Feeling Heard in All-Male/Female vs. Mixed-Gender Groups in Citizen Assemblies

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Group 20 - Who is at the table? Homogeneous vs diverse group deliberations in citizen assemblies

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Abstract

This study explores how gender composition in citizen assemblies influences participants' perceptions of feeling heard. Based on social identity theory and self-construal research, it was hypothesised that (1) participants would feel more heard in gender-homogeneous than heterogeneous groups, and (2) that gender would moderate this effect, thus women would feel more heard in female-only groups, while men's perceptions would remain unaffected by group composition. In a within-subjects experimental design (N = 37), participants engaged in both homogeneous and mixed-gender discussions and completed a Feeling Heard Scale after each. Results revealed no significant effects, although descriptive trends showed women reporting slightly higher feelings of being heard overall and in homogeneous groups. These findings suggest that while gendered group composition may not significantly impact participants' feelings heard, relational dynamics and communication styles may still influence participants' experiences. These findings underline the need for citizen assemblies to foster not only demographic diversity but also environments where respectful and inclusive interaction is actively encouraged.

Keywords: public citizen assemblies, discussions, group compositions, gender, self-construal

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Introduction

Deliberation and Participation in Public Citizen Assemblies

In the global context of rising polarisation and populism, and with it, declining trust in democratic structures, public citizen assemblies enable citizens to actively take part in policy-making and legislation. In the U.S., a survey about a local government's budget distribution found that public participation and its emphasis on public information about policy decisions impacted how fair individuals found the resulting policies, especially in individuals critical of the local government (Herian et al., 2012). Citizen assemblies consist of groups drawn by lot, representing the wider public. Along with expert contributions, they usually debate on policy issues over the span of various meetings and eventually recommend policies as a group (Perlaviciute et al., 2024). Thus, public participation can lead to an increased acceptance of resulting changes and actions. The success of public citizen assemblies, Perlaviciute (2021) further finds, rests upon a combination of the "four D's: dialogue, decision-making power, diversity, and deliberation"(Perlaviciute, 2021, p. 3). Diverse perspectives are essential for public participation to accurately reflect societal diverse perspectives and for the resulting decisions to gain broader public acceptance (Perlaviciute, 2021). Democracy wants to include all societal groups, and listening to individuals is relevant to accommodate and involve all members of society in political decision making, and make policies more fair and publicly accepted (Page, 2007). When citizen assembly participation includes a socially diverse public, people critical and open towards assemblies become more open to accepting their outcomes, as a study in the context of a Belgian climate citizen assembly found (Paulis et al., 2024). Especially minority groups benefit from being included in society, as social identification enhances mental well-being and political engagement (Haslam et al., 2009; Simon & Klandermans, 2001).

Feeling Heard in Citizen Assemblies

Roos et al. (2023) have operationalised feeling heard as the sentiment of having a voice, receiving attention, empathy, and respect from the other parties involved in the discussion, and finding common ground collectively. Actively and meaningfully participating has previously been linked to feeling heard, for example, in a citizen assembly of the province of Drenthe in the Netherlands (Jasperse & de Zeeuw, 2025). Democracy wants to include all societal groups, and listening to individuals is relevant to accommodate and involve all members of society in political decision making, and make policies more fair and publicly accepted (Page, 2007). Especially minority groups benefit from being included in society, as social identification enhances mental well-being and political engagement (Haslam et al., 2009; Simon & Klandermans, 2001). Developing environments in which all members of society feel heard might not only increase participation, satisfaction with the deliberation processes and a sense of representation, but also assist citizen assemblies in their potential to incorporate cross-cutting views into policy-making.

