they experienced and attributed to bottling up their emotions and internalized stress, such as sleeping or heart problems.

Secondly, besides these emotional changes, participants from all groups, except the citizens, talked about behavioral adaptations aimed at complying and fitting in with the majority. This essentially meant they distanced themselves from their identity as a group member, either temporary or permanently. For the asexual individuals this meant trying to fall in love and experience sexual attraction. Some international students tried to learn Dutch. The Dutch-Indos often engaged in total assimilation and also identified as a Dutch person. Some "lower" educated students reacted to not feeling heard by stopping or changing their studies, or trying to study at a "higher" educational level: "*I'm not going to stay at [secondary vocational education] level two, am I? I'm not what [..] people portray me to be, am I*?" (Dutch students, participant 1).

Lastly, a few participants tried to accept their situation and live with it. For example, aces mentioned they learned not to care. Further, the Indo-Dutch said that it was not in their nature to worry about something that had happened in the past: "*That's an expression of an Indo-Dutch: Suda. Never mind. What has been has been*" (Indo-Dutch, participant 1).

Consequences Ingroup: seeking and providing emotional and protest support

Secondly, participants talked about the collective consequences of feeling collectively unheard. The consequences for the ingroup centered around support seeking. This took two forms: talking about it and taking action. First of all, participants in all groups mentioned that

they and their peers sought each other out to share their experiences. For example, the Indo-Dutch participants talked about so-called “Kumpulan” which are events where the Indo-Dutch eat together and chat about their past. The aces’ community life largely took place online. Participants related how relieved and supported they had felt when they discovered these online ace communities that showed them they were not alone. Also for the other groups, sharing their experiences with peers made them feel less lonely and more heard. But, importantly, through validating their perception of the situation as unjust, it could also make them feel even less heard by the outgroup.

Besides seeking and providing emotional support, participants talked about their ingroup joining forces for collective actions to ask for change. An important note here is that participants described protests as something they witnessed around them or something they might see themselves support if undertaken, but only when “*it is done quietly with respect*” (Dutch students, participant 8). Some citizens joined collective protest actions, such as silent protests in which participants demonstrate their disapproval by staying quiet. Participants did not engage in protest when they felt this was not in their character, it would not be effective, it was too late, and/or because they felt they did not have a clear request to make.

Consequences Outgroup: constructive engagement versus destructive disengaging

The outgroup is the party making respondents feel unheard as a collective and differed slightly between, and at times within, groups. The outgroup was the government (citizens, Indo-Dutch, Dutch students), societal institutions such as the educational system and the media (aces, Indo-Dutch), a specific school and its staff (Dutch and international students), and/or the rest of society (citizens, aces, Dutch students). The consequences that feeling unheard had for participants’ attitudes and behaviors towards these outgroups can be classified as either constructive or destructive for the relationship.

First, some participants reacted to feeling unheard as a collective by seeking out constructive dialogue with outgroup representatives, either by themselves or via a representative. This is overlaps with the ingroup subtheme of collective action. Many participants recognized that their requests for change would be most effective when they would make them as a group. For example, a couple of citizens asked for consultation sessions with local government and others had sent letters to government. As another example, the Indo-Dutch talked about organizations making collective requests for compensation. A few participants took constructive political action by voting for someone that would defend their needs and interests; essentially changing the outgroup.

Secondly and more frequently, participants mentioned reacting to feeling unheard though attitudinal and/or behavioral disengagement. Attitudinally, participants talked about losing trust in the outgroup, often permanently and irreparably. Relatedly, many participants said feeling unheard caused them to disidentify with the outgroup. Behaviorally, participants indicated they stopped reaching out. For example, students stopped asking questions and aces avoided others that would not be open to them and their identity: "*Then I think: never mind, I won't say anything anymore*" (aces, participant 10). Some participants even mentioned they stopped voting due to losing faith in politics.

Consequences Third Party: educating for knowledge or educating for change

Lastly, feeling unheard had consequences for participants' behaviors towards the third party, defined as those not part of the ingroup nor the outgroup. Participants in all groups talked about educating this third party about the existence and/or situation of their group. This education could be aimed at increasing awareness but could also be aimed at counteracting stereotypes and wrong assumptions in the third party. Participants educated others by sharing their experiences offline as well as online, and in one-on-one contact as well as towards a broader, more abstract audience. Participants mentioned that they only tried

to educate others that appeared to be willing to learn, often friends and family but also open-minded others: "*just in your own environment, because I think that's where it starts*" (Dutch students, participant 1).

Whereas education for some participants seemed to be a goal in and of itself, for others education seemed to be aimed at getting the third party to choose the group's side to create more pressure for change on the authorities. Participants talked about making the issues of their group societal issues that cannot be ignored: "*OK, you don't want to deal with me because you don't want to hear me, then deal with your society who's angry [with] people like you*" (international students, participant 1).

Discussion

There are indications that many groups in Western societies feel unheard by their government, other institutions (e.g., Universities or companies) or their society at large. This feeling collectively unheard might be linked to (violent) protesting, populist voting, political distrust, and even conspiratorial thinking. Interestingly, disregarding these important societal consequences, academic attention for the concept is lacking. The current paper aimed to fill this gap by developing a qualitative, participant-driven understanding of the meaning and consequences of feeling collectively (un)heard. To this end, 61 semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants belonging to a set of five different groups that we expected to feel unheard in Dutch society: citizens living close to a refugee shelter ("AZC" in Dutch), asexual persons (aces), international students, Dutch "bad luck generation" ("pechgeneratie" in Dutch) students and Indo-Dutch people. Inductive thematic analyses were performed and overarching themes were extracted towards a comprehensive understanding of feeling collectively (un)heard.

What does it mean to feel collectively heard?

The themes we uncovered for the meaning of feeling collectively heard show strong overlap with what prior research has found concerning feeling interpersonally heard (Roos et al., 2023: voice, attention, empathy, respect, common ground). We see overlap in the themes of voice, awareness (similar to the interpersonal attention), understanding (similar to the interpersonal empathy) and respect. Responsiveness was not a theme on the interpersonal level but might be the collective-level equivalent of common ground or shared understanding. Through answering questions and communicating transparently, the authority arguably evidences understanding of the group's situation, while at the same time allowing the group to understand the pertinent actions and considerations of the authority (Yang et al., 2015). Further, similar to feeling heard at the interpersonal level, our data suggests that feeling collectively heard is a holistic and unitary experience (Lipetz et al., 2020; Roos et al., 2023). Whereas we could extract five themes or aspects in the meaning of feeling heard, participants described them as strongly connected, suggesting that they are not really seen as distinct. For example, without being able to voice as a group, others can not know about the group. As another example, understanding can be seen as a next step after awareness: besides knowing the group exists, also understanding how they feel. Of course, further study is needed to draw conclusions about the holistic character of the feeling collectively heard experience.

Although there was thus considerable overlap between the individual and collective level, the collective differs in that the (un)heard and the (un)hearing are part of larger groups of people (an "us" versus "them") rather than two individual beings (a "me" and "you") (as described in the social identity and self-categorization theories; Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987). This was visible in the data in two important ways. First, rather than about personal needs and experiences, collective voice, awareness, understanding and respect was about *shared* grievances, such as feeling unsafe due to a refugee shelter or feeling misrepresented in the media. Mostly this concerned a disadvantage compared to other

(historical or current) groups in society which was considered unjust. This experience of relative deprivation appeared to be considered indicative of something deeper: the group being systematically excluded and devalued (Williams, 2001, 2007), as represented in the prominent Respect theme. This indicates that feeling heard overlaps with concepts related to feeling included and valued. Our data shows, however, that in order to feel heard, it might not be sufficient to be and feel included and valued. To feel collectively heard, people also need to experience freedom of speech (voice), empathy and (mutual) understanding. This is in line with research showing the importance of being understood and of being able to make one's group understood for good intergroup relations (Bruneau & Saxe, 2012; Livingstone, 2023; Livingstone et al., 2020).

