

**A Sense of Belonging and Race-Related Stressors: Experiences of Ethnic-Racial
Minority Doctoral Students at the University of Groningen**

Yvette Compaijen

S2538946

Department of Psychology, University of Groningen

PSB3N-BT15: Bachelor Thesis

Group: 2122_1a_22

Supervisor: Joyce Hoek

Second evaluator: Prof. Dr. Marijn van Dijk

In collaboration with: Keziah Seifert, Sterre Pauly, Tessza Badric, Iona Breeuwsma and

Niklas Kranz

February 8th, 2022

A thesis is an aptitude test for students. The approval of the thesis is proof that the student has sufficient research and reporting skills to graduate, but does not guarantee the quality of the research and the results of the research as such, and the thesis is therefore not necessarily suitable to be used as an academic source to refer to. If you would like to know more about the research discussed in this thesis and any publications based on it, to which you could refer, please contact the supervisor mentioned.

Abstract

Doctoral students with an ethnic-racial minority background could be at risk for experiencing race-related stressors, which may endanger their sense of belonging in academia. The primary aim of this current study is to explore the current state of social safety at the University of Groningen in a population of doctoral students of color and, ultimately, their sense of belonging and coping responses in the face of adversities. Nine doctoral students were interviewed using a semi-structured format. The data imply a general positive work climate, although race-related stressors were present: some participants described instances of microaggressions and most participants shared the feeling of standing out in their departments due to their racial or international student identity. In response, doctoral students coped by seeking social support which provided the doctoral student with care and affirmation of lived experiences. In the quest to build lasting connections to others, doctoral students sought others with whom they share an important part of their identity. Unfavorably, participants generally had trouble connecting with Dutch colleagues, but emphasized a positive relationship with their supervisor. These findings should be interpreted with two limitations in mind. First, this study has not reached theoretical saturation due to time constraints. Second, all participants are international students, which may have been an influential confound.

Keywords: sense of belonging, minority doctoral students, race and ethnicity, work environment, social safety, coping, social support

A Sense of Belonging and Race-Related Stressors: Experiences of Ethnic-Racial Minority Doctoral Students at the University of Groningen

The rough seas of academia can be difficult to navigate as a young researcher. In a short window of time, one has to prove their academic worth in order to continue in a niche field of research. Therefore, it is not unexpected that the risk for developing serious mental health issues is heightened during one's doctoral degree, in particular symptoms of anxiety and depression (Evans et al., 2018; Levecque et al., 2017). It has been observed that a sense of belonging may act as a safeguard against depressive symptoms. This means that social connectedness may possess protective properties to counterbalance the mental health risks faced by doctoral students (Hagerty et al., 1996; Sargent et al., 2002). Yet, it has been observed that a sense of belonging in educational institutions is lowest for those with a minority or marginalized identity, such as students with an ethnic-racial minority background (Clark et al., 2012; O'Meara et al., 2017). This could be explained by race-related stressors such as a lack of ethnic-racial diversity in academic institutions (Shavers & Moore, 2019) and racialized experiences, including stigmatization, social exclusion, and microaggressions (Brondolo et al., 2009; Clark et al., 2012; Farber et al., 2021). In recent years, the current state of social safety at Dutch universities has been debated (FNV, 2019). Similarly, doctoral students at the University of Groningen have come forward to share their experiences of hostile work environments, albeit anonymously in fear of repercussions for one's career (Boomsma, 2021a, 2021b). This current study continues to explore social safety at the University of Groningen in a population of doctoral students of color. Ultimately, it aims to better understand the implications of race-related stressors for a sense of belonging.

Literature Review

Before we consider the existing literature on a sense of belonging and race-related stressors, I would like to make a note. Throughout this study, the terms 'ethnic-racial minority

identity' and 'people of color' (POC) are used interchangeably. In this study, we define POC as a person who identifies with any racial identity other than White.

A Sense of Belonging and Race-Related Stressors

The body of research on a sense of belonging in minority doctoral students is emerging and therefore limited. For this reason, studies with samples of undergraduate populations are also considered in this literature review. In addition, most studies have been carried out in the United States. The results of these studies may or may not be generalizable to doctoral students in a Dutch academic environment.

First, let us consider belongingness broadly. In an academic context, a sense of belonging refers to a psychological connection to one's academic department and its members. Here, "[...] people strive to be accepted by others, valued, and respected as competent, qualified individuals worthy of membership in a defined group or particular social context" (Strayhorn, 2019, p. 128). This concept is closely related to graduate student socialization (O'Meara et al., 2017). Here, the individual integrates into their role as a doctoral student. In an effortful process, they learn the norms and codes of behavior of their department. As they grow into this role, they cultivate knowledge and skills relevant to their field of research, encouraging a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2019). Unfavorably, when belongingness does not properly develop, it poses a threat to psychological functioning and a barrier to academic success. In doctoral students, lower levels of belongingness predict higher attrition rates (Ostrove et al., 2011) and compromise academic functioning in undergraduate students, including lower levels of motivation, engagement, and achievement (Suhlmann et al., 2018). Furthermore, lower levels of belongingness predict higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression in minority doctoral students (Miller & Orsillo, 2020). Considered holistically, an endangered sense of belonging may disadvantage already underrepresented populations in

academia (O'Meara et al., 2017), which, in turn, endanger educational ideals of equity and inclusion (Ainscow, 2020).

Several factors have been proposed which influence a sense of belonging in minority doctoral students in the realm of race-related stressors. First, is the student demographic in one's department (O'Meara et al., 2017). At predominantly White institutions (PWI), doctoral students of color may experience feelings of isolation and alienation (Gay, 2004; Ostrove et al., 2011; Shavers & Moore, 2019). In these spaces, a plethora of additional stressors may arise. To illustrate, students may be glared at, feel pressured to act as a representative of their racial group, or make conscious efforts to invalidate stereotypes (Griffith et al., 2019; Han et al., 2018). To my knowledge, there are no exact numbers that describe the distribution of racial identities of doctoral students at the University of Groningen. Nevertheless, in terms of nationality, Dutch (41,2%) and non-Dutch Europeans (21,5%) seem to be the most prevalent (Fokkens-Bruinsma et al., 2021). Therefore, it is inferred that the University of Groningen can be considered a predominantly White institution as well. Consequently, perceptions of student demographics are relevant to this current study.

In addition to student demographics, also microaggressions have been proposed as a relevant factor (Clark et al., 2012; O'Meara et al., 2017). Microaggression can be defined as a "modern form of racism comprised of subtle daily racial slights and insults" (Torres et al., 2010, p. 1075) and are prevalent among minority doctoral students (Lilly et al., 2018). Examples include, but are not limited to, stereotypical assumptions about one's identity, receiving special treatment, and expectations of lower competence (Han et al., 2018). Such slights and insults are often subtle and ambiguous in nature, leaving the doctoral student to question their own judgments (Clark et al., 2012). Regardless, microaggressions undermine the doctoral student's abilities and competence, threatening a sense of belonging. Here, Hussain and Jones (2021) emphasize the importance of institutional commitment to condemn

prejudice and discrimination. Indeed, perceived social support from one's institution affects undergraduate students' sense of belonging (Hussain & Jones, 2021).

Coping Responses

In response to race-related stressors, doctoral students may demonstrate effective coping to circumvent its damaging effects. This is not to say that those who experience maltreatment are responsible to resolve its adverse effects (Brondolo et al., 2009). Rather, research in coping and resistance acknowledges and recognizes the efficacy of targeted individuals (Spanierman et al., 2021). In review studies, specific coping strategies have been examined in their potential to mitigate distress and depressive symptoms. Here, we consider the following strategies: race-related identity development and seeking social support (Brondolo et al., 2009; Spanierman et al., 2021).

First, a developed race-related identity describes an understanding of the history, shared experiences, and social position of one's racial group. This coping strategy can have both favorable and unfavorable consequences. On one hand, when a group faces pervasive maltreatment, one may come to expect and fear rejection. On the other hand, identity development may foster a sense of pride in one's racial identity which increases self-esteem. Evidence for the protective properties of this coping strategy to mental health outcomes are mixed, in particular to depressive symptoms (Brondolo et al., 2009).

Second, seeking social support is a coping strategy in which adverse experiences are shared with trusted others. A support network can provide guidance on how to cope with race-related stressors. Simultaneously, it increases connectedness to others. Surprisingly, studies of this coping strategy in relation to mental health outcomes are limited. Yet, current findings suggest that this strategy may mitigate distress (Brondolo et al., 2009). These coping strategies — race-related identity development and seeking social support — may occur simultaneously. In a college student population, Thelamour and colleagues (2019) found that

Black undergraduate students in a PWI coped with isolation by connecting with peers who are similar to them in terms of ethnicity, which provided an opportunity to affirm one's racial identity as well as develop deep connections. Similarly, it is of interest to this study how doctoral students of color at the University of Groningen build personal and professional support networks.

Aim

This current study explores the contemporary state of social safety at the University of Groningen in a population of doctoral students, with a focus on coping and well-being. Here, the significance of having an ethnic-racial minority identity is considered and its implications for a sense of belonging. This study is guided by the following research questions: What factors encourage and undermine a sense of belonging in doctoral students of color at the University of Groningen? What race-related stressors do they encounter? And how can a support network encourage coping in the face of race-related stressors?

Methods

This current study uses a qualitative method. Qualitative researchers are interested in how people make sense of the world and how they experience events. Here, the aim is not to add predictive value to the existing literature, but to describe and explain experiences as they occur (Willig, 2008). Qualitative research allows for a more flexible approach to obtain rich data and to reveal information that quantitative data may not be able to capture.

Researcher Reflections

In qualitative studies, researchers play an integral role in the collection, interpretation, and reporting of the data. This requires an enduring self-awareness of our presence within this study (Finlay, 2002). This study is carried out in close collaboration with Keziah Seifert and Sterre Pauly under the supervision of Joyce Hoek. Therefore, I would like to recount our shared reflections. Personally, I went into this project with an interest in the lived experiences

of others. Before interviewing, I expected that racial issues may be heightened in an academic environment, which is often described as highly ambitious and competitive. Similarly, Sterre expected that people of ethnic and racial minorities can have dissatisfactory work experiences. In turn, these presumptions may have shifted our focus towards adverse experiences. Keziah's motivation for this project comes from her identity as a person of color. She tries to incorporate aspects of her identity in her work to gain a deeper understanding of her experience. Keziah expresses that, in a way, subconsciously, this project may have been a means to access people like her who are older and can affirm her experiences.