This implies that participants' openness to other perspectives is crucial for participation to be valuable (Perlaviciute, 2021), a point that ties into the discussion of how respect and recognition enhance engagement and perceived fairness. Citizens must be open to other perspectives for participation to be of value (Perlaviciute, 2021). Perceived respect and recognition, important characteristics of ‘feeling heard’ that participants felt during public assemblies, have been positively correlated with strengthened observable participation (Zenker and Seigis, 2012). Mannarini and Talò (2013) found that dialogue quality predicted future participation intentions, suggesting that when participants feel genuinely acknowledged and respected during deliberation, they are more likely to remain engaged in future democratic processes. Study reports from U.S. town meetings and deliberative forums have shown that enhanced feelings of respect – often inferred from increased trust, political

efficacy, or empowerment – align with greater attendance, active engagement in Q&A sessions, and positive process evaluations (Jo and Nabatchi, 2020; Knobloch et al., 2020). Consequently, feeling heard is not only a momentary experience but also a catalyst for further civic involvement and trust in participatory mechanisms. However, recent research also raises an issue: not everyone in deliberative exercises feels equally heard.

Feeling Heard and the Role of Group Composition

Individuals tend to feel more heard within their groups of the social categories they belong to, since they might share common societal identities. The experiences they make based on their identities often resemble and, in many cases, their perspectives are shared with other ingroup members. People tend to be more interested in those who are similar to them, as shared characteristics foster greater empathy and understanding (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social identity theory suggests that individuals derive a sense of belonging and validation from their ingroups, which can lead to increased attentiveness and receptivity toward ingroup members' opinions and experiences (Hornsey, 2008). Additionally, homophily reinforces a sense of being understood and valued, as individuals gravitate toward those who reflect their own backgrounds and beliefs (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). According to social role theory, men and women develop different social behaviours based on expected gender roles, which influence how men and women act, think, and communicate in different ways (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Moreover, shared experiences create a foundation for mutual support and understanding, which is how people may also experience a stronger sense of care and accommodation within their gender ingroups (Brewer, 1991). As a result, they socially bond more with the same gender they identify with, making men relate more to other men, and women relating more to other women, explaining how gender-homogeneous social networks form in professional and social contexts (Ibarra, 1992).

Hence, the sentiment of feeling heard differs depending on social categories (Anderson & Brion, 2014), like gender, and group composition becomes a relevant factor in citizen assemblies when gathering a diverse sample representative of the general population. While diverse discussions improve decision-making, a homogeneous group setting might provide a safer space for marginalised individuals to speak up in public citizen assemblies (Stasser & Titus, 1985), especially considering power dynamics that often govern who is used to speaking and being listened to. Gendered power dynamics influence who feels heard in deliberative settings. Men are often more accustomed to speaking in public and mixed-gender discussions, while women are more frequently interrupted or overlooked, leading to lower levels of perceived recognition and influence (Karpowitz & Mendelberg, 2014). These entrenched norms can shape deliberative experiences, particularly in heterogeneous groups, where men may dominate floor time and women may hesitate to speak up or feel dismissed when they do.

The Role of Gender and Self-Construals

Wood and Eagly's Social Role Theory (2012) posits that human behaviour patterns are shaped by the roles individuals occupy within society, which is influenced by cultural and social expectations. Thus, differences in self-construals follow: Research suggests that women tend to have a more communal and interdependent self-construal, meaning they define themselves in relation to others and emphasise social connections and group belonging (Cross & Madson, 1997). In contrast, men are more likely to have a stronger independent self-construal, defining themselves through their own achievements, autonomy, and individual success (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). These differences are well-documented in psychological literature and are supported both theoretically and experimentally.

Given that women's self-construals are more interdependent, they may experience a stronger sense of feeling heard within a group with fewer men with independent

self-construals or more women with interdependent self-construals. Due to their emphasis on social harmony and relational engagement, interdependency likely increases their efforts to ensure that others feel acknowledged and comfortable, which might in turn reinforce their own sense of being heard (Gabriel & Gardner, 1999). However, they might also offer support without receiving it in return, which could undermine their sense of acknowledgement. In contrast, men's conditioned independent self-construal may make them less reliant on maintaining harmony within the group, and they may feel heard more in contexts where their individual contributions are recognised and welcomed by more people with higher interdependent self-construal, for example, women, rather than in homogeneous male groups.