A second difference with the interpersonal level is that feeling collectively heard is not dependent on direct interpersonal interaction but can be mediated by representatives. Indeed, representation figured in many of the themes. Participants talked about feeling collectively heard *through* voice of an ingroup representative, such as fellow students or fellow citizens (which could also involve the media), and how this voice was reacted to by representatives of the outgroup, such as teachers or the mayor. The other way around, participants could also feel heard in direct interpersonal interaction *with* an outgroup representative, which they then generalized to their feelings towards the outgroup as a whole, such as from teacher to school and from governmental official to government. From this it appears that feeling collectively heard does have a strong basis in interpersonal interaction (similar to research showing that interpersonal listening can improve intergroup relations, e.g., Kalla & Broockman, 2020), but it can be delegated and indirect (as noted for organizational listening; MacNamara, 2018).

Besides direct or vicarious interaction, participants could also feel heard through decision-maker actions in terms of policies and measures that affected the group and their

ability to be heard. Interestingly, whereas some participants mentioned the need for an authority to take the reparative actions as requested by the ingroup, such as bringing back student loans or replacing refugee shelters, most also explicitly indicated that no reparative action would be OK as long as the authority explained why. This suggests that it is not so much about having one's (individual or collective) needs met but about these needs being known, understood and valued. This is in line with studies showing that action on request (Kriz et al., 2021) or goal accomplishment through conversation (Roos et al., 2023) is not needed to feel interpersonally heard. So, whereas policy change could indeed make one feel collectively heard (collective requests have been heeded), it appears less important than having the impression that the group's perspective is taken into account (as also established in the procedural justice literature; Lind et al., 1990). That might also explain why voice *before* the decision, indicating genuine attention, was of pertinent importance to participants.

Whereas there was much overlap between the groups in their understanding of feeling collectively (un)heard, there are also slight differences that might be connected to the groups' differing social standing in Dutch society. These differences seemed to be mostly along the lines of structural versus incidental disadvantage (Van Zomeren et al., 2008; Van Zomeren, 2015). The aces and the Indo-Dutch can be considered structurally disadvantaged since their lower status is a historical or socio-cultural given (e.g., discrimination based on skin color). The citizens and (Dutch and international) students, on the other hand, encountered incidental disadvantages in the form of recent and transient situations (e.g., being new to the Dutch educational system). So, feeling collectively unheard can both imply that "I" feel unheard because I am a member of structurally disadvantaged group X *and* that "we" are (not) heard as members of incidentally disadvantaged group Y. We see that the structurally versus incidentally disadvantaged talked about (vicarious) contact for different aims and towards different target outgroups: whereas the aces and Indo-Dutch mostly wanted to voice their

group's existence to society in general, the other groups were more concerned with voicing their shared struggles to authorities with decisioning power. This is also reflected in that all themes, except for responsiveness, had an authority-bound and structural component (e.g., infrastructure for voice, policy adaptation to special needs) as well as a more cultural and societal component (e.g., words for voice, representation in education, stereotypes and discrimination). To conclude, and taking all the above considerations into account, we define feeling collectively heard as follows: "The experience of being able to directly or indirectly express one's group's identity and situation to others that respect the group and are open to know and understand its experiences."

Consequences of feeling collectively unheard

Besides asking what feeling collectively heard meant to them, we also asked participants about the effects that feeling unheard had on their everyday lives and what they did in response. We found diverse and sometimes contrasting responses, not only between groups but also within groups and even within individuals. Reactions ranged from becoming silent to voicing louder and educating others, and from distancing from in- or outgroup to drawing closer to in- or outgroup.

Our findings are similar to what we know about the consequences of social rejection and exclusion (Richman & Leary, 2009). Participants reported negative emotions like anger and sadness. Interviewees further talked about attitudinal (e.g., losing trust, feeling detached) and behavioral (e.g., stopping to reach out with questions) disengagement from the outgroup. On the contrary, reaffiliation attempts with the outgroup were also apparent. Participants from all groups, except the citizens, talked about actively changing their behavior to fit in with the majority, such as speaking Dutch, trying to study at a higher level or to start a "normal" romantic relationship. Notably, through complying with the majority's descriptive and prescriptive norms, these participants, knowingly or not, distanced themselves from their

unheard ingroup. This can be explained by Social Identity Theory that shows that people sometimes disidentify from stigmatized or discriminated ingroup that reflect negatively on them in order to protect their positive self-image (Branscombe et al., 2011; Major & O'Brien, 2005). These outgroup reaffiliation attempts seemed to be a temporary reaction for some groups, however, which could be replaced by affiliation with fellow ingroup members or close others that could provide comfort and understanding. This was most prominent for the aces that talked about the relieve they felt upon discovering (online) ace communities with people like them, and thereby learning they were not weird or sick, but forgotten or ignored in a society where "everything is overly sexualized" (aces, participant 12). We can thus see a move from reaffiliation with the outgroup to affiliation with the ingroup as soon as this relational alternative is discovered (Richman & Leary, 2009). This might in turn stimulate the outgroup disengagement reaction. Indeed, through finding out that their experience was shared and/or validated, participants felt heard, but, at the same time, felt even less heard by the outgroup (it became a shared reality; Hardin & Higgins, 1996).

Not all responses to feeling unheard were in line with reactions to social rejection, however. Participants did not engage in antisocial behavior towards the perpetrator to defend their group or take revenge. In all groups protest intentions were low, which appeared mostly due to a lack of collective efficacy (Van Zomeren et al., 2008), and those that did engage in protest emphasized that their actions were peaceful and non-aggressive (e.g., signing petitions) and mostly aimed at making others feel how they felt, such as making the mayor feel unheard through literally turning their backs in silent protest. An alternative way to protest emerged from the data, however: making the rest of society aware of the existence of the group and its suffering. Whereas this sometimes seemed to be aimed at getting public opinion on the group's side to increase pressure on the authorities to take reparative action, public education oftentimes was a goal in its own right: making others aware and countering

faulty stereotypes about the ingroup. This is a reaction that has been underexposed in the literature related to social rejection, and might in fact be related to how feeling heard is different from these related experiences. Besides the impression that one does not belong to and is considered of less value than the rest, feeling unheard is about being unknown and misunderstood.

In sum, we find many diverse and sometimes contrasting responses to feeling collectively unheard. Interestingly, there appears to be almost as much variation within groups as there is between them. We can, however, tentatively discern a pattern in that the structurally disadvantaged (aces and Indo-Dutch) were more leaning towards loyalty than the incidentally disadvantaged (citizens and students), who in turn were slightly more inclined to ask for reparative action. Note, however, that also in these latter groups, many interviewees indicated that they lost trust completely and stopped reaching out. This all might have to do with the duration of the experience of being unheard (as people also tend to withdraw when met with chronic and pervasive social rejection, Richman & Leary, 2009). When one feels their group is continuously unheard, trust might decline and relationships might be damaged beyond repair, as indicated by some participants. Together, this suggests that feeling collectively unheard, can have far-reaching consequences for the wellbeing of individuals and groups, but also for building and maintaining the social fabric of democratic societies.

Limitations & Future Directions

This study comes with some limitations and many directions for future research. First, whereas we interviewed a wide range of groups, it is not yet clear whether our results generalize to groups beyond the current sample. It would be interesting to see whether the same or similar themes come up in independent studies with different interviewers interviewing different populations in differing situations. This seems especially apt in the

context of potential cultural differences, for example, do people in more collectivist cultures feel (un)heard?

Second, due to the explorative nature of this study, we were not able to study the causes of feeling collectively heard. Many interesting questions remain. For example: do collectives only feel heard when they experience voice *and* awareness *and* understanding *and* respect, or can also only a subset of these be enough, and under what circumstances? It would further be interesting to know when group members do require reparative action to feel heard and under which circumstances an explanation might be enough, and what elements should be contained within these explanations. Moreover, the fact that feeling heard can be experienced interpersonally as well as collectively, offers the possibility of studying how experiences might spill over (or not) from the micro-level of interpersonal (direct or vicarious) interactions and relationships to the macro-level of groups in society, and vice versa. A last direction concerning the antecedents of feeling collectively (un)heard is its arguably long-term and therefore fluid character. Feeling heard experiences are subject to change as long as the relationship continues (also see Kriz et al., 2021 for evidence of this on the interpersonal level). Someone might feel heard directly after a conversation with a governmental representative, but if the expected action does not ensue without sufficient explanation, this might make them revise their feelings of being heard in hindsight. This calls for mapping feeling heard longitudinally: what events contribute to the shaping of the overall sense of feeling heard in society?

Third, this study gave an impression of the possible consequences of feeling (un)heard, but we found seemingly contradictory consequences (e.g., voicing louder and becoming silent), not only between but also within groups. We therefore need systematic study to map the circumstances under which one or the other outcome will ensue. When do group members decide to engage in (violent) protest and when do they decide to disengage?