Moreover, Sterre expressed that she tries to be aware of her stereotypes and prejudices, but she acknowledges that there is still space for her to educate herself more when it comes to racial issues. Personally, I familiarize myself with societal challenges by reading, however, I do not often engage in discourse on racial issues face to face. This inexperience added to my nervousness about interviewing participants about a sensitive issue in fear of overstepping the participant's boundaries. Participants may have sensed my discomfort which could have influenced their level of openness. In addition, it has to be noted that both Sterre and I are White. In our interviews, participants may have held back on some of their true feelings and struggles due to a lack of identification. In contrast, Keziah expressed that as a person of color, participants may have felt more open to sharing their experiences with her. However, she got the impression that most interviewees would have responded similarly to an interviewer who is not a person of color.

Participants

Our sample consists of nine current or former doctoral students, all of whom are affiliated with the University of Groningen. At the time of data collection, participants had been doctoral students for at least one year or, if graduated, completed their doctorate less than one year ago. Throughout this study, we will address them by their pseudonymized

names: Maxine, Bright, Sebastian, Jessica, Stacey, Lana, Amber, Isabelle, and Nick. Their ethnicities can be characterized as Black (2), Asian (3), Hispanic/Latino (3), or multiracial (1). Moreover, all participants have non-Dutch nationalities, which could have been a confounding variable in this study. This sample represents doctoral students from the Faculty of Science and Engineering (4), Faculty of Medical Sciences (3), Faculty of Behavioral and Social Sciences (1), and Campus Fryslân (1).

Potential participants were invited to take part in this study through an open call (see Appendix A) which was promoted by the Graduate School, Ph.D. councils, Ph.D. associations, and other community groups. This method allowed us to reach potential participants across faculties, serving two purposes. First, it allowed us to represent a broad perspective across the academic institution, and second, it allowed us to find enough participants during data collection which was completed in a limited time frame of four weeks. Due to time constraints, it was not possible to sample until theoretical saturation was achieved. Instead, we agreed to include nine participants, which is an arbitrary number. Here, we used a convenience sample where participants were selected based on availability and willingness to participate. No compensation was offered for their participation.

Ethical Considerations

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Psychology at the University of Groningen (code for approval: PSY-2122-S-0013). Before the interview, participants were sent the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix B). At the start of the interview, we asked participants to verbally consent. Moreover, we emphasized their rights as a participant, which includes the right to withdraw, the right to not answer any question, and the right to view and modify the transcript for accuracy or anonymity. In addition, we reminded participants that identifiable details would be removed from the transcript. Names, faculties, nationalities, and most countries were kept anonymous in the transcript unless stated otherwise or deemed

relevant for the research. Finally, the audio recordings of the interviews were encrypted and stored at our university accounts.

Data collection

In this study, we conducted semi-structured interviews. The interview guide (see Appendix C) was adaptive and subjects were interchanged based on the interviewee's responses. We also prioritized particular questions in the guide in case the interview reached the time limit. We would like to make an additional note about Question 3 (see Appendix B) which is extensive in nature and has many examples, which may be confusing to participants. In particular, in Jessica's interview, more attention was given to negative experiences as opposed to positive experiences, which may have influenced the answer outcome for this specific question.

The interviews took place in person or online through Google Meet. The duration of the interviews ranged between 50 minutes and 100 minutes. There were no prior relationships between participants and researchers, except for Bright whom one of us is acquainted with. During interviews, we tried to make participants feel as comfortable as possible. We allowed participants to decide the label they identified with instead of imposing one and gave them the option to choose the space where they felt most comfortable to conduct the interview. If present, we emphasized similarities or common interests and acknowledged experiences like hardships and struggles. In addition, we allowed silence and used non-verbal body language and small encouragement to motivate the participant to share their experiences.

Interviews were audio-recorded. We used F4 transkript to manually transcribe the interviews. In the transcription, words that contained no meaning (e.g. 'eh', 'like') were not transcribed. Non-verbal signals were also noted, if relevant. After an initial round of transcribing, the audio was reviewed a second time for accuracy.

Data analysis

Transcripts of the interview make up our data, which contain the subjective lived experiences of our participants. This study uses thematic analysis with an inductive approach. Thematic analysis is a tool to identify common themes in the data. Yet, themes do not emerge naturally. Rather, researchers play an important role in identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2021). In this study, we assume commonalities in the experiences of our participants resulting from their ethnic-racial minority identity or as an international doctoral student, despite not sharing a uniform nationality, ethnicity, or cultural background. The inductive approach further explains how the data was not examined through a specific framework during data analysis. Instead, I consider the data through the lens of my research questions. Alternatively, both Keziah and Sterre have a hybrid inductive-deductive approach, using the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as their theoretical framework. This explains our codes for the three components of SDT: the need for relatedness, the need for autonomy, and the need for competence.

Byrne (2021) denotes six phases of thematic analysis. Our starting point corresponds to Byrne's first phase. We familiarized ourselves with the data, which was accomplished through transcribing the interviews manually and preliminary readings of the transcripts. After data familiarization, phase two followed. We produced an initial set of codes that reflected the content of the data closely, using two transcripts. For this purpose, we used Google Docs which allowed us to highlight meaningful excerpts from the transcripts and suggest codes using the comment function. Subsequently, we transitioned to ATLAS.ti to code all nine transcripts. The software allowed us to code systematically throughout the dataset and to group, organize and define each code. Newer codes that were developed further down the coding process were noted and previous transcripts were revisited and reviewed. Some older codes were deleted or replaced with better-fitting codes. Phase three, four, and five of Byrne (2021) provide an outline for generating, evaluating, and naming themes. In an

effort to make sense of the data, we grouped codes into coding schemes and discussed what story they tell. After several revisions, we agreed on the main structure containing themes and subthemes. However, themes may differ in each of our theses to accommodate individual research questions. Furthermore, to evaluate the validity of the themes, I examined if the quotes within each coding scheme indeed tell a coherent story. Here, I observed that some quotes seemed inappropriate to the theme, which could be the result of inconsistent coding or unsatisfactory demarcation of specific codes. For example, the code ‘stereotypes’ included stereotypes the participants faced but also the participant’s own stereotypical beliefs. Lastly, the sixth and final phase of thematic analysis is producing the report (Byrne, 2021).

Results

Participants generally emphasized a positive work climate and living environment in Groningen. Overall, doctoral students felt encouraged to explore their personal interests in research and felt valued for their opinions by their supervisors. Some participants disclosed that their ethnic-racial minority identity influenced their work experience. This was reflected in the interpersonal and intrapersonal domain: participants described instances of race-related stressors in social interactions but also disclosed internal struggles of isolation, loneliness, and vigilance for potential negative responses. Other participants did not share the same sentiment. These stories are examined in more detail in the theme *Adversities Related to One’s Minority Identity*. Moreover, all participants are international students and therefore had to cultivate a social support network in Groningen. Most succeeded, albeit with effort and challenges along the way. The topic of settling down in a new country and developing new relationships is explored in the theme *Building a Support Network*.

Building a Support Network

Developing a sense of belonging can be challenging when one emerges in a new environment. As an analogy, Nick described moving to the Netherlands as going through a second puberty, “*You're insecure about stuff again. You don't know what's right and what's wrong. And on top of that, you want to fit in because you are new.*” Participants coped with this by the active process of finding and building a community. Another strategy to instill a sense of belonging was integrating into and adjusting to Dutch culture. Here, participants each had their own stories of victories, struggles, and coping which are discussed in the subthemes *Finding and Building Personal Connections*, *Building Professional and Personal Connections at Work*, and *Integrating and Adjusting*. Coding schemes of the three sub-themes are provided in Appendix D (Figure 1a, 1b, and 1c, respectively) to provide a closer look.

First Sub-theme: Finding and Building Personal Connections

Finding and building personal connections was central to feeling at home in the Netherlands. However, building relationships, both professional and personal, can be effortful. After all, one has to put in time and resources to find and connect to others and maintain social connections. Lana, Jessica, Stacey, Amber, and Isabelle shared that they found it difficult to connect to others at some point during their doctoral degree. For example, Amber shared that in the first year she would travel abroad every month to meet friends. Only recently she was able to find her community, “*We just drink together every week. Not talk about work.*” Before, Amber enjoyed Groningen academically but explained that this community was important to enjoy it also personally.

Participants often sought out others with whom they share an important piece of their identity or belief system. As a result, participants sought communities but also created their own. Examples include: finding other feminists for Stacey, visiting Church for Bright, and connecting with other Black women for Maxine. Maxine describes the importance of finding a community early on, “*I think I met (name) in my second or third month here, and we started*

meeting and doing this. And I needed that, that was like nourishment to my soul.” Stacey expressed that it was important to her to be surrounded by people of color or people who speak the same language. *“That makes me feel at home, more like I belong and I'm not [...] a strange person in a place that's not for her.”* Moreover, it was observed by Sebastian that there are communities in Groningen that gear towards specific nationalities, *“You end up seeing that they'll not reach out to the respective Ph.D. communities but they'll have their own country's international group within the University [...]. Sometimes they just need a home away from home.”* Similarly, both Jessica and Amber felt it was easier to connect to other international residents who, in general, have more experience engaging with other cultures. Similarly, Lana shared, *“I don't really know how Dutch people make friends or behave in front of friends.”* Lana continued to explain that the meaning of relationships is much clearer to her when she interacts with people who share her nationality. *“We call someone our friends pretty quickly. We don't really use the word ‘acquaintances’, because if we use that means we hate you [Laughs].”*

Second Sub-theme: Building Professional and Personal Connections at Work

Most participants described a positive professional relationship with their supervisor. When participants were asked about their ideal supervisor relationship, many expressed the wish to connect on a personal level with their supervisor. For example, both Nick and Amber were fond of their supervisors and longed for an even closer relationship. In contrast, Isabelle, who described one of her supervisors as friendly and approachable, felt that her supervisor went overboard by sending her text messages on the weekends that were not related to work. Nevertheless, characteristics such as caring, supportive, and encouraging were often mentioned as desirable. Both Jessica and Stacey shared that their supervisors were imperative for them to feel at home in the Netherlands. To illustrate, Stacey disclosed that she felt quite isolated during her doctoral degree, which started during the Covid-19 pandemic. Her

supervisor offered her the support she needed, *“She would invite me to have a lunch with her, with her family, and she was so welcoming to me and I felt that at least I had someone.”*

Moreover, some participants valued a level of identification with their supervisors, such as their race, ethnicity, nationality, or gender.