Thus, in a homogeneous female group, women may feel more heard due to the collective focus on inclusivity and interpersonal connection. This dynamic relates to the broader argument that feeling heard depends on the perceived effort of others to listen, acknowledge, and respond empathetically—a process more common among individuals with interdependent self-construals. Conversely, in a heterogeneous mixed-gender group, the presence of men's independent self-construals may disrupt the communal dynamics, potentially making women feel less heard. At the same time, men in a homogeneous male group may experience lower levels of feeling heard, as the lack of communal reinforcement may reduce perceived acknowledgement. Instead, men may feel more heard in a heterogeneous group, where interactions with women's interdependent self-construals facilitate greater engagement and attentiveness. Only early evidence from research in a Dutch citizen assembly could lead to support this theoretical framework, as female participants felt less heard in group discussions compared to male participants (Eichholtzer et al., in prep).

While the composition of groups through gender could be a predictor of being heard, self-construals on the individual level may be even more predictive. These orientations are regularly reinforced, which may lead them to influence the effect of group composition.

Following prior research literature linking interdependent orientations more frequently to women and independent orientations more frequently to men will spare an assessment of self-construals. While this is a simplification and does not account for within-gender variation or the fluidity of gender identity and psychological orientation, this decision was made for pragmatic reasons given the study's scope.

Hypotheses

To investigate these dynamics, this experiment examines how group gender composition affects perceived feelings heard in simulated public citizen assemblies.

Hypothesis 1: Members of homogeneous groups experience "feeling more heard" than members of heterogeneous groups.

Hypothesis 2: Gender moderates the effect of group composition on participants' perceptions of feeling heard. Specifically, women feel more heard in a homogeneous female group than in a heterogeneous mixed-gender group, while in men, group composition doesn't affect their perceptions of feeling heard.

This work contributes to a growing body of literature on inclusive democratic engagement and may inform the design of citizen assemblies to facilitate equitable participation across different social groups.

Methods

Participants

For this study, we collected data from participants through a convenience sample. The target population was men and women over eighteen years old. Participants identifying in a binary gendered way, male or female, were a requirement for participation in the study, which was assessed during sign-up. We were unable to account for participants identifying with other genders within this study. With two levels of the between-subjects condition and two levels of the within-subjects condition, our study employs a 2 x 2 design. According to a G*power analysis for an analysis of the first hypothesis, a one-tailed t-test, a minimum of 52 participants, assuming a small to medium effect size (d) = 0.35, an $\alpha = 0.05$, and a Power = 0.80 would be needed for a significant result. For the ANOVA, a minimum of 52 participants, assuming a small to medium effect size (f) = 0.2, an $\alpha = 0.05$, and a Power = 0.80 would be needed for a significant result for testing Hypothesis 2.

Recruitment for the study was partly done through the platform of first-year psychology students, SONA. The study was also shared and advertised online, with a poster that can be found in Appendix A (Figure A1), or by directly asking participants in the cafeteria of the Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences at the University of Groningen. Participants were compensated either with SONA credits or by the possibility of winning one of four gift vouchers in the height of 25€. Participants were provided with cookies.

We were only able to recruit a sample of 37 participants, with 57% of the sample being men (21 in counts). All participants were students, with 70% being psychology students and 43% of participants being in the first year of Bachelor's studies.

Design and Procedure

Overall Design

The study employed a mixed-group experimental design, involving the between-subjects factor gender (male and female participants) and the within-subjects factor (homogeneous, all-male/-female vs. heterogeneous, mixed-gender group discussions). Each participant took part in two discussion rounds: one in a homogeneous group (same-gender) and one in a heterogeneous group (mixed-gender), with the order of these conditions counterbalanced to control for potential order effects. Group discussions lasted 15 minutes and included between 3 and 5 participants. Sessions were conducted in multiple time slots, with 6 to 8 overall participants per session.

Task Description

Participants were asked to evaluate six social initiatives in groups, described as being under consideration for budget cuts by the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. The initiatives were partly fictional and partly based on real programs. They read through them individually first as part of a baseline assessment. Each participant was assigned to two groups in which they were asked to discuss initiatives, then the groups had to agree on which two of the six initiatives they would choose to protect, which two to cut, and which two they felt neutral about.