This is important to know considering the potentially disrupting effects of these actions for democratic societies. A fruitful direction here might be to assess emotional reactions: if people experience anger (an approach emotion) in response to feeling unheard, they might be more likely to engage and protest, while people experiencing disappointment (an avoidance emotion) might be more likely to disengage (e.g., Carver & Harmon-Jones, 2009).

Before we can learn about these causes, consequences and moderating circumstances, however, we first need to be able to assess feeling collectively heard. Future research could use the results of this study (and possibly complementary data, e.g., expert interviews) to develop items and test these in various populations to construct a scale and assess its reliability and validity. Considering the large amount of overlap with interpersonally feeling heard, the Feeling Heard Scale of Roos et al. (2023) could be a good start. It would be especially important to see whether and how feeling collectively heard differs from related constructs, such as social exclusion (Williams, 2009), perceived discrimination (Williams et al., 1997), psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999), and relative deprivation (Obaidi et al., 2019).

Conclusion

By offering a fine-grained understanding of the experience of feeling collectively (un)heard from the perspective of the (un)heard group members themselves, this paper opens up the scientific study of this phenomenon that appears to affect not only the wellbeing of the individual and their social relationships but also the state of their society. Conceptually, feeling (un)heard can extend the social psychological literature because it does not only concern minorities and what are traditionally considered disadvantaged groups, but can potentially be experienced by large majorities and what are traditionally considered advantaged groups. Furthermore, since people can feel (un)heard both at an interpersonal level and collectively, and our data shows that interpersonal experiences inform collective

perceptions and vice versa, this concept offers the opportunity to study micro- (interpersonal) to macro- (societal) level processes. This is especially important because feeling unheard does not only drive people apart, but also closer together.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Jetske Bles for her help in developing the interview protocol. We are further grateful to Ellen Martens and Victoria Echeverry for conducting and transcribing part of the interviews and aiding in the analysis of the data. Lastly, we would like to thank Prof. dr. Juliette Schaafsma for her valuable theoretical and conceptual input.

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Appendix 1: Overview of the demographics per group

Citizens living close to a (future) refugee shelter

10 persons, 4 male, 6 female, aged between 19 and 60 years old, mostly lower educated: 6 secondary vocational education ("MBO" in Dutch), 3 higher professional education ("HBO" in Dutch), and 1 University education ("WO" in Dutch). Participants were confronted with refugee shelters in differing stages: 1) plans for a refugee shelter, 2) history of a refugee shelters with plans for a new one, 3) where a refugee shelters has (recently) been set-up. Participants mentioned it was often unclear to them what the exact timeframe for the placement was. All citizen participants clearly felt unheard by several authorities involved in the decisioning about the placement of the refugee shelter. Participants talked about their experiences with three authorities: national government, local government and the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA), but also about their relationship vis a vis the refugees and the rest of the Dutch. There were strong "us versus them" feelings. The interviewees felt structurally and unjustly disadvantaged in Dutch society. They felt they were held responsible for fixing all kinds of societal problems that they did not cause (e.g., the nitrogen crisis, the housing crisis).

Table … Demographics of the citizen interviewees.

	Age	Gender	Nationality	Education	AZC status?	Do you feel heard by the government as citizen close to refugee shelter?[a]
Pp1	59	female	Dutch	LHNO	In future	No
Pp2	53	female	Dutch	University	In near future	No
Pp3	48	female	Dutch	HBO+	AZC present with plans for a new one	No
Pp4	58	male	Dutch	HBO	In future	No
Pp5	42	male	Dutch	HBO	AZC present, temporary	No
Pp6	32	male	Dutch	MBO	AZC present	No
Pp7	48	female	Dutch	MBO	AZC present	No

Pp8	19	female	Dutch	MBO	AZC history with plans for a new one	No
Pp9	60	female	Dutch	MBO	AZC history with plans for a new one	No
Pp10	53	male	Dutch	MBO	In near future	No

a. Answers to the first question.

Indo-Dutch participants

11 persons, aged between 72 and 91 years old, 6 female and 5 male. Came to the Netherlands between the 1940's and the 1960's as refugee children. They fled Indonesia with their parents due to them being on the Dutch side in the Indonesian war for independence. When they came to the Netherlands, their families did not receive much support in terms of basic necessities such as housing and clothing. Interviewees felt that their parents were the ones that were and felt least heard and that they as children did not really suffer. Most participants currently feel Dutch and as such they mostly felt heard. Additionally, many of them found it hard to talk about feeling unheard due to their cultural inheritance of not complaining (Indo's silence). Participants clearly wanted to talk a lot (and be heard by the interviewer) about their history in Indonesia and the horrors they witnessed there. Relatedly, they noticed that the rest of Dutch society lacked knowledge about their past. The government is offering monetary compensation and recent excuses for the atrocities committed by the Dutch army, but these measures are often considered too late and insincere.

Table … Demographics of the Indo-Dutch interviewees.

	Age	Gender	Nationality	Education	How long in NL?	Do you feel heard by the government as an Indo-Dutch?[a]
Pp1	80	female	Dutch	Mulo	72 years	Yes
Pp2	83	male	Dutch	Hbo	66 years	Yes
Pp3	91	male	Dutch	-[b]	76 years	Not thought about it
Pp4	79	female	Dutch	-	64 years	Yes
Pp5	76	female	Dutch	-	70 years	Yes
Pp6	85	male	Dutch	-	72 years	Partly
Pp7	80	female	Dutch	Mulo	68 years	Partly
Pp8	78	female	Dutch	Mulo	70 years	Yes

Pp9	73	male	Dutch	Mbo	64 years	Partly
Pp10	72	female	Dutch	Mbo	70 years	Yes, but parents not
Pp11	76	male	Dutch	-	61 years	Yes, but parents not

a. Answers to the first question. b. "–" means missing data.

Bad luck generation Dutch students

10 native Dutch students, aged between 17 and 25 years old, 5 female and 5 male, from diverse educational levels: 4 secondary vocational education ("MBO" in Dutch), 2 higher professional education ("HBO" in Dutch), and 4 University education ("WO" in Dutch). Some students at the higher educational level, first studied at a lower level. Students from these different levels have partly overlapping but also partly unique struggles. All Dutch students experience a lot of challenges due to crisis in society, such as problems with finding housing and finances. As a consequence of this, many feel part of the "pechgeneratie" ("bad luck generation" in English). They perceive that they are worse off compared to previous generations, especially financially because they did not get the same allowance for their studies from the government. Concerning unique struggles, some of the MBO students felt underestimated and looked down on by the rest of society. They often experience that the rest of society does not have an accurate understanding of their education and their abilities. The degree to which the Dutch students felt heard differed. When first asked whether they felt heard as a student or not: 3 said that they did feel heard, 2 said they did not feel heard, and 5 indicated that they partly felt heard. Besides references to government and other authorities, participants talked a lot about interpersonal interactions with teachers when asked about feeling heard as a student.

Table … Demographics of the Dutch student interviewees.

	Age	Gender	Nationality	Education	Do you feel heard as a student?[a]
Pp1	23	female	Dutch	MBO	Partly
Pp2	25	male	Dutch	WO	Partly
Pp3	24	female	Dutch	WO	Partly
Pp4	21	male	Dutch	WO	Partly

Pp5	19	male	Dutch	HBO	No
Pp6	22	female	Dutch	WO	No
Pp7	20	female	Dutch	HBO	Yes
Pp8	20	female	Dutch	MBO	Partly
Pp9	17	male	Dutch	MBO	Yes
Pp10	18	male	Dutch	MBO	Yes

a. Answers to the first question.

International Bachelor or Master students

15 international Bachelor and Master students, between 20 and 35 years old, 7 female and 8 male, from many different counties that had been in the Netherlands for a minimum of 9 months and a maximum of 3 years. For most participants English was not their first language but all were comfortable speaking in English. Participants talked about their experiences with various others: fellow international students, Dutch students, Dutch citizens, the University and the University staff. These were, as for the Dutch students, mostly interpersonal experiences. The international students mostly felt unheard in the difficulties they encountered in their transition and integration into the Netherlands. They talked about their special needs not being noticed and/or not being taken into account by the University, such in terms of holidays, food and language. They felt disadvantaged compared to the native Dutch students and felt excluded by them and the rest of the University. For them, University was a very large part of their lives, because they left all their friends and family behind and paid a lot to study in the Netherlands. Not feeling heard in University made them feel like not belonging in the Netherlands.