One particular challenge to building professional connections had to do with language barriers. Some participants felt unsure about their English-speaking abilities. Jessica explained that her insecurity prevented her from speaking up out of fear of losing face. Yet, eventually, she overcame her insecurities. *“I should be open-minded and confident and don't be afraid to lose your face [...] It's kind of a cultural thing that drives you to behave that way.”* Moreover, participants shared experiences of finding it difficult to befriend Dutch colleagues due to language as well. Entering an environment where the default language is Dutch can be isolating if you do not speak the language. Jessica disclosed that colleagues would often speak Dutch amongst each other, which made her feel excluded, *“We can't hear, we can't understand. They have their own way to feel connected with their own group.”* Sometimes participants avoided social situations altogether, such as Stacey, who often declined invitations to get lunch from her colleagues, *“I kind of didn't want to bother by just being there and they have to switch to English.”* Eventually, Stacey voiced her concerns,

“When I opened up to my colleagues and said I feel bad about that, they said ‘Don't! It's also good for us to practice our English,’ I started going out to lunch with them and I think my mood also improved.” (Stacey)

Related, Amber, Sebastian, and Isabelle observed that Dutch colleagues tend to have an established group of friends and are therefore less open to friendships at work.

Third Sub-theme: Integrating and Adjusting

In the dyadic relationship between international doctoral students and native colleagues, cultural differences between participants and local residents often became apparent. Familiarizing oneself with Dutch culture was an important coping strategy for some, while others longed for their own culture to be appreciated and known beyond a superficial level. As an illustration, Jessica's supervisor had lived in her home country for some years and was, therefore, able to understand her disposition to honor hierarchy within their relationship. *"He knows what kind of behaviors are characteristic of (ethnicity) students and he always encourages me to change that into a more Western way to be free and no strict [hierarchy] between supervisors and students."* In contrast, on the part of the doctoral student, efforts were made to familiarize oneself with the Dutch culture and the international environment at work. Sebastian shared,

"Part of me living in this country is also not saying I'm trying to impose myself here, but what are the cultural norms here that I have to be aware of to be able to facilitate the dialogue, which is important." (Sebastian)

Generally, participants were satisfied with the low power distance at work but sometimes struggled with Dutch directness. Moreover, Nick felt that it was important to him to befriend native residents to feel at home in the Netherlands. This allowed him to make sense of Dutch culture. Befriending local residents helped him to distinguish, for example, Dutch directness from plain rudeness.

"I am here, everything is new, I'm not really sure what's right or wrong and then these people are just being rude. And then they're saying, 'This is not being rude, this is just being direct.' Then I start questioning myself, you know, my own manners. But then I start talking to people who are actually closer to me in their way of thinking about the world, who are also Dutch. And then they say, 'No, that's a lie, that is just being rude."

These people are stupid. ' [...] Then I just know that the way that those people think is not the Dutch way. ' (Nick)

Adversities Related to One's Minority Identity

Unfortunately, doctoral students encountered race-related stressors experiences in their work environment. Within this theme, I aim to explore adversities concerning one's minority identity in interpersonal relations. Some participants revealed feeling excluded, lonely and endured experiences of microaggressions, discrimination, and stereotypes. However, some participants clarified that their racial or ethnic identity had not influenced their work experiences explicitly: Sebastian, Jessica, Nick, and Stacey recalled no incidents at work in which their identity was negatively highlighted. Yet, participants may experience adversities concerning their identity implicitly. For example, Bright felt that his racial identity may have influenced how others approach him. He suspected that people give him special treatment because they want to be viewed as tolerant. It was important to Bright to be recognized for his personality, not his racial identity.

Furthermore, it is important to recognize that doctoral students do not arrive as blank slates at the University of Groningen. Indeed, multiple participants pointed out their personal histories of race-related adversities and their lasting effects on daily life. Stacey shared an experience in a North American country, *"People heard me speaking (language), and someone commented that I should go back to where I came from. And I think from that point on, I have this inner fear that someone is going to say that to me."* Thus, even in the absence of a direct threat, there is vigilance. In contrast, Sebastian explained that his past experiences raised the threshold for what he considers to be discrimination. Nick, however, shared Stacey's fear of being negatively regarded by others. In particular, the fear of falling into stereotypes. Nick disclosed, *"I noticed I am always a little bit extra stressed about being on time to make sure that I am not the (nationality) that is always late."* Moreover, one explicit

experience of discrimination comes from Amber. Amber's colleague was showing a Master student around the office. *"And then, when she passed by with the Master student she said in Dutch, because I understand, 'Those are just foreigners, it doesn't matter'. And then she didn't introduce us to her Master student."* In addition, a lack of cultural competence from native residents could lead to unwanted questions or comments, which often contained presumptions or stereotypical ideas about one's cultural background. Some received compliments on the fluency of their English or questions about their presumed unusual eating habits. Lana shared that someone once commented on the high number of poor people in her home country, *"In [the] grand scheme of things that's not wrong, but I'm not exactly happy that your idea of my country is just related to poverty."* Importantly, one particular race-related stressor seemed to be omnipresent among participants: the observation that one is part of a minority. Due to its significance, it is reviewed in the subtheme *Standing Out or Feeling Like You're the Only One*. Nevertheless, in the face of adversities, there was also coping. Particularly, participants described wanting to feel cared for by others and wanting to be affirmed. The subtheme *The Need to be Affirmed and Cared For* explores the importance and function of this particular support. Appendix D provides coding schemes for the main theme (Figure 2a) and its two subthemes (Figure 2b and 2c).

First Sub-theme: Standing Out or Feeling Like the Only One

In predominantly White institutions, one particular struggle is the feeling of standing out which can endanger one's sense of belonging. All participants shared the sentiment of standing out in their work environment at the University of Groningen, in particular concerning their racial minority identity or international student identity. In most cases, this sense of standing out originated from the observation of being the only or being one of the very few. For example, Lana shared, *"I did a couple times jokingly say, 'This department is very White'."* Participants have diverse responses to standing out. While some experience a

sense of isolation, insecurity, and internal pressure, yet others recall no adverse effects. For example, Stacey shared, *“Sometimes I feel like I stand out and also because of my hair and just how I look. And I think that everyone, at one point some people just, I don't know, treat me differently.”* Moreover, Maxine expressed how the feeling of standing out fueled her fear of being hired as a token and the pressure that came with this fear. *“Was I hired because I'm a Black woman? [...] Was I hired because of this? And you know what comes after that, you got to prove right, you got to prove that you weren't hired because of this.”* Similarly, Jessica shared that at the start of her doctoral degree she felt isolated in her department being the only one of her specific ethnicity. *“I'm the only one. I feel a little bit pressure to behave myself well.”* Moreover, a lack of role models in academia can induce uncertainty about the progression of one's career. Bright worried,

“If you don't see them, it makes you doubt whether you have a place here after your Ph.D. studies, whether you can get employed here. Sometimes it made me feel a bit, maybe that there is nothing good going to come from this.” (Bright)

The need to blend in became apparent when Stacey expressed,

“I remember that one time I felt that I needed to go somewhere just to have some fun, and I went to Germany and I saw a lot of people of color, and that made me feel better, [...] I don't feel like I stand out so much”. (Stacey)

In contrast, some participants were aware that they stand out from others but didn't experience adverse effects. Nick reflected,

“I never really felt a lot like an outsider. Well, I am an outsider because I am from another country. But this feeling that I sometimes hear from my colleagues, of being looked at differently or of feeling less worthy, I haven't had.” (Nick)

Second Sub-theme: The Need to be Affirmed and Cared For

When participants experienced adversities in interpersonal relationships, they offered a rationalization almost instantaneously. For example, some mentioned that there was no ill intent on the end of the other party or contemplated the meaning of the interaction. Yet, in some cases we observed doubt in the participant, *“But again, maybe it was just me overthinking things,”* for Bright or *“But am I reading too much into it?”* for Maxine. In those instances, participants valued affirmations from others. Here, others can confirm the participant’s reality or offer emotional support. Social support can be particularly powerful when there is a level of identification between people. To illustrate, Maxine shared that she values hearing from others who have had experiences similar to her. Therefore, she joined a support group for doctoral students for Black women. Maxine motivates,

“And I had to do that, in order to... Why? To hear other people say, 'No, it's not just you,' because you need that sometimes. Like I said, it's a mental struggle and sometimes you wonder if it's just you reading too much into something or, so I needed that and those experiences.” (Maxine)

Similarly, Lana, whose closest friends in the Netherlands are mostly White Europeans, shared, *“Usually, I just complain about it to my other friends that are also other people of color because they will understand. [...] Sometimes White people don't understand what [it's] like.”*

Moreover, a lack of perceived care from others may be detrimental to a sense of belonging. Isabelle described an experience during lunch where she was speaking English with her colleagues, however, when the supervisors joined everyone suddenly switched to Dutch. *“No one dares to say 'Hey, we were speaking English for a reason,' and I also don't dare to say 'Hey, why did you all switch?’”* As mentioned earlier, language barriers could lead to feelings of isolation and exclusion in participants. Here, a lack of support from colleagues could amplify these feelings. In addition, a lack of institutional support can also

contribute to not feeling cared for. Isabelle, Lana, Bright, and Amber all debated the University's commitment to the care and well-being of minority and international doctoral students. Sometimes, a sense of hopelessness could be detected. When Lana recommended cultural sensitivity training for staff, she reflected, "*Again, I don't think they will do it.*" Bright shared his suspicion that diversity serves a performative function at the University of Groningen. Again, Bright pleaded the value of diversity: a diverse staff provides role models for minority students and affirms the notion that an academic career is within reach for all.