Procedure

Upon arrival at the study location, participants received a briefing about the procedure and were given the opportunity to ask questions. They signed an informed consent form, which also included options regarding video consent. Each participant was assigned a unique identifier and completed a demographics questionnaire.

Participants were then divided into small groups (3–5 people, depending on availability) for the first discussion round and assigned to their group discussion condition (homogeneous or heterogeneous). During the 15-minute group discussion, participants collaboratively decided which two of the six initiatives to protect, cut, or remain neutral

about. These discussions were videotaped, with a signal given at the two-minute mark to prompt a conclusion.

Following the discussion, participants individually completed a questionnaire including the Feeling Heard Scale (FHS) and re-evaluated their decisions on the initiatives. Participants then switched to the opposite group condition (homo- or heterogeneous) for a second round, repeating the same procedure: group discussion followed by individual questionnaires.

After completing both rounds, participants returned to the baseroom for debriefing. They were allowed to ask further questions and could voluntarily sign up with their email address for a chance to win gift vouchers.

Materials

The key measure used was an adapted and reduced version of the Feeling Heard Scale (FHS) (Roos et al., 2023), administered after each of the two discussion rounds. One item from each of the five components: “voice, attention, empathy, respect, common ground” (Roos et al., 2023, p. 1) of the literature study of the original paper (Roos et al., 2023) was added, three of the original eight items were used, rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = completely disagree to 7 = completely agree), such as “The others listened to what I said”. Two more were added, that had not been included in the original final version of the FHS (“I felt inhibited in what I wanted to say” and “The others were empathetic”). Full questionnaire items can be found in Appendix A (Table A1). One reverse-coded item was adjusted before the analysis (“I felt inhibited in what I wanted to say”). However, this item had to be removed as it was negatively correlated with the rest of the scale (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.58$, 95% CI = {0.313; 0.757}). Subsequently, the scale demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.77$, 95% CI = {0.625; 0.866}) and acceptable inter-item correlations (average $r = .326$).

Analysis Plan

In this study, we focused on the dependent variable, *feeling heard*. The composite score of feeling heard was calculated as the average of all items of four items measuring it in the post-discussion questionnaires. When starting our analysis, some descriptive statistics, such as the means, standard deviations, and correlations of all variables included in the regression model, were calculated. H1 was tested by a paired two-sample t-test to compare the effect of a homogeneous or heterogeneous group composition on feeling heard scores. For H2, a Mixed ANOVA was conducted to examine whether it moderated the relationship between group composition (homogeneous vs. heterogeneous) and feeling heard scores.

For the analysis of the data, JASP (Version 0.18.3) was used. While running the paired t-test and ANOVA, assumptions such as Normality of residuals, equal variances, outliers and sphericity and any possible violations were thoroughly investigated.

Results

The collected data from 36 individuals (20 men, 16 women) from 6 group discussions (3 homogeneous, 3 heterogeneous) is analysed in the following steps.

Descriptive Statistics

Overall, participants reported relatively high levels of feeling heard, with mean scores leaning toward the higher end of the 7-point scale (M = 5.98, SD = 0.6) and a minimum value of 4.75. There was a slight ceiling effect for feeling heard, as can be observed in the distribution plot and boxplot (Appendix B - Figures B1 and B2). The descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations of the variable "Feeling Heard" (FH), when separating values by gender, indicate higher overall values in women than in men, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Homogeneous and Heterogeneous Groups by Gender

Group Type	Gender	M	SD	n
Homogeneous	Overall	6.00	0.66	36
	Male	5.84	0.66	20
	Female	6.2	0.63	16
Heterogeneous	Overall	5.93	0.78	37
	Male	5.79	0.82	21
	Female	6.13	0.70	16

Note. *M* = Mean; *SD* = Standard Deviation; *n* = Number of Observations.

Hypothesis 1: Participants "feel more heard" in homogeneous groups compared to heterogeneous groups.