Table … Demographics of the international student interviewees.

	Age	Gender	Nationality	Time in NL	Education	Do you feel heard by the University community as an international student?[a]
Pp1	26	male	Greek	1.5 years	Master marketing management	Partly

Pp2	31	male	Britisch	11 months	Master Law	Partly
Pp3	25	female	Greek	1 year	Master Arts and heritage policy management and education	Yes
Pp4	28	male	Colombian	2 years	Master geomatics	No
Pp5	28	female	Colombian	1.5 years	Master in forest and nature conservation	No
Pp6	20	male	Spanish	1.5 years	Bachelor cognitive science and artificial intelligence	Partly
Pp7	23	female	Indonesian	3 years	Bachelor of economics	No
Pp8	27	male	Colombian	10 months	Master Marketing analytics	Yes
Pp9	24	female	Mexican	1.5 years	Bachelor political science	Partly
Pp10	21	female	Greek	2.5 years	Bachelor artificial intelligence	Yes
Pp11	24	female	Indonesian	1 year	Master media studies	Partly
Pp12	21	female	Romanian	3 years	Bachelor law	Partly
Pp13	25	male	Spanish	1 year	Master Econometrics and mathematical economics	Yes
Pp14	25	male	Spanish	9 months	Masters international law	Partly
Pp15	35	male	Colombian	3 years	Master in performing public space	Yes

a. Answers to the first question.

People that identify as asexual ("aces")

15 individuals who identified on the asexual spectrum (12 asexual, 2 gray-ace and 1 demisexual), aged between 18 and 32 years old, 7 female, 5 non-binary, 1 genderfluid, 1 uncertain and 1 male. Mostly higher educated: 1 secondary vocational education ("MBO" in Dutch), 3 higher professional education ("HBO" in Dutch), and 11 University education ("WO" in Dutch). Most participants did not feel heard. Like the students, the asexual

participants also talked a lot about interpersonal interactions making them feel more or less heard at a collective level. The asexual group distinguished itself from the rest of the sample in that they do not really feel (un)heard by an authority but more by society as a whole. They also distinguish themselves from the other groups in that they mostly feel (un)heard with respect to their collective identity rather than their collective situation. Still they felt their group was not very unified and homogeneous because everyone seemed to experience their asexuality in a slightly different way. Moreover, participants indicated that they belonged to many minorities at the same time, for example also being physically handicapped or autistic or Asian. This diversity within their group also made they did not have very clear requests for change in policy. Participants mostly felt unheard by others due to the taboo on talking about sex and asexuality and the lack of (accurate) representation in different domains of life, e.g., media and schools, and knowledge of their identity. They also often encountered people not wanting to believe asexuality actually exists and coming up with alternative explanations for the lack of sexual feelings, e.g., consequence of trauma or sickness or "just a phase". Growing up in this context, virtually all participants talked about their development from not knowing what was "wrong" with them and trying to be like the rest to currently knowing who they are and having a network that hears them.

Table … Demographics of the asexual people interviewees.

	Age	Gender	Nationality	Education	Sexuality	Do you feel heard as someone who identifies as ace?[a]
Pp1	31	Non-binary	Dutch	University	Asexual	No
Pp2	22	Female	Dutch	University	Asexual	Partly
Pp3	32	Non-binary	Dutch	University	Asexual	No
Pp4	21	Female	Dutch	University	Asexual	No
Pp5	19	Non-binary	Hungarian (speaks English)	University	Asexual	Partly
Pp6	22	Female	Dutch	HBO	Asexual	No
Pp7	22	Genderfluid	Dutch	University	Asexual	Partly
Pp8	30	Uncertain	Dutch	HBO	Asexual	Partly

Pp9	18	Non-binary	Dutch	MBO	Asexual	No
Pp10	27	Male	Dutch	Univerity	Asexual	No
Pp11	20	Female	Dutch	University	Asexual	No
Pp12	20	Non-binary	Dutch	University	Asexual	No
Pp13	20	Female	Dutch	University	Asexual	No
Pp14	23	Female	Dutch	HBO	Asexual	No
Pp15	20	Female	Austrian and American (speaks Dutch)	University	Asexual	Not thought about it

a. Answers to the first question.

Appendix 2: The interview protocol

Introduction

For my master's degree in Communication and Information Science at [MASKED FOR REVIEW], I am conducting a study into what feeling heard on a collective level means. This study is being conducted by me under the supervision of [MASKED FOR REVIEW].

Goal: In this research we try to better understand what feeling heard at a collective level means for certain groups in society. To gain more insight into this previously unexplored concept, interviews are conducted with various groups in Dutch society.

- Interview procedure: I am going to ask questions about what feeling at a collective level means for you as a(n) [international student, asexual person, Indonesian-Dutch person, Dutch student, inhabitant of a municipality with (plans for) an AZC]. In order to process all information in an appropriate way, I want to record the interview. Then I will transcribe the recording, then encode it and finally analyze it. Identifiable data from the transcripts is removed, such as names of persons. The original sound recordings will also be deleted. I add the transcripts in the appendices of my research and they will be used for at least 10 years. Ultimately, we hope to publish this research in aggregated and anonymized form and share it with other scientists. Naturally, the data is stored on well-secured computers of [MASKED FOR REVIEW]. The entire interview will last approximately 60 minutes.

- Informed Consent:
  As an interviewee you have the following rights:

1. You can ask questions before, during and after the interview
2. During the interview you have the right not to answer questions or to stop the interview for any reason. This has no negative consequences.
3. We expect that participation in this study will not have any negative consequences. If this is the case, please report this so that we can find a solution together. You may also contact the principal investigator. Then I'll give you her email address. If you have any complaints or concerns about this research, you can also contact the Research Ethics and Data Management Committee of [MASKED FOR REVIEW].
4. There are no wrong or right answers, so you are completely free to talk about your own feelings, opinions, attitudes and experiences. I'm interested in your perspective.
5. The interview will be anonymized, meaning your answers cannot be traced back to you and your name will not be mentioned in my research.
6. An audio recording is made of the interview with a voice recorder.
7. After the interview, it is possible to listen to the audio recording of the interview, possibly edit your responses and withdraw the interview.
8. The audio recording is only listened to by me, the other master students with whom I collaborate, and my thesis supervisor.
9. If you agree to participate in this study, you also agree to use the recorded data from this interview. I will transcribe the recordings and delete the original audio-recordings afterwards. Identifying data, such as your name and names of other people or institutions, will be removed from the transcripts.
10. Before we can start the interview, it is important that you have understood everything I

have said. In addition, it is necessary that you have read and understood the information letter and that you have signed the informed consent form. Is that the case? Do you have any questions and/or comments? 11. Have you understood everything and do you agree? If you have understood everything and agree, I will start the audio recording. Could you then indicate that you agree that I may record this interview and that you have understood the information I just mentioned and thereby give your informed consent to participate in this study? *12. [Start audio recording]* 13. *[Respondent gives informed consent]* *[Start interview if interviewee agrees]*	
Goal: mapping the samples	**Demographic questions** First I'm going to ask you some general questions to get a better picture of you as a(n) [international student, asexual person, Indonesian-Dutch person, Dutch student, inhabitant of a municipality with (plans for) an AZC] 1. What is your age? 2. What gender do you identify with? 3. What is your nationality? 4. What is your educational level? **Specific demographic questions that differ per group:** **<u>Asexual people:</u>** 5. What is your sexual orientation? **<u>Indonesian-Dutch people:</u>** 5. For how long have you been living in the Netherlands? **<u>International students:</u>** 5. Are you a bachelor or a master student? 6. How long have you been in NL? **<u>Inhabitants of municipality with (plans for) an AZC:</u>** 5. Is there already a refugee shelter in your municipality, or will it be there in the future?
Goal: learn about what feeling heard means	**Concept feeling heard** 1. Do you feel heard by the [Dutch government, University community, society] as a(n) [international student, asexual person, Indonesian-Dutch person, Dutch student, inhabitant of a municipality with (plans for) an AZC]? 2. Why do you feel heard/ feel not heard?