Discussion

The primary aim of this study was to explore the presence of race-related stressors in doctoral students of color at the University of Groningen and, ultimately, what factors encourage and undermine their sense of belonging. Moreover, coping responses to race-related stressors were also considered. A thematic analysis of the interviews indicated, generally, a positive work environment. Despite this, participants disclosed feelings of loneliness and alienation. Potential factors were identified. Namely, all participants observed a lack of ethnic-racial diversity in their departments. Consequently, this negatively affected their sense of belonging, as has been observed in preliminary studies (O'Meara et al., 2017). In response, participants experienced insecurity about the progression of one's career, the pressure to prove themselves, and the pressure to positively represent their ethnic-racial group. Such responses have been reported previously in the existing literature about minority doctoral students in PWI's (Gay, 2004; Ostrove et al., 2011). In addition, other race-related stressors were present in our sample — doctoral students endured experiences of stereotypes, microaggression, and racism. Together, these findings support both student demographics and microaggressions as relevant determinants of a sense of belonging in minority doctoral students, as proposed by O'Meara and colleagues (2017).

Interestingly, other experiences of loneliness and alienation could be related to the participant's international identity as opposed to their ethnicity or race. Indeed, in this sample of international doctoral students, participants were assigned a double task of socialization. They had to adjust to the customs of Dutch culture as well as the customs of their academic departments. Participants generally found it difficult to connect to Dutch colleagues due to language barriers. Unfavorably, this poses a barrier to developing a professional network, which is a contributing factor to a sense of belonging in graduate school (O'Meara et al., 2017). Yet, in this professional network a positive mentor relationship is also important, often provided by one's supervisor. In our sample, participants expressed satisfaction with their relationship with their supervisor. Supervisors provided the participants with guidance and encouragement, which is beneficial to graduate student socialization (Strayhorn, 2019). These findings harmonize with a recent survey among doctoral students at the University of Groningen by Fokkens-Bruinsma and colleagues (2021), in which supervisor satisfaction was also reflected.

Moreover, this current study revealed some strategies to cope with race-related stressors. Community and support networks may safeguard against the negative effects of race-related stressors, in particular microaggressions, by providing care and affirmation of lived experiences. Indeed, Brondolo and colleagues (2009) argue that support networks allow the individual to recognize race-related stressors as shared experiences. An affirmation can be especially powerful when there is a level of identification between people. Results also imply that doctoral students seek to build connections with others with whom they share an important part of their identity. Examples include, but are not limited to, ethnicity, nationality, gender, religious affiliation, and belief system. Unfortunately, due to the qualitative design of this study, no conclusions can be made about the relation between coping strategies and mental health outcomes. In future research, it may be fruitful to include quantitative elements

which allow a systematic examination of coping strategies and mental health outcomes, such as the use of questionnaires.

Finally, some participants perceived a lack of institutional care for doctoral students of color and international students, which negatively affects a sense of belonging (Hussain & Jones, 2021). An institutional commitment to diversity and inclusion should be prioritized. Currently, one of the challenges faced by University of Groningen is to cultivate a safe climate where adverse experiences can be shared. It can be questioned whether support and resources are satisfactory, as exemplified by a recent report by Young Academy Groningen (2021) about harassment. Here, it becomes clear that the institution struggles to arrive at satisfactory solutions for victims after a complaint has been filed against a colleague of higher status. In some cases, an act of harassment against a staff member was reconstructed as a mere interpersonal conflict. Fortunately, in our sample, doctoral students had not experienced incidents that required a formal complaint.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

The results of this study should be interpreted with its limitations in mind. First, data collection took place during the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic may have impacted the social lives of doctoral students, who have had less opportunity to form and maintain social bonds. In turn, this may have exacerbated feelings of loneliness and isolation and undermined a sense of belonging, especially for those who started their doctoral degree during the pandemic. Furthermore, there are also some limitations in regards to sampling and recruiting. Time constraints confined us to a limited number of interviews, thus, theoretical saturation was not reached. We recommend that future qualitative studies recruit participants until no new information is yielded in order to reach theoretical saturation. Second, the open call method of recruiting participants could lead to underrepresentation or overrepresentation of populations. Thus, there could be a volunteer bias, meaning that those who chose to

participate in this study may be different from the general population. For example, people with either particular good experiences or particularly bad experiences will come forward and participate in the study. This comes with the risk that people with a neutral point of view may not be represented.

Unfortunately, in this study, there were no specific considerations for intersecting minority identities, such as race, ethnicity, gender, social-economic background, sexual orientation, and religion. Some participants mentioned some of these themes spontaneously, yet, this study may not have sufficiently appreciated the participant as a complex whole. Interestingly, by chance, all participants in this study are international doctoral students. It can therefore be argued that their experiences can be related to their ethnic and racial identity as well as their international student identity. This also means that the experiences of Dutch doctoral students of color are not represented in this study, which could be of interest for future research.

Conclusion

Concluding, this study examined a sense of belonging in ethnic-racial minority doctoral students in a European academic context. The findings suggest similar determinants of a sense of belonging, namely race-related stressors, which originate from studies based in the United States. Nevertheless, some cultural differences may exist and require a deeper examination. Ultimately, scientific insights may guide practical strategies to support minority doctoral students, promoting educational ideals of equity and inclusion.

References

- Ainscow, M. (2020). Inclusion and equity in education: Making sense of global challenges. *PROSPECTS*, 49(3), 123–134. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-020-09506-w>
- Boomsma, C. (2021a, February 15). ‘Mijn PhD heeft me gesloopt.’ *UKrant.nl*.
<https://ukrant.nl/magazine/mijn-phd-heeft-me-gesloopt/>
- Boomsma, C. (2021b, February 22). Je mond opentrekken (of niet). *UKrant.nl*.
<https://ukrant.nl/magazine/je-mond-opentrekken-of-niet/>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Brondolo, E., Brady ver Halen, N., Pencille, M., Beatty, D., & Contrada, R. J. (2009). Coping with racism: A selective review of the literature and a theoretical and methodological critique. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 32(1), 64–88.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10865-008-9193-0>
- Byrne, D. (2021). A worked example of Braun and Clarke’s approach to reflexive thematic analysis. *Quality & Quantity*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-021-01182-y>
- Clark, C. R., Mercer, S. H., Zeigler-Hill, V., & Dufrene, B. A. (2012). Barriers to the Success of Ethnic Minority Students in School Psychology Graduate Programs. *School Psychology Review*, 41(2), 176–192.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02796015.2012.12087519>
- Evans, T. M., Bira, L., Gastelum, J. B., Weiss, L. T., & Vanderford, N. L. (2018). Evidence for a mental health crisis in graduate education. *Nature Biotechnology*, 36(3), 282–284. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nbt.4089>
- Farber, R., Wedell, E., Herchenroeder, L., Dickter, C. L., Pearson, M. R., & Bravo, A. J. (2021). Microaggressions and Psychological Health Among College Students: A Moderated Mediation Model of Rumination and Social Structure Beliefs. *Journal of*

- Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities*, 8(1), 245–255. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40615-020-00778-8>
- Finlay, L. (2002). “Outing” the Researcher: The Provenance, Process, and Practice of Reflexivity. *Qualitative Health Research*, 12(4), 531–545. <https://doi.org/10.1177/104973202129120052>
- FNV. (2019, May 5). *Onderzoek FNV en VAWO: Helft universiteitspersoneel ervaart sociaal onveilige werkomgeving*. <https://www.fnv.nl/nieuwsbericht/sectornieuws/fnv-overheid/2019/05/helft-universiteitspersoneel-ervaart-sociaal-onvei>
- Fokkens-Bruinsma, M., Jansen, E., & Axmann, F. (2021). *Well-being Survey 2020: Aspects of University of Groningen PhD students' well-being*. Rijksuniversiteit Groningen.
- Gay, G. (2004). Navigating marginality en route to the professoriate: Graduate students of color learning and living in academia. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 17(2), 265–288. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390310001653907>
- Griffith, A. N., Hurd, N. M., & Hussain, S. B. (2019). “I Didn’t Come to School for This”: A Qualitative Examination of Experiences With Race-Related Stressors and Coping Responses Among Black Students Attending a Predominantly White Institution. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 34(2), 115–139. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558417742983>
- Hagerty, B. M., Williams, R. A., Coyne, J. C., & Early, M. R. (1996). Sense of belonging and indicators of social and psychological functioning. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*, 10(4), 235–244. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0883-9417\(96\)80029-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0883-9417(96)80029-X)
- Han, S., Dean, M., & Okoroji, C. (2018). Minority Student Experiences in a Living and Learning Community on a Predominantly White College Campus. *Journal of Ethnographic & Qualitative Research*, 13(2), 107–121.
- Hussain, M., & Jones, J. M. (2021). Discrimination, diversity, and sense of belonging:

- Experiences of students of color. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 14(1), 63–71. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000117>
- Levecque, K., Anseel, F., De Beuckelaer, A., Van der Heyden, J., & Gisle, L. (2017). Work organization and mental health problems in PhD students. *Research Policy*, 46(4), 868–879. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2017.02.008>
- Lilly, F. R. W., Owens, J., Bailey, T. C., Ramirez, A., Brown, W., Clawson, C., & Vidal, C. (2018). The Influence of Racial Microaggressions and Social Rank on Risk for Depression Among Minority Graduate and Professional Students. *College Student Journal*, 52(1), 86–104.
- Miller, A. N., & Orsillo, S. M. (2020). Values, acceptance, and belongingness in graduate school: Perspectives from underrepresented minority students. *Journal of Contextual Behavioral Science*, 15, 197–206. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcbs.2020.01.002>
- O'Meara, K., A. Griffin, K., Kuvaeva, A., Nyunt, G., & N Robinson, T. (2017). Sense of Belonging and Its Contributing Factors in Graduate Education. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 12, 251–279. <https://doi.org/10.28945/3903>
- Ostrove, J. M., Stewart, A. J., & Curtin, N. L. (2011). Social Class and Belonging: Implications for Graduate Students' Career Aspirations. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 82(6), 748–774. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jhe.2011.0039>
- Sargent, J., Williams, R. A., Hagerty, B., Lynch-Sauer, J., & Hoyle, K. (2002). Sense of Belonging as a Buffer Against Depressive Symptoms. *Journal of the American Psychiatric Nurses Association*, 8(4), 120–129. <https://doi.org/10.1067/mpn.2002.127290>
- Shavers, M. C., & Moore, J. L. (2019). The Perpetual Outsider: Voices of Black Women Pursuing Doctoral Degrees at Predominantly White Institutions. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 47(4), 210–226.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/jmcd.12154>

Spanierman, L. B., Clark, D. A., & Kim, Y. (2021). Reviewing Racial Microaggressions Research: Documenting Targets' Experiences, Harmful Sequelae, and Resistance Strategies. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *16*(5), 1037–1059.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/17456916211019944>

Strayhorn, T. L. (2019). *College students' sense of belonging: A key to educational success for all students* (Second edition). Routledge.

