Feeling heard: Operationalizing a key concept for social relations

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Abstract

Feeling heard is seen as a cornerstone of intimate relationships and healthy self-development. In public life, feeling heard may play an important role in a well-functioning representative democracy. The current paper aimed to define and measure feeling heard in the context of everyday interpersonal interactions. Based on an integrative literature review, feeling heard is conceptualized as consisting of five components at two levels. At the interpersonal level people feel heard when they have 1) voice, and they receive (2) attention, (3) empathy, and (4) respect. At the collective level people should experience (5) common ground. In two population surveys ($N = 194$, $N = 1000$) and a lab study ($N = 74$), we develop and validate the feeling heard scale (FHS); a concise eight-item scale with good psychometric properties. Results show that the FHS is a distinct and powerful predictor of conversation intentions in many different contexts and relationships. In fact, the FHS is the strongest predictor of intentions for conflict behavior among a set of 15 related variables (e.g., acquaintance, intimacy). Moreover, the FHS explains variance in conversational experiences that other variables do not. We conclude by reflecting on the potential applications of this scale. In interpersonal relations and professional contacts, the FHS enables the assessment of one crucial dimension of social interaction.

Keywords: Feeling heard, scale development, interpersonal interaction, conflict, online communication

Feeling heard: Operationalizing a key concept for social relations

“The right of all children to be heard and taken seriously constitutes one of the fundamental values of the Convention on the Rights of the Child”

(Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2009)

“If we only listened with the same passion that we feel about being heard”

(Harriet Lerner, n.d.; clinical psychologist)

“In the final analysis a riot is the language of the unheard. And what is it that America has failed to hear”

(Martin Luther King, Jr., 1967)

References to feeling heard are made in many domains of everyday life. As the quotes above suggest, it is often seen as a cornerstone of intimate relationships, crucial to healthy self-development, and essential to a well-functioning representative democracy. Indeed, an abundance of self-help information and training exists to help people make others feel heard, for example romantic partners, children, employees, or customers (e.g., Floer, 2020; Glaser, 2020; Mohl, 2020; Simperingham, 2014). For those who want to feel heard themselves, many countries have so-called listening centers that offer a listening ear 24/7 (see <https://www.ifotes.org/en>). At a more abstract level, beyond interpersonal relationships and direct interaction, various individuals and groups feel unheard by their government or other institutions. Populist parties often gain popularity among these groups by purporting to represent those who are not heard by the elite (e.g., Chotniner, 2021). Alternatively, people that do not feel heard can unite and engage in collective action (e.g., Greijdanus & Postmes, 2018). For example, in the US, groups across the political spectrum, from Trump supporters to Black Lives Matter activists, protest for the same reason: to be heard (e.g., Chartan, 2020; Goldberg, 2021).

Feeling heard thus appears to be a central concept in individualized Western societies. However, possibly due to a lack of systematic research into the concept (indeed, scientific study of the concept is scattered across different fields), we currently lack a good understanding of what the concept entails, and what its precursors and consequences may be. For example, in current society many want to have a say and use social media as platforms to express themselves to strangers on an unprecedented scale. But is all this self-expression on social media effective in making people feel heard? Recent research suggests the opposite might be the case: a lack of instant feedback online can be misinterpreted as a signal of disinterest leading people to feel less heard online compared to face-to-face conversation (Roos, et al., 2020a; 2021). Especially in the context of increasing political polarization and concerns about loneliness and isolation (e.g., Hertz, 2020; McPherson et al., 2006), it would be important to know for sure.

In sum, feeling heard could be a key variable of our time and appears central to relationships, self-development, and representation. But psychologically, this sentiment of feeling heard remains understudied. This paper therefore embarks on exploring the concept, by integrating related constructs from different literatures (e.g., intimate relationships, healthcare, organizations) into a unified definition and measurement. We focus on the concrete level of feeling heard in everyday interpersonal interactions because feeling heard at an abstract level (e.g., by the government) might be different and therefore require an independent exploration.