Paired two-sample t-test

Assumptions were supported (see Appendix A, Assumptions). To compare homogeneous FH scores with heterogeneous FH scores, a one-tailed paired t-test was conducted, comparing heterogeneous group scores with homogeneous ones. The results indicated a non-significant relationship $t(35) = 0.36$, $p = .360$, $d=0.06$. This suggests that individuals in homogeneous, all-male or all-female group settings do not significantly report higher levels of FH compared to heterogeneous, mixed-gender groups. Though a positive trend can be observed, meaning the homogeneous groups did report an ever so small higher score in FH than the heterogeneous groups, the hypothesis was not supported.

Hypothesis 2: Gender moderates the effect of group composition on participants' perceptions of feeling heard.

Repeated Measures ANOVA

Assumptions can be considered fulfilled (Appendix A- Assumptions). A Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance was conducted to test the moderating effect of gender predicted for group composition on FH. No significant results were found for the effect of group composition on FH, or the interaction of gender and group composition to predict scores of FH (Table 2). Hypothesis 2 is thus rejected. This suggests that the group composition does not impact how 'heard' individuals felt, regardless of their gender.

Table 2 - Repeated Measures Analyses of Variance of Group Composition x Gender on FH

Cases	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	η^2
feeling heard	0.047	1	0.047	0.142	0.709	0.001

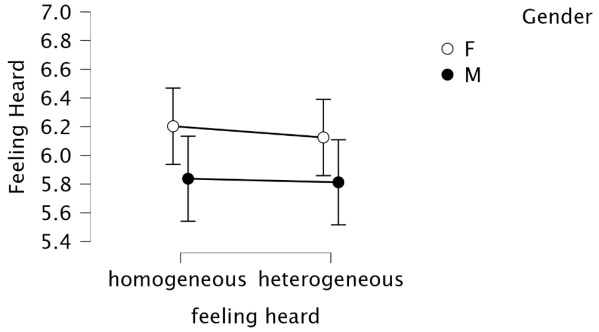
feeling heard ✻ Gender	0.013	1	0.013	0.038	0.847	3.423×10^{-4}
Residuals	11.351	34	0.334			

*Note. Type III Sum of Squares *p < .05.*

Simple main effects analyses explored potential differences in feeling heard by group composition within each gender group. For female participants, the effect of group composition was not significant (Appendix B, Table B1). Similarly, for male participants, there was no significant effect (Appendix B, Table B1). These results further support the conclusion that group composition had no differential effect on perceived feeling heard for men or women.

The following plot displays the interaction of means split by gender and group composition.

Plot 1- Means Plot from RM ANOVA including Error Bars



To further explore the pattern of results, estimated marginal means were plotted and are reported in Appendix B, Table B2. Descriptively, female participants reported a higher overall sense of being heard compared to male participants. However, these differences were minimal, and the 95% confidence intervals overlapped, indicating no meaningful differences.

Exploratory Results

The graphs indicate higher scores in feeling heard in both group compositions for women than men, consequently, the between-subjects effect, gender, on feeling heard scores was explored separately from group composition within the RM-ANOVA. No significant difference between the means of men and women in feeling heard scores was found, $F(1,34)=3.00$, $p = 0.093$.

An exploratory analysis including the deleted fourth item ("I felt inhibited in what I wanted to say") was performed to examine the item's effect on the t-test and RM-ANOVA. Descriptives (means and standard deviations) as well as an FH means plot split by gender and group composition, including error bars, can be found in Appendix B (Table B3 and Figure B5). No significant results were found ($t(36) = -0.49$, $p = .69$, $d= -0.08$; $F(1, 34) = 0.142$, $p = .709$); however, some original trends were revealed to be reversed when examining FH and including this measure. Homogeneous group members felt less heard than heterogeneous group members; the ANOVA revealed that men felt less heard in homogeneous groups than in heterogeneous groups. Only women's trends stayed similar, with overall lower FH scores than when the fourth item was not included.

Discussion

This study explores how group composition, in this case, manipulated through gender identity, may impact participants' perceptions of feeling heard in participatory democracy group settings, such as public citizen assemblies. It was theorised whether and how this relationship might be moderated by the participants' gender.