Suhlmann, M., Sassenberg, K., Nagengast, B., & Trautwein, U. (2018). Belonging Mediates Effects of Student-University Fit on Well-Being, Motivation, and Dropout Intention. *Social Psychology*, *49*(1), 16–28. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-9335/a000325>

Thelamour, B., George Mwangi, C., & Ezeofor, I. (2019). “We need to stick together for survival”: Black college students' racial identity, same-ethnic friendships, and campus connectedness. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *12*(3), 266–279.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000104>

Torres, L., Driscoll, M. W., & Burrow, A. L. (2010). Racial Microaggressions and Psychological Functioning Among Highly Achieving African-Americans: A Mixed-Methods Approach. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, *29*(10), 1074–1099.

<https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.2010.29.10.1074>

Willig, C. (2008). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method* (Second ed). Open university press.

Young Academy Groningen. (2021). *Harassment at the University of Groningen*. University of Groningen. <https://www.rug.nl/news/2021/10/young-academy-groningen-publishes-report-on-harassment-in-academia?lang=en>

Appendix A

Open call

Dear Ph.D. students,

For our bachelor thesis project, we aim to explore the experiences of Ph.D. students of color* at the University of Groningen. We would like to interview you about how you experience your research project, work environment, well-being, and the collaboration with your supervisor. The interview will take about one hour. Please feel free to participate in our research if you would like to share your experience. We look forward to hearing your perspective.

Requirement: You are a Ph.D. student at the University of Groningen and have been for at least one year, or you have finished your Ph.D. less than one year ago.

You can contact us at [e-mail address].

* In our study we define people of color as anyone who isn't White. However, we realize that this includes a wide range of cultures and ethnicities and that people of color are not a uniform group. We recognize that people may identify in a number of different ways.

Kind regards,

Sterre Pauly, Keziah Seifert and Yvette Compaijen

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

“The experienced of Ph.D. students of color at the University of Groningen”

- The purpose of the research has been explained to me in writing, and I have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw my contribution at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I am aware that an audio recording and a written transcript will be taken of the interview.
- The following about the processing of my data has been explained to me:
 - The transcript will be pseudonymized and identifiable information will be removed.
 - I will be given the opportunity to check the transcript for any factual mistakes or sensitive information.
 - The original audio recording will be retained at the University of Groningen, encrypted, and will be deleted after the publication of this study.
 - The anonymized transcript of my interview will be retained for 10 years at the University of Groningen.
 - I can request a copy of the audio recording or transcript at any time while it is in storage, as specified above.
 - The transcript of my interview will be used for analysis and anonymous excerpts from my interview *may* be used as part of the bachelor theses of Sterre Pauly, Keziah Seifert and Yvette Compaijen.

- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.
- I hereby consent to voluntarily participate in the current study:
 yes no
- I hereby give permission to record the interview:
 yes no, but the interviewer can take notes of the interview

Appendix C

Interview Guide

1. You are dedicating 4+ years of your life to contribute to academia and to the knowledge on [insert research topic]. What drives you to do so?
(Probe) What year of your Ph.D. are you currently in?
 - a. In your research project, to what extent do you feel like you are able to make your own choices? Can you give me an example?
 - b. Do you feel confident in your abilities as a researcher or academic? How so?
2. For the sake of this study, we will be using the term ‘person of color’, which we define as anyone who is not White. We realize that this includes a wide range of cultures and ethnicities and that each person has their own unique experiences and struggles. When we use the term person of color, we mean to address your unique ethnic background with which you identify. Do you feel comfortable with us using the term person of color or would you prefer us to address your identity in any other way?
 - a. Have you experienced that your identity as a person of color has influenced your work and can you give an example of how it has or hasn’t?
 - b. (Option 1: the answer to 2a is that their identity has influenced their work environment.) What are some of your coping strategies to get through this experience?
(Probe) I would like to revisit [insert challenge] briefly. If a friend/colleague were to go through a similar experience, what advice would you give them?
(Probe) What was particularly helpful to you to overcome [insert challenge]?
 - c. (Option 2: the answer to 2a is that their identity has not influenced their work environment.) Have you always felt this way during your Ph.D. at the University of Groningen? What aspects of your work have helped you to feel at home?

3. Most Ph.D. students struggle with similar stressors related to academia, such as the pressure to publish, meet deadlines, and improve the quality of science. However, there are experiences that are unique to people of color. These experiences can either add to or counterbalance some of those stressors. A counterbalance could be, for example, finding a community within academia. This could include finding other Ph.D. students of color, mentors and allies. However, there are also negative experiences, such as microaggressions and feelings of isolation. Could you talk a bit about how you yourself have experienced this?

(Probe) Did you voice your experiences?

(Probe) Which responses and support, or lack thereof, did you receive and by whom?

4. How would you describe the relationship with your supervisor?

(Probe) Can you describe how you and your supervisor are similar? How does this affect your relationship with your supervisor?

- a. What is your ideal supervisor relationship? To what extent does your relationship deviate from this ideal, and why?

(Probe) Would you like to change anything in this relationship?

- b. * You mentioned some qualities in an ideal supervisor relationship such as [list qualities]. How would having a supervisor who is also a person of color affect your work experience?

5. How would you compare your experience as a Ph.D. student of color at the University of Groningen versus your previous institute?

(If the participant completed their Bachelor's and/or Master's degree at the University of Groningen). Have you observed any changes or improvements with regards to diversity, for example the number of POC staff and students? What would those changes be?

6. What advice would you give to the University of Groningen in regards to improvements they could make for the issues you have mentioned? Do you have any tips for improvement?
7. * Would you like to continue in academia after your Ph.D.? Why or why not?

* If the interview is running low on time, questions with this mark may be skipped.

Appendix D

Coding schemes

Figure 1a. Coding scheme for the main theme of *Building a Support network* with *First Sub-theme: Finding and Building Personal Connections*. The scheme includes codes, corresponding definitions, and a selection of quotes to illustrate the code.

Code	Definition	Examples
Sense of belonging	Describes the human emotional need to be an accepted member of a group. This includes family, friends, religion, colleagues or an academic institution as a whole.	<p>"What made me the most comfortable about being here was the fact that I felt welcome. Not only from the university, but from the Dutch culture perspective, you know? And valued for what I am." (Nick)</p> <p>"They have been very welcoming to me but I guess in the beginning I just felt like, I sort of didn't belong in a sense." (Stacey)</p>
Feeling at home	Expression of experiencing an emotional state in response to one's situation, mood or relationship with others. Here, refers to expressing a sense of belonging.	<p>"It started spiraling into this positive thing. I just felt very at home. Because I had this relationship and I had all of this network to support me. They are not like family-family, but they are friends." (Nick)</p>
Coping strategy_Finding community	The approach a person takes to solve an interpersonal or personal problem that will help to overcome, mitigate, or tolerate feelings of stress or conflict. Here, the specific strategy is finding community or efforts to find community.	<p>"And I think for me one of the main things that really help me during my Ph.D. is the church I was part of. For me, a big part of that community was fantastic." (Bright)</p> <p>"I talk about it actually. I think I either with friends or family, yeah just talk about it and try to say, "Oh, why do feel uncomfortable or what can I do?" Or, "I've found my other communities out there, that's something you have to do as a researcher and a PhD student." (Maxime)</p> <p>"Actually there is the Gopher, the PhD event organization is called Gopher. They organize some social events for the gathering and I met other international students there and yeah it's very good experience to have fun with others." (Jessica)</p>
Coping strategy_Seeking out familiar or similar others	The approach a person takes to solve an interpersonal or personal problem that will help to overcome, mitigate, or tolerate feelings of stress or conflict. Here, the specific strategy is to seek out other people who are familiar or share similarities. For example, seeking out people with whom they share an important part of their identity.	<p>"I think it's important or very helpful for building a connection with supervisor or even a colleague, when a colleague comes from a similar (ethnicity) country it's easier to build connections with each other." (Jessica)</p> <p>"Because I'm a woman, or I identify as such, I always tend to go to women first because I also declare myself as a strong feminist, and then the Ph.D. I had also some colleagues that were quite feminist so then you have something in common and it's to create like this sense of community." (Stacey)</p>
Community_Finding community	Community: A group of people sharing similar characteristics, background, values or interests. Here, refers to finding community or efforts made to find community.	<p>"I've found my other communities out there, that's something you have to do as a researcher and a PhD student." (Maxime)</p> <p>"Actually there is the Gopher, the PhD event organization is called Gopher. They organize some social events for the gathering and I met other international students there and yeah it's very good experience to have fun with others." (Jessica)</p>
Community_Creating_community	Community: A group of people sharing similar characteristics, background, values or interests. The participant mentions efforts to create and build community.	<p>"Yes, that is why I do a lot of (community work). I work in three (community spaces)." (Sebastian)</p>
Community_Helping others	Community: A group of people sharing similar characteristics, background, values or interests. Here, refers to helping other people.	<p>"And also looking at the last names. Like, oh she or he's probably from Latin America and then you can reach out. And that's what I did, I reached out to them like, "Hey, is there anything you need?" (Isabelle)</p>
Support network_Friends support	Refers to the participant's friend(s) that they can turn to for support, encouragement and advice.	<p>"I did make new friend who is also a person of color and we bonded pretty much immediately based on a lot of like... He is born and raised in Europe but because he is like still (ethnicity) we bonded quite fast." (Lana)</p>