Feeling Heard in the Literature

Considering the importance of feeling heard in colloquial speech and common understanding, one would expect this concept to have its own scientific literature. But in a comprehensive review, we found that feeling heard is not treated as a distinct concept yet. Instead, the literatures on contexts where feeling heard could play an important role tend to

revolve around related concepts. Exploring each of these literatures might help us define *feeling heard* and determine whether it is distinct from other existing concepts. In this section, we will shortly describe the key findings from our review.

Intimate Relationships Literature: Perceived Responsiveness

First, the importance of feeling heard becomes evident from the literature on intimate relationships. Rather than focusing explicitly on feeling heard, this literature examines the closely related construct of perceived responsiveness. Perceived responsiveness has been defined as the belief that close others understand and value one's personal needs and goals and are supportive in fulfilling these (Reis & Clark, 2013; Reis & Shaver, 1988). It is essentially about a person's perception that intimate others see them for who they are and accept, value, and support that (Reis et al., 2018). While perceived responsiveness was studied most in the context of romantic couples it plays a role in all kinds of intimate relationships, such as that between parent and child (Landry, 2006; Yang & Laroche, 2011). It has been found to support and strengthen not only the relationship, by increasing satisfaction, intimacy, and commitment, but also its members, by increasing subjective well-being and self-esteem (e.g., Gable & Reis, 2010).

The concept of perceived responsiveness thus focuses on the target's perception of their partner's attitudes towards them. We believe this is also an important component of feeling heard in conversations. But feeling heard is more concrete than perceived responsiveness, in the sense that it is a feeling that arises from a specific interaction, rather than a general appreciation of a person's needs and goals. Recently, Itzchakov and Reis (2020) suggested that the concrete form of responsiveness is *listening* and called for the integration of both concepts in future research. The perception of listening behavior might make a speaker feel heard. Listening has been extensively studied in the healthcare literatures.

Healthcare Literatures: Attentive Listening

Listening is mostly considered in service of the person-centered approach that is seen as a core dimension of high-quality healthcare (Langberg et al., 2019). The person-centered therapist is essentially a responsive therapist who puts the patient center stage and aims to stimulate the patient to pursue their own needs and goals (Rogers, 1989). This makes the client feel known and empowered (Epstein & Street, 2011). The person-centered approach gained currency in many other domains beyond healthcare, for example, it is used in education to optimize child development and in retailing to increase customer satisfaction (De Ruyter & Wetzels, 2000; Murray, 2019).

The important practice in the person-centered approach is active listening (also called empathic listening). This involves paying undivided, non-directive, and non-judgmental attention with behaviors like paraphrasing and summarizing what has been said (Rogers & Farson, 1957). Active listeners listen to the feelings and attitudes behind the speaker's words. The active listener tries to see the world through the speaker's eyes and empathize with them. In this way, the listener communicates respect for the speaker.

In this literature, the central focus is on listening behaviors per se and less so on their perception by the speaker (see Worthington & Bodie, 2017 for a review). The experience of being listened to is treated as an important and positive yet largely undefined outcome (e.g., Ingersol et al., 2018; Meyers et al., 2000; Weiste et al., 2020). We suspect that to feel heard a speaker must *perceive* their interaction partner as an attentive listener. Much like perceived responsiveness then, to feel heard not only the behaviors of the listener are important, but also the perceptions of the speaker.

Based on the previous, to feel listened to attentively, three ingredients might be of importance: attention, empathy, and respect. First, the speaker will feel heard when they perceive (undivided) attention on the side of the listener. The listener is not a passive receiver but actively engaged; the listener is all ears. Second, the speaker will feel heard when they

perceive the listener as empathic. The listener tries to step into the speaker's shoes and take their perspective. And third, the speaker must feel that the listener is respectful towards them. The listener takes the speaker seriously and does not judge them for what they say or who they are. Thus, the speaker feels heard when they perceive the listener as attentive, empathic, and respectful.

But to be listened to or heard, the speaker first needs to speak. This shifts the focus from the speaker's interpretations of the listener's behavior to the speaker themselves. Does the speaker feel able to speak?