Though results turned out statistically nonsignificant, slight patterns could be observed from the graphs in line with the hypotheses for the second hypothesis. While homogeneous groups did not feel more heard than in heterogeneous groups, women might have benefited slightly in their perception of feeling heard in a homogeneous group setting. No significant results appeared from exploratory analyses.

Group Composition and Feeling Heard

Hypothesis 1 predicted that participants in homogeneous gender groups, thus all-male or all-female, would feel more heard than participants assigned to mixed-gender groups. Contrary to expectations, group composition did not significantly affect participants' perceived feeling of being heard. The analyses did not provide statistical support. Identity-based homogeneity of gender might help forge a conversation in which members feel safer (Karpowitz & Mendelberg, 2014). However, participants in same-gender groups did not specifically appear to express greater ease within their groups, which goes against the theories of social identity and in-group dynamics (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Hornsey, 2008).

Gendered Patterns of Participation

Hypothesis 2 posited gender-specific outcomes: that women would feel more heard in female-only groups, and that men would feel heard to a similar extent in both groups. The results were again inconclusive, but the observed patterns align with the hypothesis. Women reported slightly higher feelings of being heard in same-gender settings. This may reflect how women, socialised in relational and emotionally expressive communication styles (Eagly &

Wood, 2012) and therefore interdependent self-construal, found resonance and solidarity in exclusively female groups. These spaces might be less likely to be dominated by assertive or competitive conversational norms, relating to independent self-construal.

For men, the patterns were less defined. As expected, male participants reported high levels of feeling heard in bot composition settings. This could suggest that male participants were generally comfortable in either context, or that feelings of being heard for men may be less influenced by the influence of self-construal and more by the first variable, group composition, or others. These nuances point to the complexity of deliberative dynamics, where group gender composition may interact with multiple identity factors beyond tying gender socialisation largely to self-construal.

The Role of Self-Construals

Although our findings did not show a statistically significant moderating effect of gender, the direction of the effects suggests that more interdependently oriented individuals, women, might benefit from homogeneous settings. At the same time, participants' self-construals might be more flexible or balanced, meaning some participants might be higher on independence and some higher on interdependency, also depending on the setting also depending on the setting and not specifically on the gender (Foels & Tomcho, 2009). This suggests that the effects of group composition may be filtered through individual psychological orientations, further complicating simplistic binary accounts of gendered deliberation. Rather than assuming self-construal through gender, future research could assess self-construal in a prior questionnaire, as these interaction effects might differ with more diverse identity variables, including age, race, and socio-economic status, that all might interact with how gender self-construals are socially constructed.

When adding the item 'I felt inhibited in what I wanted to say', men's feeling heard scores were quite low in the homogeneous group setting, meaning in all male groups. Some

explanatory attempts could be that independent self-construals might have led to the opposite effect of women's interdependent self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Cross & Madson, 1997). It remains to be analysed why this item showed such a strong change in this context specifically.

Methodological Reflections

Due to the study design, a realistic discussion task was made possible, in which group composition based on gender was successfully manipulated. The study was underpowered (N = 37) and primarily drawn from psychology students, limiting the generalizability of the findings.

Using crowdsourcing as a method for the collection of participants had its advantages, such as quickly gathering data from various locations and involving a larger group of participants. Participants were selected for inclusion in the sample because they were easiest to access due to geographical proximity, availability, and willingness to participate. Such a convenience sample might have consequences on the educational background and gender, and thus on the generalizability of the data collected. Relying on a convenience sample attracted individuals similar in age range and study subject, leading to a skewed representation of educational diversity and age in the sample. Thus, in our study, simply grouping participants by gender did not foster an environment in which participants felt more understood, validated, and less at risk of judgment or marginalisation. Possibly, they did not perceive these gender ingroups as such in the group, as with issues of the collection of participants throughout the entire study, we gathered a total of five more male participants than women. Hence, in some cases, the mixed-gender group would be a group of three participants, two men and one woman. Or they did notice the manipulation of gender composition and were thus very aware of the associated construals and did not interact naturally. Additionally, the short time for each of the discussion rounds (15 minutes) may not

have allowed for the full unfolding of group dynamics and or associations of feelings of inclusion or marginalisation (Stasser & Titus, 1985).