Figure 1a. (Continued)

Support network_Church	Refers to the participant's religious affiliation that they can turn to for support, encouragement and advice.	<p>" And I think for me one of the main things that really help me during my PhD is the church I was part of; for me a big part of that community was fantastic." (Bright)</p>
Community_Difficulty finding friends	Community: A group of people sharing similar characteristics, background, values or interests. Here, refers to expressing a difficulty to establish new friendships.	<p>" And it was also hard to find like a community of people. I know there are (Latin Americans) here but I haven't met a lot of (ethnicity)." (Stacey)</p> <p>" That's the awkward part. Because you don't really talk as friends when you are sitting next to each other. You are just busy with work. That is one issue. I don't know. And when they talk, they just talk in Dutch. And then they might think I am just a shy (nationality) girl who doesn't want to talk." (Amber)</p>
Isolation	The state of being in a place or situation characterized by feelings of separation from others. Inclusion criteria: participant has to mention that they feel isolated or have difficulty connecting with others.	<p>" Issues with mental health, feelings of isolation. Especially if they come as international students, then they have... maybe not as a close support network as they used to have." (Sebastian)</p> <p>" But to be honest, it was kind of like isolating because I also felt like okay everyone is Dutch, and I don't speak their language and I kind of didn't want to bother by just being there and they have to switch to English." (Stacey)</p>
Loneliness	Emotional state of solitude, which can be experienced while being isolated from others as well as in a group.	<p>" I was just so lonely because my friends, when I first came here my friends from back home also came, not specifically to Groningen but to the Netherlands for their studies but, I was the only one that stayed like they all left then I had to sort of like start over, making friends again." (Lana)</p>

Figure 1b. Coding scheme for the main theme of *Building a Support Network* with *Second Sub-theme: Building Professional and Personal Networks at Work*.. The scheme includes codes, corresponding definitions, and a selection of quotes to illustrate the code.

Code	Definition	Examples
Support network_Colleagues support	Refers to the participant's colleague(s) that they can turn to for support, encouragement and advice.	<p>" We have a very good climate to share our own work with other international and local students. We have like lunch meeting to present our research with others. So, I guess it helped me concentrating and further explore what I'm doing now what I'm actually focussed on. I get inspired from other ideas and perspectives. They actually encourage and help me to do my research . " (Jessica)</p> <p>" When I opened up to my colleagues and said I feel bad about that, they said 'Don't! It's also good for us to practice our English. ' I started going out to lunch with them and I think my mood also improved. " (Stacey)</p>
Support network_Supervisor support	Refers to the participant's supervisor(s) that they can turn to for support, encouragement and advice.	<p>" He encouraged me to do a PhD here and he helped me to settle down in this country and yeah I feel like more connections with him. " (Jessica)</p> <p>" I think she is like my friend. [Laughs]. [...] She taught me a lot about (software program). And we have each other's WhatsApp. We sometimes communicate from WhatsApp. Hm. [Praises]. It's the vibe, you know? Sometimes the connection is just like, "Ah, she's so nice and she's so easy going. " " (Amber)</p>
Ideal supervisor relationship_Relating on a personal level	Characteristics associated with the best possible or perfect supervisor relationship. In this case: relating on a personal level.	<p>" I would like to have more personal connections, but not really personal. Because I know some other supervisors, they will take their Ph.D. to dinner. Not one to one, but in a group. Or go for a drink. Or go for a bike trip, or something. But I've never had this with none of my supervisors. " (Amber)</p>
Ideal supervisor relationship_Caring	Characteristics associated with the best possible or perfect supervisor relationship. In this case: caring.	<p>" I think it's a relationship where you know you can trust the other person, and also that the other person shows that she cares for you. " (Stacey)</p>
Ideal supervisor relationship_Encouraging	Characteristics associated with the best possible or perfect supervisor relationship. In this case: encouraging.	<p>" Because sometimes I doubt myself a lot, but they have never doubted that I am capable of this. " (Stacey)</p>
Ideal supervisor relationship_Supportive	Characteristics associated with the best possible or perfect supervisor relationship. In this case: supportive.	<p>" When you approach them, they always happy to support you and compliment on you and give their opinion. " (Amber)</p>
Ideal supervisor relationship_Sharing POC identity	Characteristics associated with the best possible or perfect supervisor relationship. In this case: sharing identity as a person of color.	<p>" I think it's important or very helpful for building a connection with supervisor or even a colleague. when a colleague comes from a similar (ethnicity) country it's easier to build connections with each other. " (Jessica)</p>
Community_Difficulty connecting with Dutch colleagues	A group of people sharing similar characteristics including background, values or interests. In this case: difficulty connecting with Dutch Ph.D. students	<p>" The thing you notice is that it's really hard to make real friends with locals, either (European country of previous university) or Dutch. They will treat you as their best international friend. " (Amber)</p>
Language_Barriers	Refers to the lack of effective communication between people who are unable to speak the same language (on the same level of fluency).	<p>" I guess maybe the language barrier for international students. They are not very good at Dutch so most of us speak English during the social event, but for the local people they can't help themselves just speaking Dutch with themselves so it's like excluded. We can't hear we can't understand. They have their own way to feel connected with their own group. " (Jessica)</p>

Figure 1c. Coding scheme for the main theme of *Building a Support Network* with *Third Sub-theme: Integrating and Adjusting*. The scheme includes codes, corresponding definitions, and a selection of quotes to illustrate the code.

Code	Definition	Quotes
Integrating and adjusting	Integrating: The process of adjusting to being a citizen of the Netherlands. To mix with and join society or a group of people. Often involves adjusting one's behavior to suit their way of life, habits and customs.	<p>" But it comes with a trait as well, you have to leave your country and family and you have to turn suddenly 160 degrees to come here and maybe at first really like trying to grapple with what is happening and language barriers those kind of things." (Lana)</p> <p>" Whereas in the Netherlands, it's very much like: let's talk about the weather and let's just grab a coffee and have oliebollen. It's different. I guess, part of me living in this country is also not saying I'm trying to impose myself here, but what are the cultural norms here that I have to be aware of to be able to facilitate the dialogue, which is important." (Sebastian)</p>
Insecurity_Coming to a new country and adjusting	Feelings of anxiety and insecurity that the participant experienced upon moving to the Netherlands.	<p>" So, you're insecure about stuff again. You don't know what's right and what's wrong. And on top of that, you want to fit in because you are new. So, you get insecure in this way." (Nick)</p>
Cultural competence	The ability to comprehend, appreciate and interact with people from different cultures or belief systems than one's own.	<p>" I have noticed and seen, like also sometimes a culture clash for some students, when they come from international backgrounds. They have this expectation to be told what to do. The professor says, "XYZ you have to deliver this" and then they sort of feel a bit lost. But then it's part of their growing up and trying to incorporate different cultures of research into their Ph.D." (Sebastian)</p> <p>" I think the international education background or study abroad experience that supervisors have, it could be very supportive very good or feel the connection with international students because they have a good foundation to understand each other better other than always having stereotypes or their own minds and ideas." (Jessica)</p>
Learning and speaking Dutch	Effort participants directed towards learning and speaking Dutch.	<p>" And then back then, I was learning Dutch and I asked some Dutch friends, "Can we go and have lunch together? I'll pay for your lunch and then we can speak and learn more Dutch, you know?" (Nick)</p>
Coping strategy_Familiarizing oneself with Dutch culture	The approach a person takes to solve an interpersonal or personal problem that will help to overcome, mitigate, or tolerate feelings of stress or conflict. Here, refers to familiarizing oneself with Dutch culture.	<p>" I am also very interested as well. I love traveling, I love learning about new cultures. So for me, there was always this urge to learn more about the Netherlands, because I just wanted to know everything about it." (Nick)</p>
Community_Befriending Dutch people	A group of people sharing similar characteristics including background, values or interests. In this case, befriending Dutch people.	<p>" But when I opened up to my colleagues and said I feel bad about that. They said "Don't! It's also good for us to practice our English" I started going out to lunch with them and I think my mood also improved." (Stacey)</p> <p>" For me, it was really important to have Dutch people who agree with me. Because now I know it's not all me. It's all these people who are being weird." (Nick)</p>

Figure 2a. Coding scheme for the main theme of *Adversities Related to One’s Identity*. The scheme includes codes, corresponding definitions, and a selection of quotes to illustrate the code.