	3. What does feeling heard as a(n) [international student, asexual person, Indonesian-Dutch person, Dutch student, inhabitant of a municipality with (plans for) an AZC] mean to you? 4. Can you recall a specific moment when you felt unheard by [the government, University community, society] as a(n) [international student, asexual person, Indonesian-Dutch person, Dutch student, inhabitant of a municipality with (plans for) an AZC] and describe this moment? 5. Can you recall a specific moment when you felt heard by [the government, University community, society] as a(n) [international student, asexual person, Indonesian-Dutch person, Dutch student, inhabitant of a municipality with (plans for) an AZC] and describe this moment? 1. 6. Do you think other [international students, asexual persons, Indonesian-Dutch persons, Dutch students, inhabitants of a municipality with (plans for) an AZC] feel heard by the [Dutch government, University community, society]? 6b. Why/ why not? 7. Do you think you as [international student, asexual person, Indonesian-Dutch person, Dutch student, inhabitant of a municipality with (plans for) an AZC] should be heard more or should be heard less by [the government, University community, society]? 7b. Why more/ why less?
Goal: ask about specific groups concerns	**Feeling heard questions for specific groups:** **<u>Asexual people:</u>** 1. Do you think that there is a taboo surrounding asexuality? 1b. If so, how do you experience this? 2. Do people stereotype or stigmatize you as an asexual person? 2b. If so, how do people stereotype or stigmatize you? 3. Does being stigmatized have an influence on whether you feel heard? 3b. If so, in which ways? 4. Do you feel as if you can be totally and openly yourself in today's society? 4a. Is this linked to feeling heard? **<u>Indonesian-Dutch people:</u>** 1. Did or do you get a compensation for the consequences of the

	war? 1b. If yes: how is that compensation called? 1c: How do you feel about receiving this compensation? 1d: Does this compensation makes you feel that you as an Indonesian-Dutch person and/or your history is heard (by the government/society)? 2. Did you see or hear about the excuses of Mark Rutte and King Willem Alexander? 2b. What did you think of these excuses? 2c. Did these excuses affect you? And how? 2d. Did these excuses make you feel heard (by the government/society)? **Dutch students:** 1. Do interactions with your fellow students influence your feeling of being heard/unheard by society and/or the government? 1b. Why? Can you explain further? 2. Do social media play a role in making you feel more or less heard as a student? 1b. Why? Can you explain further? **International students:** 1. Do interpersonal interactions with your fellow students influence your feeling of being heard/unheard by the University community as a whole? 1b. Why? Can you explain further? 1c. Is there a difference between fellow internationals versus Dutch students? 2. Do interpersonal interactions with your teachers or other University staff members influence your feeling of being heard/unheard by the University community as a whole? 2b. Why? Can you explain further? 3. Can you describe an interpersonal interaction with someone that made you feel heard/unheard by the University community as a whole? Who was this person and why did your interaction make you feel like this? **Inhabitants of municipalities with (plans for) an AZC:** 1. Have you been invited to a public participation evening organized by the municipality? 1b. If so: did this make you feel heard? 1c. Why did it make you feel heard or not heard?

Goal: ask about the consequences of feeling (not) heard	**Consequences of feeling (un)heard:** 1. Does feeling (not) heard as [international student, asexual person, Indonesian-Dutch person, Dutch student, inhabitant of a municipality with (plans for) an AZC] affect you in your everyday life? 1b. If so: in what way? (Inquire about behavior and cognitions.) 2. Does feeling heard or not have an effect on you as [international student, asexual person, Indonesian-Dutch person, Dutch student, inhabitant of a municipality with (plans for) an AZC]? 2b. If so, what effect? (Inquire about behavior and cognitions.) 3. Does feeling heard or not as a [international student, asexual person, Indonesian-Dutch person, Dutch student, inhabitant of a municipality with (plans for) an AZC] affect your relationship with the [government, University community, society]? 3b. If so, in what way?
Goal: ask about possible ways for feeling more heard	**Actions to be heard:** 1. What would you need to feel more heard as [international student, asexual person, Indonesian-Dutch person, Dutch student, inhabitant of a municipality with (plans for) an AZC]? 2. How can the [government, University community, society] make you feel heard as a(n) [international student, asexual person, Indonesian-Dutch person, Dutch student, inhabitant of a municipality with (plans for) an AZC]? 3. What can you as a group of [international students, asexual persons, Indonesian-Dutch persons, Dutch students, inhabitants of a municipality with (plans for) an AZC] do to feel more heard by the [government, University community, society]? 3b. To what extent are you willing to participate in these actions yourself? 3c. Would you protest? Why/why not? 3d. If not, to what extent do you feel that these protesting [international students, asexual persons, Indonesian-Dutch persons, Dutch students, inhabitants of a municipality with (plans for) an AZC] also represent your voice as a(n) [international student, asexual person, Indonesian-Dutch person, Dutch student, inhabitant of a municipality with (plans for) an AZC]?

	4. What else can you do yourself to feel more heard as a(n) [international student, asexual person, Indonesian-Dutch person, Dutch student, inhabitant of a municipality with (plans for) an AZC]?
Goal: ask for concepts found in literature. <u>Only ask about factors not mentioned before</u>.	I have a few more factors that I expect might have to do with the experience of feeling heard. Can you indicate to what extent you think this plays a role in your experiences of feeling heard as a(n) [international student, asexual person, Indonesian-Dutch person, Dutch student, inhabitant of a municipality with (plans for) an AZC]? This is about your own experiences. 1. How important is it for you to be able to express your opinions and feelings about your the situation of [international students, asexual persons, Indonesian-Dutch persons, Dutch students, inhabitants of a municipality with (plans for) an AZC]? 1b. What does that mean for you? 2. Does the feeling of being able to actually influence policy play a role in feeling heard as a(n) [international student, asexual person, Indonesian-Dutch person, Dutch student, inhabitant of a municipality with (plans for) an AZC] towards the [government, University community, society] or by someone in [government, University community, society]? 2b. What does this influence mean to you? 3. To what extent does feeling represented as a(n) [international student, asexual person, Indonesian-Dutch person, Dutch student, inhabitant of a municipality with (plans for) an AZC] towards the [government, University community, society] or by someone in [government, University community, society] play a role in feeling heard? 3b. What does feeling represented mean to you? 4. To what extent does attentive listening by the [government, University community, society] to [international students, asexual persons, Indonesian-Dutch persons, Dutch students, inhabitants of a municipality with (plans for) an AZC] contribute to whether or not you feel heard? 4b. What does attentive listening from the [government, University community, society] mean to you? 5. To what extent does empathy from the [government, University community, society] contribute to feeling heard or not as a(n) [international student, asexual person, Indonesian-Dutch person, Dutch student, inhabitant of a municipality with (plans for) an

	AZC]? 5b. What does empathy from the [government, University community, society] mean to you? 6. To what extent does respect from the [government, University community, society] contribute to whether or not you feel heard as a(n) [international student, asexual person, Indonesian-Dutch person, Dutch student, inhabitant of a municipality with (plans for) an AZC]? 6b. What does respect from the [government, University community, society] mean to you? 7. To what extent does mutual understanding, so that the [government, University community, society] understands you as a(n) [international student, asexual person, Indonesian-Dutch person, Dutch student, inhabitant of a municipality with (plans for) an AZC] and that you understand them, contribute to whether you feel heard or not? 7b. What does this mutual understanding mean to you? 8. Does the idea that the [government, University community, society] makes an effort for the group of [international students, asexual persons, Indonesian-Dutch persons, Dutch students, inhabitants of a municipality with (plans for) an AZC] play a role in feeling heard? 8b. What does this effort mean to you?
Goal: closing, leaving room for undiscussed topics	Are there any other topics that you think we haven't discussed, but could be relevant to what feeling heard means? Do you have any further questions or comments? If not, thank you very much for your time and effort. If you are interested in the results of this research, you can send me your email address. I will keep this email address in a secure environment and delete it after sending you the results. *[Stop recording]*