Participants' demographic similarities, in age and educational background, might have led to a certain amount of homogeneity within the artificial heterogeneity manipulated through gender identity. Specifically in younger generations, due to younger age and less exposure, or due to societal development towards less extreme gender roles, self-construals might not be as present, especially in well-educated individuals (Simon & Klandermans, 2001).

Furthermore, future research could include direct and multidimensional assessments of self-construal to avoid reifying binary assumptions or overlooking gender-diverse experiences.

Moreover, self-selection bias of participants might have led to a sample that was more open to being involved in discussions and participating more actively, which might have affected other participants' perception of feeling heard (Jo & Nabatchi, 2020). This emphasises the importance of being cautious when interpreting how applicable the study findings are to the general population in the Netherlands.

Perhaps even, as the general high feeling heard score might be indicative of, individuals felt comfortable enough throughout the entire experience to not feel the need to group.

The adapted and shortened Feeling Heard Scale (Roos et al, 2023), being a validated scale and showing acceptable inter-item correlations, lead to being a reliable instrument to use for assessing perceptions of feeling heard.

Implications for Citizen Assemblies

The preliminary and limited findings suggest that the underlying reasons why citizens vary in perceptions of feeling heard remain to be identified. Building inclusive citizen

assemblies involves more than reflecting demographics; it demands attention to interpersonal and relational dynamics that influence who feels comfortable speaking, who is listened to, and whose opinions are taken into account (Paulis et al., 2024). Gendered self-construals, like the relational emphasis among women, suggest that inclusion is not only a matter of equality in speaking time but also of the quality of listening and the emotional recognition participants receive.

Rather than relying solely on quotas or demographic sorting, facilitators might consider introducing deliberative norms that actively promote mutual recognition, empathy, and inclusive listening (Sodoma & Sharp, 2025). Perhaps fostering self-reflective and empathetic group norms, as advocated by deliberative theorists (Mansbridge et al., 2012), might be more effective than structuring groups by social identity category. However, these practices may be especially important in mixed-gender or mixed-identity groups, where default norms may replicate broader societal hierarchies.

Theoretical Implications and Directions for Future Research

Future studies should aim to replicate this study with larger and more diverse samples, ideally across different socio-political contexts. Moreover, qualitative methods such as interviews or discourse analysis could deepen insight into how people interpret and narrate their experience of being heard (Knobloch et al., 2020).

Representing the diversity of participants in a "non-artificial" setting might already make some dynamics more salient, as their gender identity might have become notable to them through participants' effects.

While it was not the aim of the study, Figure 5 in Appendix B reveals that women reported higher mean values of feeling heard than men in either condition. These results were not significant at an alpha of $p=0.05$; however, these trends were the closest to statistical significance. Future research could investigate if and how this might relate to self-construals

and what other components in the socialisation of gender roles might influence these differences in feeling heard.

Conclusion

This study contributes to a developing understanding of the way gendered dynamics and psychological self-construals contribute to the subjective experience of inclusion within group discussions. While statistical significance was not met, the observed trends suggest that homogeneous gender settings, particularly homogeneous female spaces, may foster greater feelings of being heard among women, which might partly be due to the more interdependent self-construal related to gender identity in social psychological literature (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Cross & Madson, 1997). These findings underscore the importance of deliberative processes that are not only demographically representative but also attuned to the emotional and relational dimensions of inclusion.

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Appendix A

Figure 1: Advertising Poster designed for recruitment of participants

Table 1: Adapted Version of the Feeling Heard Scale

	Strongly Disagree (1)	(2)	(3)	Neutral (4)	(5)	(6)	Strongly Agree (7)
The others listened to what I said	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
The others were empathetic	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
The others treated me with respect	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
I felt inhibited in what I wanted to say	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

During the conversation, we understood each other	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Assumptions

Feeling heard is a continuous dependent variable, and independence of results was ensured through study design. Participants were split up during the completion of the questionnaires and randomly assigned to groups. Paired measurements were obtained from the same subject. Normality can be assumed from QQ-plots (Appendix B- Figures B3 and B4). Assumptions for both the t-test and the RM-ANOVA can thus be considered fulfilled.