Code	Definition	Examples
Stereotypes	Oversimplified and generalized set of ideas that people have about what someone or something is like. Includes stereotypes that other people have of them or the group they belong to, and stereotypes the participant has about others.	<p>“ I was like a couple of minutes late. So, I was like, “Sorry, I’m sorry that I’m late” and I was going to explain why. And the person said, “Oh no, it’s fine, you’re (nationality)”. That was very hurtful, you know? So, this was a very bad experience. I think that nowadays I’m extra concerned about being late.” (Nick)</p> <p>“ But all the Dutch colleagues, I think, if they want to social or communicate an issue, it’s like they have a mode. Like, they have mode they switch on [Laughs] to communicate to international-colleagues-mode. And then, the questions we receive. Like, to some extent, I feel like those questions I don’t really want to answer, you know. Those questions for typical (nationality) or (ethnicity) Ph.D.’s. I’m like, “Oh no, what time is it?”” (Amber)</p>
Discrimination	Treating a person or particular group of people differently than others, primarily in a negative fashion, on the basis of for example, but not limited to their skin color, sex, background, abilities or sexuality.	<p>“ Sometimes, they would have those Master or Bachelor students who would do their project with them. So, they will lead them here, walk around and introduce. And one day there was a colleague, and she brought a Master student. Just like, “Hi, this is this,” and “Hi, this is this”. And then I was sitting somewhere with another international Ph.D. student and then... We happened to sit together, because this is a flexible table. But we were just sitting together that day. And then, when she passed by with the Master student she said in Dutch... Because I understand, “Those are just foreigners, it doesn’t matter”. And then she didn’t introduce us to her Master student. She just turned to the other side.” (Amber)</p>
Feeling othered/Tokenized	Expression of experiencing an emotional state in response to one’s situation, mood or relationship with others. Here, refers to the experience of being tokenized.	<p>“ Was I hired because I’m a Black woman? Was I hired because my supervisor does work with persons of color? Was I hired because of this?” (Maxine)</p> <p>“ I think it will help them to stop look at like, you know, the internationals are German or British or whatever. I’m pretty sure they don’t get treated the same way like as the internationals that are also people of color.” (Lana)</p> <p>“ Then he said, “That’s why I like to keep my lab so diverse,” or something like that. And I was like, why?” (Isabelle)</p>
Commenting on their language (Dutch or English)	Receiving comments on how well they speak a certain language (either English or Dutch).	<p>“ They didn’t say it in an insulting manner but I do find it a bit insulting when people say, “Oh my god, your English is so great”. Why are you surprised? Do you think we have no education? I don’t know. I feel like it’s quite offensive. Why? Because I look like this so you would expect I don’t speak English well?” (Lana)</p>
Internal_Vigilance	Self-imposed feelings or experiences of alertness that happen internally.	<p>“ I remember once I was in (North American country) and people heard me speaking (language), and someone commented that I should go back to where I came from. And I think from that point on, I have this inner fear that someone is going to say that to me.” (Stacey)</p>
Emotion_Discomfort	Expression of experiencing an emotional state in response to one’s situation, mood or relationship with others. Here, refers to expressing emotional discomfort.	<p>“ It’s not that anyone has pointed out something, but I do feel like sometimes I stand out and not in a good way.” (Stacey)</p>

Figure 2a. (Continued)

<p>Work relationship_Affected by POC identity</p>	<p>Work relationships that are or have been affected by POC identity.</p>	<p>" Specific to race, perhaps it's affected how people approached me or sort of people ' s perceptions about me, also not really in a negative way but sometimes I had a feeling that people are trying to be nice to you because of your race, you know? Just because maybe it makes them feel, how do you call it, tolerant or something like that. Which sometimes I didn't really like. I mean, if you are being nice to me then be nice to me because of my personality, because of my work, because of who I am. But don't give me respect or try to be nice to me because I am a person of color." (Bright)</p>
<p>Work relationship_Not affected by POC identity</p>	<p>Work relationships that are not or have not been affected by POC identity.</p>	<p>" I was like a couple of minutes late. So, I was like, "Sorry, I'm sorry that I'm late" and I was going to explain why. And the person said, "Oh no, it's fine, you're (Latin American nationality)". That was very hurtful, you know? So, this was a very bad experience. I think that nowadays I'm extra concerned about being late." (Nick) " But all the Dutch colleagues. I think, if they want to social or communicate an issue, it's like they have a mode. Like, they have mode they switch on [Laughs] to communicate to international colleagues mode. And then, the questions we receive. Like, to some extent, I feel like those questions I don't really want to answer, you know. Those questions for typical (nationality) or (ethnicity) Ph.D.'s. I'm like, "Oh no, what time is it?" (Amber)</p>
<p>No personal experiences with discrimination (NI)</p>	<p>Absence of negative experiences regarding aspects of their identity including race, sexuality, gender or nationality.</p>	<p>" Sometimes, they would have those Master or Bachelor students who would do their project with them. So, they will lead them here, walk around and introduce. And one day there was a colleague, and she brought a Master student. Just like, "Hi, this is this," and "Hi, this is this". And then I was sitting somewhere with another international Ph.D. student and then... We happened to sit together, because this is a flexible table. But we were just sitting together that day. And then, when she passed by with the Master student she said in Dutch... Because I understand, "Those are just foreigners, it doesn't matter". And then she didn't introduce us to her Master student. She just turned to the other side." (Amber)</p>
<p>Identity_Racial identity</p>	<p>How a person defines themselves, or a set of qualities of a person which makes them different from others. Specifically in relation to one's racial identity.</p>	<p>" I'm Black, I'm Black, POC is an umbrella term but I'm Black, I'm (ethnicity), blackity Black Black." (Maxine) " Yes, yes, that's a very polarizing fact about there. There it's very much: your color is your identity. Whereas in Europe, it's a bit more of a melting pot in that regard. So it's not like, "You are this and you are that". It's more like, "Oh, you're just a good person or a nice person". That's my experience." (Sebastian) " I know I am a Ph.D. of color, but that is not my identity. Because I do not see myself as different from the others, you know?" (Nick)</p>
<p>Identity_International</p>	<p>How a person defines themselves, or a set of qualities of a person which makes them different from others. Specifically in relation to one's international doctoral student identity.</p>	<p>" Yeah, here, I never had the feeling of being a person of color. I had the feeling of being an international." (Nick) " But for international students we have our own networks ourselves. So, it's kind of open and inclusive here. After work or during i still have some differences between local group and international group." (Jessica)</p>
<p>Identity_Immigrant</p>	<p>How a person defines themselves, or a set of qualities of a person which makes them different from others. Specifically in relation to one's immigrant status or identity.</p>	<p>" I think the categorization of being considered a foreigner is already quite engr. well not engrained, but a sort of stamp you receive prior to coming to a country. Because you have to do a visa application, you have a time limit on how long you are [going to stay]. " (Sebastian) " I mean I have experienced some of those like isolations those kind of things but that wasn't related to my identity as a person of color. I think it was just because I was an immigrant, I still am an immigrant. And my work stressors were related to a lot of them were related to my whole immigrant status instead of my identity as a person of color." (Lana)</p>

Figure 2a. (Continued)

<p>General experience of POC identity_Netherlands</p>	<p>Any mention of personal experiences where one's POC identity was highlighted, specifically in the Netherlands.</p>	<p>" I never really felt a lot like an outsider. Well, I am an outsider because I am from another country. But this feeling that I sometimes hear from my colleagues, of being looked at differently or of feeling less worthy, I haven't had. Or I don't remember... Maybe I had it a little bit in the beginning, but it's not something that stuck to me or I remember very vividly." (Nick)</p> <p>" I've been screamed at the streets like by a random men on the streets." (Lama)</p> <p>" Ph.D.'s of color in the University of Groningen. I think, in general, the environment here is very supportive. To do what you want to do. But of course, you always hear there's poor cases. And also, Ph.D. students of color are more at high risk. [...] Issues with mental health, feelings of isolation." (Sebastian)</p>
<p>General experience of POC identity_Abroad</p>	<p>Any mention of personal experiences where one's POC identity was highlighted, specifically outside of the Netherlands.</p>	<p>" It's still very nice here. I'm not the nicest example in that regard because I've experienced worse. For me, the threshold of discrimination is maybe a bit higher, because I've faced real discrimination in (North American country)." (Sebastian)</p> <p>" [...] when I started to contact other people to be my supervisor in other universities, I was always afraid that they were going to say no to me just because of my background, because I know that a lot of people have comments about (country) and negative stuff and also like about my skin color. I've heard people like some friends say things, so I was really worried that no one was going to say yes just because of where I come from." (Stacey)</p>

Figure 2b. Coding scheme for the main theme of *Adversities Related to One’s Identity* with the *First Sub-theme: Standing Out or Feeling Like the Only One*. The scheme includes codes, corresponding definitions, and a selection of quotes to illustrate the code.

Code	Definition	Examples
Standing out / Feeling like the only one	Any expression of feelings from the participant that they are noticeably different from those around them. Feeling like they are the only one or that they are stand out.	<p>“ I guess the most funniest thing is when you go to a neighborhood and everyone is staring at you. And you’re like, “I realize I’m the only minority person here.” (Sebastian)</p> <p>“ So, at first point I feel lonely, because two years ago I was the only (ethnicity) in this faculty and I was very, how to say, I was very isolated because only myself here and without other (ethnicity) students surrounded. So it could be like, yeah, I’m very unique, I’m the only one, I feel a little bit pressure to behave myself well.” (Jessica)</p>
Predominantly White institution	Any mention of the perception that the department or educational institution of the participant is predominantly white, referring to both staff and students. Here, white people account for 50% or greater of the academic population.	<p>“ There were only two people of color that I could, at the time, that I could think of in my whole department.” (Bright)</p> <p>“ Here, my colleagues here, they are almost like 99% white.” (Amber)</p> <p>“ There were only two people of color that I could, at the time, that I could think of in my whole department.” (Lana)</p> <p>“ [...] but as I said before everyone in my department is white so....” (Isabelle)</p> <p>“ Now we have more people of color but I think for at least two years there were only two.” (Lana)</p>
Diversity_Lack of diversity	The description or set of practices of including or involving people from a variety of social and ethnic backgrounds and of different genders, sexual orientations etc. Here, the participant mentions a lack of diversity in their environment. Referring to the lack of number or presence of people of color, both in staff, students or general population/surroundings.	<p>“ I would have really appreciated more diversity. I think but it’s not necessary what I was expecting.” (Lana)</p> <p>“ I can only imagine what it feels like for people, others who have lived here seven years ago or ten years ago, since I’ve lived here, way more when persons of color are in the city. Way more definitely.” (Maxime)</p> <p>“ I remember that one time I felt that I needed to go somewhere just to have some fun, and I went to Germany and I saw a lot of people of color, and that made me feel better, I was like I don’t feel like I stand out so much.” (Stacey)</p>
Representation	The presence of being reflected or the wish to see oneself reflected within a group. Can refer to many different groups: one’s colleagues, one’s psychologist, one’s supervisor.	<p>“ But I get increasing representation of people of color in university. Would be great, right? Because you cannot bring students of color and ask them to identify with roles that are not representative of them you cannot ask anyone that. Yeah go and identify with someone that doesn’t represent you, you cannot do that.” (Isabelle)</p> <p>“ I think it would have helped if there would have been another (ethnicity) or (nationality) in the department who is about the same age.” (Lana)</p>
Diversity_Being part of a minority	The description or set of practices of including or involving people from a variety of social and ethnic backgrounds and of different genders, sexual orientations etc. Here, the participant mentions being part of a minority.	<p>“ And I am one of the few that is just English speaking. So sometimes I feel like I stand out and also because of my hair and just how I look.” (Stacey)</p> <p>“ As far as diversity is concerned, in general from the part of the university, I don’t think much changed. So, I looked at my department at some point and then I realized that about 90%+ of the people working there are Dutch, so not just even you know international.” (Bright)</p>

Figure 2b. (Continued).