Appendix 3: Themes and subthemes coding phase one

Group	Theme	Subthemes
Citizens living close to a refugee shelter		
	Voice	Being represented; Being invited to voice; Personal contact with authority representatives
	Recognition	Being seen; Being understood; Being empathized with
	Influence	Being involved in decision making; Voice before decision
	Transparency	Being timely and personally informed; Decisions being explained; Being able to ask questions and get answers
Dutch students		
	Voice	Being able to voice opinions to authorities; Talking to family and friends; Representation of the student collective
	Attention	Receiving sincere attention
	Mutual understanding	Authority shows empathy; Being enabled to understand decisions; Society having an accurate picture of the group
	Inclusion	Not being forgotten; Being taken seriously; Being involved in decision making; Sense of togetherness with other students
	Action	Authority taking appropriate action; Sufficient explanation of lack of action
Asexual participants		
	Voice	Feeling safe to express feeling and opinions; Lack of prejudiced assumptions; Feeling represented
	Knowledge	Society knowing about asexuality; Society having an accurate image of asexuality; Knowing about oneself
	Empathy	Not being considered weird; Being understood
Indo-Dutch participants		
	Attention	Voice to draw attention; Being taken seriously
	Understanding	Knowledge of history; Understanding of peers
	Recognition	Government understanding the pain and suffering;

		Getting compensated
	Equal treatment	Not being discriminated; Equality compared to other refugee groups; Feeling included in society
International students		
	Voice	Having a spokesperson; University is open for input; University asks for feedback
	Responsiveness	University takes appropriate action; Timely responses; Personal and relevant responses
	Understanding/ empathy	Understanding of internationals' challenges; Adapting to internationals' differing needs
	Respectful treatment	Feeling included in the University community; Being treated equally as the Dutch students; Perspective being considered in decisions

Appendix 4: Codes and themes coding phase 2

Citizens

Meaning of feeling heard

Higher-level codes

no achterkamertjes (transparency)
being understood
adequate action being taken
being helped, collaboration
being asked
being able to ask questions
having influence
being listened to
perspective taking
having voice
being considered important
being informed
being represented
being trusted
government not only focused on self-interest

Themes

Being enabled to voice
Being treated equally
Being understood and empathized with
Being helped
Active information: Being informed correctly and completely
Passive information: Questions being answered

Consequences of feeling unheard

Higher-level codes

no effects on life
protest
psychological damage
support ingroup
thinking about it
seeking distraction
trust lost
voicing anyways
avoidance, trying to ignore
becoming aggressive
change voting habits
constructive dialogue
frustrated
information seeking
ingroup relationships damaged
legal action

Themes

Psychological suffering
Ingroup social support
Ingroup protest support

Outgroup destructive action
Outgroup constructive action
Informing the rest of society

International students

Meaning of feeling heard
Higher-level codes
influencing policy, measures taken
adapting to needs
given attention
being asked about opinion
feeling included
being able to contact, available to talk
good response
being helped
others are interested, want to know more
being listened to
being understood
being acknowledged or known
being able to ask questions
being cared about
transparency about decisions
not left alone
being represented
taken into account
taken seriously
being welcomed
being considered as important
Themes
Being enabled to voice
Being acknowledged
Being understood
Being included and valued
Being helped
Being responded to
Consequences of feeling unheard
Higher-level codes
acceptance
adapting
asking for change interpersonally
feel close to ingroup
feeling distant
negative feelings
negative perception of uni
stop voicing
study motivation
support collective voice
supporting ingroup
talking about it with ingroup

talking bad about uni to third party
Themes
Negative feelings
Adapting
Accepting
Ingroup social support
Ingroup protest support
Stop reaching out to outgroup
Informing others

Dutch Students

Meaning of feeling heard
Higher-level codes
(emotional) understanding
problems being acknowledged
reparative action as an extra
reparative action is needed
being able to voice
taken into account
not underestimated and discriminated
collaboration, help
being able to talk about it
feeling represented
treated as important, fair treatment
having freedom to act
being listened to opinions and ideas
listened to problems
being known
transparency about decisions
getting attention
government holding promises
Themes
Being enabled to voice
Being listened to
Being known and understood
Treated equally in equal circumstances
Being helped
Consequences of feeling unheard
Higher-level codes
adapting, managing life when
angry and frustrated
ask less questions
division between groups
explaining about mbo
feeling ashamed
feeling connected to peers
lost trust government
lost trust in society
not being respectful

political disengagement
stop study
studying more to proof oneself
support on social media
support protest
talking about it with family/friends
voting for representative

Themes

Negative emotions
Adapting, complying
Ingroup social support
Ingroup protest support
Disengagement from the outgroup
Educating the rest of society

Indo-Dutch participants

Meaning of feeling heard

Higher-level codes

being accepted
being considered Dutch
being respected
being taken into account
being considered as important
not discriminated by Dutch
Dutch are interested
Dutch know about us
Dutch do not ignore history
feeling like having a good life
feeling part of NL
government not only acting out of self-interest
speaking up
acknowledgement for our good deeds
sufficient compensation and excuses
freedom to act/decide
help in meeting needs
attention for the suffering
being represented
being trusted
suffering being acknowledged
being understood
fair treatment compared to other refugees

Themes

Having voice
Being acknowledged
Being understood
Being included and valued
Being helped

Consequences of feeling unheard

Higher-level codes

adapting
asking for compensation
be independent
being annoyed
being very angry
engaging in dialogue
feeling sad
gathering with peers
maintain Indo culture
no action
no trust in government in general
organizing as Indos
reading about past
remain silent
sharing your story
talking to peers
try not to worry
trying to life with it
voting for Indo representative

Themes

Negative emotions
Accepting, letting it be
Adapting
Ingroup social support
Outgroup legal action
Constructive dialogue with the rest of society

Aces

Meaning of feeling heard

Higher-level codes

asexuality not considered wrong and sick
being visible
feeling included
not having to explain
not ignoring it
correct representation
non-invasive questions
being accepted
attention for it
others show empathy, able to imagine
knowledge about its existence and what it means
being listened to
being represented
getting respect
being able to be oneself
being able to join the conversation
being taken into account
being believed
being understood

people changing worldview to accommodate aces
no stereotypes and prejudice
no stigmas
no taboo on (a)sexuality
others wanting to learn
Themes
Having voice
Being known
Being understood
Being accepted
Consequences of feeling unheard
Higher-level codes
angry and frustrated
avoid those that do not hear
being careful in what they communicate
being very careful with whom they share
feeling hurt
feeling lonely
insecure and feeling wrong
joined pride
not protesting
promoting visibility
seeking out other ace's
seeking out others that make them feel safe
stop explaining because annoying
supporting other ace's
thinking about it
trying to accept it
trying to adapt
trying to change policy
trying to educate others
Themes
Negative emotions
Trying to adapt
Trying to accept
Ingroup social support (online and offline)
Trying to change policy
Educating others

Appendix 5: Themes and quotes for the meaning of feeling collectively heard[1]

Theme	Subtheme	Illustrative Quotes
Voice	Getting the space and time to express	To have more channels, more spaces, more ways of communicating my concerns and that that the University promote them more. And I know there are study deans but, where do I look? Where is their office? How do I contact them? What happens if I have some kind of issue […] So, in order to be more heard I would say that University needs more promotion of the people, the channels, the spaces that are open for internationals students. (International students, participant 5) […] you see 5 speakers telling a very emotional story. Then the municipal council votes. First of all, nobody asks the speakers a question, they barely look at them, they just look around. And then they [the council] read out a statement that they wrote beforehand. So, you just let 5 people tell their story in vain. You completely ignore that. (Citizens, participant 4)
	Having the words to express	Silence yes. Yes, that, that's what you get, a very large silent group. That's not good. […] Screaming on a staircase, you know, at the peace palace, they don't do that. They haven't learned that. Not from their parents, not from their grandparents, you know? (Indo-Dutch, participant 3) You shouldn't talk about sex too much, but its also strange if you're not interested in it. (Aces, participant 2)
Awareness	Enabled to know	[…] a lot of them [Dutch population] don't know that history at all and that is foreign to them. But there are people who do look into it. And yes, that goes well […] with some people who, when you talk about something, don't know what you are actually talking about. That's simply because there is very little information [about Indo-Dutch history] provided in schools. (Indo-Dutch, participant 4) […] there doesn't necessarily has to be a lecture about it, but it does need saying "hey, these are all [educational] levels, when you're talking about the Netherlands". Or saying it like "these are all the levels that we have here" and just say in 5 minutes, "okay this is what MBO entails and we have levels 2, 3, 4."

[1] Dutch quotes were translated to English by the first author.