Organizational and Law Literatures: Voice

The importance of being able to speak per se is most explicitly recognized in the concept of *voice*, which is most relevant in contexts where there is a power difference and has therefore been examined in contexts of representation (e.g., in legal, political, and managerial settings). Voice is a central concept in the literature on procedural justice.

Procedural justice is the process by which a decision is made, and as such is contrasted with distributive justice which refers to the decision itself (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Thibaut & Walker, 1975). Subjective procedural justice involves the *experience* of being treated fairly. Voice contributes importantly to this experience (Folger, 1977). To experience voice, subordinates should feel able to let their opinions and feelings be known and taken into account by those making decisions that affect them. Importantly, this does not require (the perception of) actually influencing the decision (Lind et al., 1990). In organizations, experiencing voice tends to increase engagement, satisfaction, and social identification with the organization (Tyler & Blader, 2003). In the context of law, the importance of voice has also been recognized (Tyler & Huo, 2002). Without voice, litigants might feel treated as a number and not taken seriously, which can make procedures appear random and raise suspicions towards legal authorities.

Although voice is mostly studied in law or organizational contexts, the essence of being able to say what one wants to say could be an important component of feeling heard, that could apply to many everyday conversations. Integrating the three literatures described so far suggests that feeling heard involves being able to speak freely to an attentive other that shows empathy and respect. This all happens on an interpersonal level. However, to feel heard, interaction partners need a certain degree of understanding between them. Such understanding requires a superordinate level of the dyad or group.

Communication Literature: Common Ground

In communication science, this level of “us” is considered the basis for establishing a *common ground*. Common ground is the knowledge and beliefs that interaction partners assume to share, which allows them to communicate effectively (Clark, 1996; Clark & Schaefer, 1989). The continuous creation and maintenance of these mutual understandings, called grounding, occurs through the dynamics of interpersonal interaction. Grounding has been presented as a three-step process that starts with the speaker presenting information, followed by the listener expressing understanding or misunderstanding, which the speaker subsequently acknowledges or corrects (Bavelas et al, 2012). Interaction is thus considered an act of coordination and collaboration (Bavelas et al, 2000).

It logically follows that to feel heard, one needs to develop a common understanding of one’s needs and wishes in the conversation. This component seems to be quite distinct from the other, more transactional, foundations of feeling heard, which occur at the interpersonal level (i.e., the level of “me” and “you”). The communication literature adds a new element by pointing out that feeling heard may require a *joint effort* of grounding in which interaction partners dynamically construct a mutual understanding at the level of “us”.

At this point it is good to take stock: what have we learned so far? We believe that while none of these literatures are about *feeling heard* as such, all of them imply that it may

be an important psychological outcome of social interaction and all of them add something important to understanding what *feeling heard* entails. One can feel heard because of particular *actions* of *self* (e.g., voice) and *other* (e.g., attentive listening). This exchange can feed into *perceptions* such as responsiveness. But feeling heard may also require an ongoing *dynamic* by which understandings of “us” are construed and maintained. In other words, in the psychological sense of feeling heard the actions and perceptions of self, other, and us jointly seem to converge. This conclusion implies two things: that *feeling heard* is not a redundant concept, because it is not reducible to any one of these components, and that operationalizing it should attend to each of these components.

A Definition of *Feeling Heard* and an Operational Model¹

Integrating the concepts found in these diverse literatures allows us to distinguish different components of *feeling heard* that should be included in a definition of this concept. *Voice* is a first vital part of feeling heard: one needs to communicate to be, and by extension feel, heard. Voice also presupposes a wish to be heard, a desire to communicate something. Indeed, the voice literature concerns situations where communication is not self-evident (because of status differences), not required (up to people themselves), but allowed and likely desirable (giving opinions on self-relevant decisions). So, voice is not just about piping up but about one’s experience of having the opportunity to speak *if* one wants to speak, and to say *what* one wants to say.