Loneliness	Emotional state of solitude, which could be experienced while being isolated from others as well as in a group.	<p>“ And it was also hard to find like a community of people. I know there are (ethnicity) here but I haven't met a lot of (ethnicity). ” (Stacey)</p>
Isolation	The state of being in a place or situation characterized by feelings of separation from others. Inclusion criteria: participant has to mention that they feel isolated or have difficulty connecting with others.	<p>“ Sometimes it makes you feel a bit isolated. Isolated in the context of work I mean, because it' s not that you really want you know people who look exactly like you to be there, but sometimes it helps and it gives you sort of some hope that you can also become like them. If there are people of color also taking positions at your department or at your faculty so you believe that you can also become like them. ” (Bright)</p> <p>“ It was definitely worse when I first came. But it was during my Master's, so the first six months I wanted to go home. I think it was four months also, it was quite a big shock cause not only cultural but also how university works. ” (Isabelle)</p>
Blending in	The feeling that you look the same as surrounding people, and therefore are not easily noticeable or stand out.	<p>“ Yes, to be honest, that makes me feel at home, more like I belong and I'm not, how to say it, a strange person in a place that's not for her. ” (Stacey)</p> <p>“ Exactly, that's how I felt in Den Haag like this feels so nice, and I wanted to stay there longer because I felt like I didn't stand out in that way. ” (Stacey)</p>
Role models	A person who someone admires or looks up to within their environment or field, and tries to emulate them.	<p>“ The university admits a lot of international students, but if you really want to be international then you also have to work on your stuff, because these international students will feel more at home when they see that the staff is also very diverse. When they see that, you know, people of color are also teaching them, are also supervising them. But if at the staff level, it's still very skewed, then it's really, really white-dominant. ” (Bright)</p>

Figure 2c. Coding scheme for the main theme of *Adversities related to one’s identity* with the *Second Sub-theme: The need to be affirmed and cared for*. The scheme includes codes, corresponding definitions and a selection of quotes to illustrate the code.

Code	Definition	Examples
Being affirmed / Confirmation_Present	Receiving emotional support and/or encouragement when sharing personal experiences. The other person confirms that something is true.	<p>“ And I had to do that, in order to ... Why? To hear other people say, ‘No, it’s not just you’, Because you need that sometimes. Like I said, it’s a mental struggle and sometimes you wonder if it’s just you reading too much into something or, so I needed that and those experiences.” (Maxime)</p> <p>“ Between Dutch culture and my own culture, what helps from the (nationality) perspective is that you can always talk to (nationality) people because they often share the same experience. But from the Dutch perspective, for me it was really important to have Dutch people who agree with me. Because now I know it’s not all me. It’s all these people who are being weird.” (Nick)</p>
Coping strategies_Sharing experience	The approach a person takes to solve an interpersonal or personal problem that will help to overcome, mitigate, or tolerate feelings of stress or conflict. In this case, sharing experiences.	<p>“ If something is said and it doesn’t sit right, then I think what I’ll do is like, reach out to my own friends and be like tell me what you think about this.” (Maxime)</p> <p>“ But when I opened up to my colleagues and said I feel bad about that, They said ‘Don’t! It’s also good for us to practice our English’ I started going out to lunch with them and I think my mood also improved.” (Stacey)</p> <p>“ Yes, I was a bit angry, but I just complain to my friends in the (other department). I just complain to them, ‘I want to kick her’. But this is just joking.” (Amber)</p>
Coping strategies_Seeking out familiar or similar others	The approach a person takes to solve an interpersonal or personal problem that will help to overcome, mitigate, or tolerate feelings of stress or conflict. Here, the specific strategy is to seek out other people who are familiar or share similarities. For example, seeking out people with whom they share an important part of their identity.	<p>“ [...] I go to another fellow person of color to complain about because they will understand what is what.” (Lana)</p> <p>“ Because I’m a woman, or I identify as such, I always tend to go to women first because I also declare myself as a strong feminist, and then the Ph.D. I had also some colleagues that were quite feminist so then you have something in common and it’s to create like this sense of community.” (Stacey)</p>
Coping strategies_Finding community	The approach a person takes to solve an interpersonal or personal problem that will help to overcome, mitigate, or tolerate feelings of stress or conflict. Here, the specific strategy is finding community or efforts to find community.	<p>“ I’ve found my other communities out there, that’s something you have to do as a researcher and a PhD student.” (Maxime)</p> <p>“ Actually there is the Gopher, the PhD event organization is called Gopher. They organize some social events for the gathering and I met other international students there and yeah it’s very good experience to have fun with others.” (Jessica)</p>
Community_Creating community	A group of people sharing similar characteristics, background, values or interests. The participant mentions efforts to create and build community.	<p>“ So, we formed (group name) and we went on and someone else joined, another young lady from (city) she joined, and then we had a couple more people join, but the core is I think the five of us. Then I think that, oh Lord, we’re still trying to hold on to it but it was good, it was good that we had that community in my first six months right.” (Maxime)</p> <p>“ Yes, that is why I do a lot of (community work). I work in three (community spaces).” (Sebastian)</p>
Community_Finding community	A group of people sharing similar characteristics, background, values, interests. The participant mentions finding community, or efforts to find community.	<p>“ I’ve found my other communities out there, that’s something you have to do as a researcher and a PhD student.” (Maxime)</p> <p>“ Actually there is the Gopher, the PhD event organization is called Gopher. They organize some social events for the gathering and I met other international students there and yeah it’s very good experience to have fun with others.” (Jessica)</p>

Figure 2c. (Continued)

Self-determination theory_Relatedness	Describes the human emotional need to have close, affectionate relationships with others. The need to connect with other people, feeling like you belong, or caring about others and being cared for.	<p>" It could be very supportive very good or feel the connection with international students because they have a good foundation to understand each other better other than always having stereotypes or their own minds and ideas, it's like a diversity understanding and openness. Yeah, that's important for connections. It's not only for work also social." (Jessica)</p> <p>And having that lens of being an 'other' being 'othered' sorry, gives I think this perspective, so she won't know how I feel and I don't know how she feels, but because we've had this 'othering' in our upbringing and experiences. I think it give us common ground in our upbringing and experiences. I think it give us common ground." (Maxine)</p>
Support network_Friends	Refers to the participant's friend(s) that they can turn to for support, encouragement and advice.	<p>" I did make new friend who is also a person of color and we bonded pretty much immediately based on a lot of like... He is born and raised in Europe but because he is like still (ethnicity) we bonded quite fast." (Lana)</p> <p>" I have a really nice support of friends and family and supervisors, partner." (Maxine)</p>
Support network_Family	Refers to the participant's family member(s) that they can turn to for support, encouragement and advice.	<p>" I remember telling my sister." (Maxine)</p> <p>" And on top of that, I got my (family member)." (Nick)</p>
Perceptions_Intentions of others	Refers to how the participant perceives the intentions of others and interprets the motivation behind another person's acts or how they express themselves. In particular this refers to negative behaviors.	<p>" I know no one means ill intent." (Maxine)</p> <p>" Of course she meant well." (Isabelle)</p> <p>" I don't really think of it, like "Oh wow, they are really trying to hurt me". But I think it's kind of... pin?" (Sebastian)</p>
Being affirmed / Confirmation_Lack of it	The desire to receive emotional support and/or encouragement when sharing personal experiences, but not receiving it. The other person does not explicitly confirm that something is true.	<p>" So, he is a friend who has like an very much ongoing yellow fever. He thinks I'm pretty and he went to me like as a compliment like "Oh, he thinks you're pretty and he only dates (ethnicity) girls". I was like, oh no I'm very uncomfortable and he was like, "It's a compliment;" and I was like, "You don't understand sweetheart, like you're like a white man." [Laughs]. (Lana)</p> <p>" It's a different approach to see the world, and they don't really see the world the way I see the world." (Maxine)</p>
University_False diversity image	The perception of the participant that the claim made by the university of having a diverse staff and student population, does not resemble their experience/reality.	<p>" [...] especially when the university sells itself as being very international. I thought this is just for marketing purposes or PR purposes because I don't see that." (Bright)</p> <p>" [...] but then they sell themselves as an international university while being an international here can be a pain in the ass and, yeah, well same applies for people of color, right?" (Isabelle)</p>
University_Lack of caring about well-being internationals OR POC Ph.D.'s	The perception of the participant that the university lacks in their efforts to provide support and resources to POC/international Ph.D. students.	<p>" I don't know how much, well at least the microaggression part or the casual racism part, I don't think the university will care about it." (Lana)</p> <p>" I come here I pay so much money and then you don't even care how I'm doing. Let's not even go to the housing crisis, but they don't really care how students are developing, if they are comfortable, if they have everything, if they understand how the university works. It's just like come give your money and get your diploma, let's be done. It definitely feels like that." (Isabelle)</p>
Emotion_Hopelessness / Losing faith	Expression of experiencing an emotional state in response to one's situation, mood or relationship with others. Here, specifically refers to a sense of hopelessness or losing faith in a positive outcome.	<p>" I think there are some things... you cannot fight back or something. There are some things, you have to get used to it. Because this doesn't happen that often." (Amber)</p> <p>" Again I don't think they will do it and I don't know how serious they will take it." (Lana)</p>