		Just so that everyone knows it a little bit about it, because then you also don't get the situation that someone doesn't know what MBO is. I know that there are a lot of people at MBO schools. And if you then realize that someone doesn't even know that those schools exist. That's so crazy. Yes, so I mainly think that. That's the basics. And that already makes you feel more heard. If someone doesn't even know everything you do and what you fight for, even though they live in the same country as you, that's really strange. (Dutch students, participant 1) I think people just don't know enough about it, so they can't understand it. There are also plenty of people who do know it, who did see it, and will still say "yes, but that doesn't make sense." You always have those. But I think there are also a lot of people who just genuinely don't know. And then they can't, they can't hear you either, because they don't know what you're talking about. (Aces, participant 2)
	Wanting to know	[…] it took me a long time to come to this conclusion. It's just really hard to even say, "oh, I'm on the aro-ace spectrum" because no one believes you. Every time I brought it up in my family, it was like, "Oh yeah, you just haven't met the right person yet", "Oh, that will happen, you're just a late bloomer", so just not believing it really is a thing. It's actually just a really weird thing to experience that most people just don't have. (Aces, participant 13) Then you [the municipality] would have organized an information evening, that would have been the first step. Now it's a bit of 'giving shit': they don't care what we think about it. (Citizens, participant 6) Depends on whether that person is indeed interested. You can talk, but if the person in front of you is not interested in it, there is no point because then you go back to your old, old worries and put [them] on the table and that makes no sense. (Indo-Dutch, participant 6)
Understand-ing	Authorities	And just like parents who are afraid and worried about the safety of their children […] And then the mayor asked: but what is it that you are so afraid of? That we thought, if the mayor already doesn't understand what parents are afraid of, then just stop. How are you [the mayor] going to ensure that things work out for us

		here? You are the one responsible for order and safety. (Citizens, participant 2) I think that that [being represented in the government] would play a big role, because then there is someone at a high level who can stand up for your interests. But I think what is important is that this person must have actually experienced the situation and not just watched it happen. So, for example, someone from the generation that experienced this would be in the cabinet to represent us, instead of someone who helped approve the policy, now sees that there are mistakes and wants to correct them, but basically approved that policy at some point and didn't really experience how it affected us. (Dutch students, participant 2)
	Rest of society	Yeah, then we came here and then, absurd, just find out for yourself. Yes, really, just find out yourself. Yes, even our family here in the Netherlands had no understanding for everything at all, because they can't imagine, right? Then we sometimes thought it makes sense that they can't imagine that. (Indo-Dutch, participant 3) Ace people are almost never being represented in the media, but there is also very little diversity within that representation, because of which people very quickly form an image, a one-sided image of a sexuality or a sexual orientation, so to speak. […] For example, yes, in the media, when it comes to asexuality, it is often about people not wanting sex, while that is of course not the case for everyone. Or that these people don't want a relationship, things like that. As a result, I think, people who are not familiar with this from people in their own environment, get a wrong or at least one-sided image of it. (Aces, participant 4)
Respect	Equal treatment	It is much more difficult for me to start a higher professional education, and to be accepted at a school somewhere, or even an internship, for example. And because, yes, when people see secondary vocational education, they consider it a low level. And think that we don't have the capacity to work. Or eventually be able to move to at a higher professional level. (Dutch students, participant 8) It's also in the language, things like “Love is what makes you human”, and if you don't experience that conventionally like everyone else does, then you're not

		human, you know, things like that. Yeah, it's wack. […] Well, you're just [considered] a broken person if they see that things aren't quite right. And what I often hear is autism, then you're just an autistic person […] So that's really a bit of a strange connotation, you are also often compared to robots or aliens, that you can be anything but human, that kind of thing. (Aces, participant 13) Sometimes because I'm dark and stuff. When I go shopping at the Etos [Dutch drugstore] and I'm looking for things, afterwards I always see a cashier who has of course noticed that there is a dark person [in the shop] and comes to check and then I actually feel quite bad. (Indo-Dutch, participant 5)
	Support in overcoming disadvantage	not feeling heard is that they don't take you into account. Therefore, you're being discriminated. You're not like, yeah, you're not taken into account in their interest and at the end of the day we are all students of one big uni. We should all be treated the same way […] They know taking flights is way more expensive when you arrive to Christmas, you know those times are really hectic for everyone, like for students, everyone. And yeah, just know maybe when we [the teachers] are scheduling the course, or I don't know, just reshaping it in a way that helps everyone would be nice, because obviously, yeah, Dutch students can get the train to go to their home place in two hours, but not everyone can do that. So yeah, that like there are tiny details that at the end of the day help a lot. (International students, participant 6) We were put in the corner like little boys, we were not listened to, and we just have to deal with it. That's sort of the message we got. The government no regard for what is happening in the countryside, we have known that for a long time. And you also see this when you look at the distribution of refugee shelters across the country, those are all in the province and not in the Randstad. It already starts with that. We cannot rely on the government. (Citizens, participant 4) If you compare it [treatment of Dutch-Indos] with how it is with other people after us… they have always forgotten us. (Indo-Dutch, participant 6)
Responsive-ness	Transparency	Simply explain in easy language what you did and why. […] Language use, but also completeness. So

		clarity, and just be complete. Justify your choices. (Citizens, participant 5) Of course, I also don't know what's going on in the government. And whether, for example, things I would like are actually possible, of course. So I think that's also a big factor in feeling heard. Because perhaps we are being heard, but because the government has no other option, yes, it is not possible of course. So I think that too, yes, yes, that is a very big factor, yes. [...] I also don't know what the government does or what the government can do. Usually we just hear it on the news once, and that's it. (Dutch students, participant 5)
	Question answering	They never have the answers. They are always redirecting you to one person. Then they redirect you to another person. Then they redirect you to the same person and it's completely useless. Honestly, completely useless. And you just feel frustration and that's it. And you don't find the answers. And yeah, that's why I don't know if the student desk has that role. (International students, participant 6) Too late, most of them [the Dutch-Indos] have already died. And they actually deserved it. Look, we are the next generation. […] But they [should have shown] respect to our parents. They've waited far too long. Also with this, with the recognition for the people themselves, when they were already well over 90. They [Dutch government] should have done so much earlier. (Indo-Dutch, participant 10)

Appendix 6: Themes and quotes for the consequences of feeling collectively heard[2]

Theme	Subtheme	Illustrative Quotes
Self	Negative emotions	My colleagues said: please take care of yourself. Because I was switched ON. A personal story: then you have such an intense evening with a lot of annoyance [...] Everyone is so very frustrated. That really took me a couple of days. Barely any sleep... I'm a very good sleeper, so is my husband, but my jammed head had to be organized again. And realizing what a strange, absurd theatre play I have witnessed. And what is true and what is not true? And what can I accept as honest and what is not honest? And we also have an app [WhatsApp group] where things are shared. So if you want to be ON, you can be on in no time. (Citizens, participant 3) Well, I have a roommate who just really [said] "yeah, shouldn't you just have sex sometime?" He literally made that statement. […] I then became just really, really angry and sad about it and I was genuinely like "really?". (Aces, participant 7)
	Adapting	I never really accepted myself, because as a teenager I was also very insecure about that. I thought "oh, there must be something wrong with me" and I became very focused on it [having sex] because I wanted to stimulate that in myself or something, because everyone else was also busy with that. […] I had a boyfriend when I was 18 or something, and then it felt like an obligation for me to go further than what I actually wanted, so to speak. Not that it was really super intense or anything, but I really did put a lot of pressure on myself, like "I have to want this, because I'm already so old and everyone does it." (Aces, participant 1) […] now I have a different motivation because I'm older, but then it was like, I'm not going to stay at level two. I'm not, you know what people think about me, that's not me. So that was my motivation for quite a while: "no, I'm not going to stay here because everyone says this and that". (Dutch students, participant 1) […] we are assimilated 100% and that of course comes very easily. I talk in Dutch, we had the Dutch thoughts in us, so that was quite easy. Only the food was different. (Indo-Dutch, participant 6)
	Trying to accept	I think I'm just really at a point where it all really doesn't matter to me anymore, and that I don't care about what other people think about this. So yes, I have really let go of that or

[2] Dutch quotes were translated to English by the first author.