Appendix B

Figure B1- FH Distribution

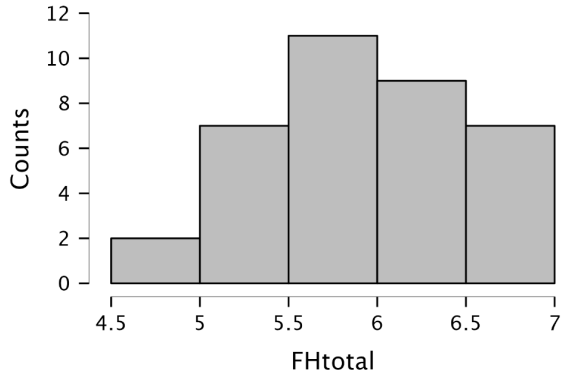

Figure B2- Boxplot FH total

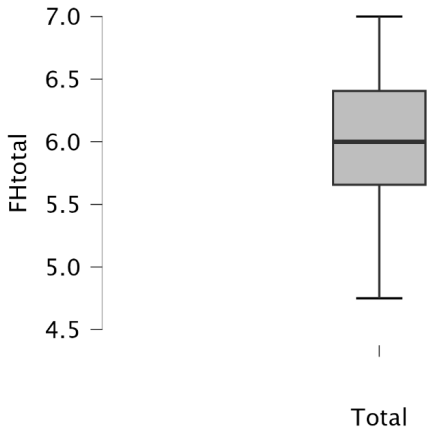

Figure B3- QQ-plot, FH of heterogeneous groups

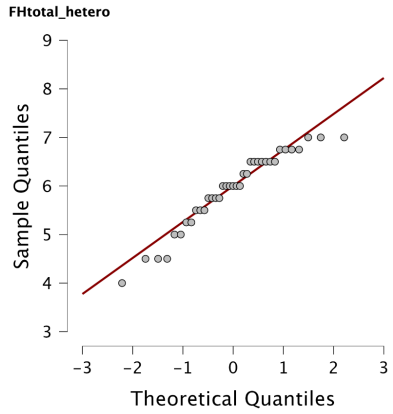

Figure B4- QQ-plot, FH of homogeneous groups

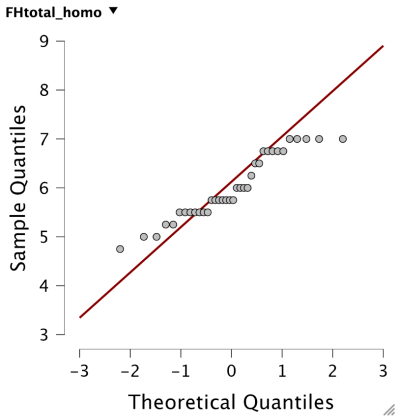

Table B1- Simple Main Effects of FH

Level of Gender	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
F	0.049	1	0.049	0.196	0.664
M	0.006	1	0.006	0.016	0.902

Note. Type III Sum of Squares

Table B2- Marginal Means of the Variable Gender as a part of RM-ANOVA

		95% CI for Mean Difference		
Gender	Marginal Mean	Lower	Upper	SE
F	6.145	5.865	6.426	0.138

M	5.806	5.526	6.087	0.138

Table B3: Descriptive Statistics for Homogeneous and Heterogeneous Groups by Gender

Group Type	Gender	M	SD	n
Homogeneous	Overall	5.71	1.16	36
	Male	5.2	1.44	20
	Female	5.95	0.6	16
Heterogeneous	Overall	5.8	0.73	37
	Male	5.74	0.77	21
	Female	5.87	0.69	16

Note. M = Mean; *SD* = Standard Deviation; *n* = Number of Observations.

Figure B5 - Means Plot with Error Bars and Deleted Item