		so, and also accepted it. […] this is how it is. (Aces, participant 14) I'm old now and I'm not going to worry about that anymore. I do talk to, I sympathize with the Indo-Dutch people. And then, sometimes you see that he withdraws, or she. Then they come up with a counter argument [but] it is of little use. […] why are they still making a fuss? History is over, it must be this way. (Indo-Dutch, participant 9)
Ingroup	Emotional support	I have to say, I spend quite a lot of time on Twitter and that is really a place where you actually meet a lot of people, actually without any real confrontation or, there are many options to meet different people. I've also been asking questions there about how they feel about being asexual and so you meet quite a lot of people who feel the same or have a similar sexuality, or feelings towards asexuality, so that's very nice. Because, for example, I can just ask a question or, "hey, does someone want to talk to me about it" and then completely strange people just come and say, "hey, DM [direct message] me", and "hey, […] I'm there if you want to talk about it". Or "oh, I have a few questions about it too." (Aces, participant 11) If you think, oh, I'm not the only one who thinks that, but ultimately the whole class thinks that way. And then I think you feel more heard by your fellow students. Even if not by the government, but with your fellow students. (Dutch students, participant 7)
	Protest support	Protests really only work if you have a very specific goal in mind. So, like a very detailed goal. And I feel like the kinds of goals we have are just more societal. So, I think that the goal is to just have bigger visibility, and I guess we can do that by just marching on the street with asexual flags and making people wonder what that is, but I think that's something that's already done in pride, so. I think maybe one thing you could do is have more of an asexual faction at pride. Well, if there was, because usually what I see is just individuals, some individuals bringing their own asexual flags to pride, which is nice, but if we had like a whole float that would be like even bigger visibility. (Aces, participant 5) Yes, if I were going to a protest or something like that, I wouldn't go there myself or ask friends to go there. If a friend asks me to go there, I would go along. So, and social media. Yes, if a friend posted a message, I would immediately repost it or whatever, but I would never post a

		message myself... No, yes, so I nee dan extra push. (Dutch students, participant 3)
Outgroup	Constructive engagement	But at a certain point we had that information meeting, and there were people that came from the church villages to the catering facility, who were not entering or not allowed to enter, but they collectively stood outside as a guard of honor with their backs turned to the mayor and the alderman. Is that neat? No. But that's how we feel too. You're actually sending out a signal about how you feel. If you walk there as mayor or alderman you will not feel good. Is that the way? For us at that moment, yes. Does that make you feel more heard? No, but supported. We really needed support. (Citizens, participant 3) […] only one person came to the University to talk about it, but then they didn't really take it seriously, because it's just one person. But then after, because we decided to e-mail them and then to say like yeah, 40 people don't agree with this course and stuff. And then after that they took it seriously because, oh yeah, well, because everyone doesn't like this course. So, there is something wrong with this course. I think, like in order to be heard, I think we really have to take collective action. (International students, participant 11)
	Destructive disengagement	Yeah, I always feel like after all these years I still feel like I'm a foreigner. I can't really integrate with society, which is very unfortunate. […] I still feel like I'm different. I still feel like I have different opportunities […] the way that I feel like treated differently than the other Dutch students makes me feel like, OK, I'm not home, you know, because no one in my home will treated me this way and it always repeating even after I mean almost three years here and I still feel like, yeah, I'm clearly not from here. (International students, participant 7) There's no point in reaching out, yeah, if there's no positive feedback or there's no appropriate response I won't bother reaching out, it's a waste of time. I have to manage my time carefully. (International students, participant 2) All faith in government is already gone. But the worst part is, we are going to the ballot box again at the beginning of the year, but I don't believe that anything will change. Everyone sees that it’s going wrong, everyone disagrees with it, and soon the same people will be elected, and we continue happily. So you have nothing say. (Citizens, participant 10)

Third party	Educating for knowlegde	just say “hey, do you even know that secondary vocational education exists”? If you can just make people aware of that. And eventually, when they hear someone else from outside their circle, they know, “oh yeah, I heard it there too”. I especially think that starting from your own, with your own people, that is the first thing you have an impact on. (Dutch students, participant 1)
	Educating for change	I'm trying to find a way that I can be heard, like even louder […] So, for me, the consequence is that I talk about it, and I make it a bigger issue all around the country, maybe like with other students and then many people talk about it. So then it becomes a societal issue and then teachers or whoever has to deal with the societal issue then not with me. So, you can say that this is kind of my revenge, like making it even bigger so “OK, you don't want to deal with me because you don't want to hear me, then deal with your society who's angry about people like you” ...you know what I mean? So basically, talking about it. (International students, participant 1)

Appendix 7: Meaning of the themes per group

Meaning of feeling collectively unheard

	Citizens	Indo-Dutch	Dutch students	Aces	International students
Having voice	No (real) voice before decision.	Indo silence: Indo-Dutch do not speak up and are responsible for being unheard.	Not able to voice about problems and needs. Not knowing where to ask questions. Many do feel heard by teachers that are available for questions.	Having no words to express what they experience. No voice because talking with people's prejudices. Difficult to voice due to taboo on sexuality. Lack of representation in media.	Not knowing where to go with questions. Not being invited to voice.
Being known	Concerns are not acknowledged. Others are not aware of the problems.	Indo history is not known by the rest of society.	Prejudice and assumptions prevent listening.	Limited or no knowledge about their identity. Many faulty assumptions that are hard to change.	The Dutch (teachers and students) do not know about their struggles.
Being understood	No empathy and understanding.	Indo-Dutch experiences are not being understood. Past suffering is not acknowledged.	Rest of society does not have an accurate understanding of MBO students. The other students feel the government does not (want to) understand their problems because they have not been in the same situation.	People do not even try to understand.	The Dutch do not understand or try to understand their situation and the problems they encounter. The Dutch do not empathize with the difficulties of the transition.
Being included and valued	Considered and treated as less important (than	Not treated equally to current refugees (who	Not being taken seriously and not listened	Their identity and experiences are not	Not being included and welcomed to the

	rest of NL, refugees).	get much more). Many Indos do feel Dutch and therefore heard.	to because not considered important.	believed and considered invalid. They do not fit in people's worldviews about how life should be. They are being considered wrong or sick.	University community. Not being treated in an equal manner compared to the privileged Dutch students, no equity. No adaptation to their special needs. No caring: not being asked how they are doing.
Being responded to	"Achterkamertjes", not informed timely and personally. No answers. Not helped, not supported.	Left alone and needs not being met when they first came here. Now an inadequate compensation and excuses too late.	Left alone. Government does not help students enough, not enough action.	na	Responding in an adequate and timely manner to comments and requests. Preferably also in the form of action in response to their issues and special needs. At least tries to do something with complaints and explains when this does not work out.

Consequences of feeling collectively unheard

	Citizens	**Indo-Dutch**	**Dutch students**	**Aces**	**International students**
Ingroup	Support seeking, talking about it. Protesting together.	Hardly talked about it due to culture but Indos do gather for social events. No protesting but some	Talking about it which makes them feel heard (but even less heard by the government). Do not protest	Seeking out each other and talking about their experiences, often online. Seeking out others that	Talking about it makes them feel heard (but even less heard by the University). Maybe voicing

		organizations try to get more compensation	but might support it.	make them feel safe. No protest because not a clear goal or request.	collectively might help.
Outgroup destructive	Losing trust. Stop voting. Confrontation with refugees or in government meetings.	na	Losing trust and feeling negative towards government. Disengaging from politics. Stop asking teachers for help.	na	Not feeling at home. Losing trust and negative feelings towards the University. Stop asking questions.
Outgroup constructive	Different voting. Seeking constructive dialogue. Silent protest.	Asking for compensation as a collective or an individual.	Voting for party that represents their voice.	A few tried to change policy or be active in politics.	na
Personal consequences	Negative emotions, even some health issues. Thinking about it. Actively trying to avoid it and find distraction. Letting it be.	Accepting it and focus on making their own life nice. Adapting by becoming more Dutch.	Negative feelings. Trying to adapt by spending wisely. MBO students either stop studying or try to study at a higher level because of being underestimated.	First feel very insecure and lonely because they feel sick and wrong. Trying to change and be “normal”. Later accepting it.	Accepting and trying to adapt. Negative feelings. Negative effects on study motivation and results.
Third party	Trying to inform through social media or talking about it to close others.	Informing those that are interested about their past, but remaining silent if there is no interest.	Talking about it with family and friends that agree. Some MBO students want to educate society about their value.	Educating others, especially those that seem willing to learn, and often on social media. Avoiding those that are not open.	Talking in a bad manner about the University to third parties.