There should also be someone receiving the communication. The literatures on intimate relations and healthcare elaborate how receivers can put the speaker center stage. The receiver does so by paying close and undivided attention to the speaker and their

¹ In addition to this literature review, we conducted semi-structured interviews with four individuals who had a lot of practical experience with and knowledge about feeling heard in different fields. The summarized interviews can be found in the supplementary materials, section 1.3. The themes that came up in these expert interviews showed substantial overlap with the literatures outlined here.

communication. This is needed to accurately take the speaker's perspective and understand their needs and goals. Lastly, the listener should be non-judgmental and accept the speaker for who they are. Whether the speaker feels heard is dependent on their perception and interpretation of the listener's behaviors. In sum, interpersonal perceptions of *attentiveness*, *empathy*, and *respect* are important components of feeling heard.

Finally, the communication literatures suggest that feeling heard requires an overarching sense that "we understand each other". This *common ground* appears essential to all other components of feeling heard. It is needed to voice effectively: the speaker needs to adapt their communication to their understanding of the listener's understanding to ensure the listener understands correctly. Common ground is also needed for attention, empathy, and respect: the listener must understand the speaker to attend to the correct details of their communication, empathize with them, and respect them for who they are.

Putting these different insights together, feeling heard has five components concerning three entities (me, you, and we) at two levels of analysis (interpersonal and collective). At the interpersonal level there is *my* voice (1), and *your* attention (2), empathy (3) and respect (4). And at the collective level there is *our* (5) common ground. See Figure 1. This bring us to the following definition: Feeling heard is the feeling that one's communication is received with attention, empathy, respect, and in a spirit of mutual understanding. In the remainder of this paper, we report on the development and validation of an instrument to measure this concept.

Figure 1.

Feeling heard in conversation. A visual representation of the proposed model.

Study Outlines

The paper consists of three studies with three main aims: 1) scale development, 2) scale validation, and 3) manipulation of the construct. We first constructed three items to measure each of the five feeling heard components plus one general feeling heard item, resulting in a 16-item scale. Study 1 was a Dutch population survey in which we tested the proposed model and scale to select the items and factor structure that best represent feeling heard. Study 2 was a preregistered US survey study designed to assess the reliability, and convergent, divergent, and predictive validity of the resulting feeling heard scale (the FHS). Study 3 was a preregistered lab study aimed at manipulating feeling heard by varying communication channel use, and thereby testing whether feeling heard picks up on unique variance in conversational experiences that is not measured by other related variables. All

three studies were approved by the Ethical Committee Psychology of the [MASKED FOR REVIEW]. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation.

Study 1²

Aims and Hypotheses

Study 1 had three aims: 1) gain insight into how people themselves understand and experience feeling heard, 2) test the proposed factor structure, and 3) get an impression of the natural distribution of feeling heard in everyday online conversations. Because this study was conducted during the lockdowns due to the covid-19 pandemic, we focused on *online* interactions, which then became a central mode of communication.

Method³

Sample Size Rationale

As a crude rule of thumb, for scale development at least 10 participants per item are required, which means 160 participants for 16 items (Bentler & Chou, 1987). We decided to recruit slightly over 200 participants, anticipating some attrition due to incorrectly answered attention checks. With a sample of 160, correlations of $r = .19$ (small effect; Cohen, 1988) can still be reliably estimated with $\alpha = .05$ (two-tailed) and power = .80.

Participants

A representative sample of the Dutch population in terms of age, gender, and educational level was recruited and paid through the online panel service PanelInzicht ($N = 217$). Participants were required to be native Dutch and to have at least some experience with online conversations. Based on their descriptions of a past online conversation, we excluded 23 participants who provided nonsensical answers or indicated that they did not have the required experience (e.g., “Sorry, no example, never happened” P.198). The final sample

² Upon publication all the data reported in this paper will be accessible on dataverse.nl.

³ This study was not preregistered.

consisted of 194 participants, 51.55% female and 48.45% male. 37.11% were between 18 and 38 years old, 43.81% were between 39 and 59, and 19.07% were 60 or older. Most participants (46.91%) had middle education level, 29.90% were higher educated, and 23.20% were lower educated (classification based on Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2021). Most participants (73.20%) had a full- or part-time job, 18.04% was either unemployed or retired, and 8.76% was studying.

Design and Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to the conditions of a 2 (felt heard vs. did not feel heard; between subjects) by 2 (last conversation vs. conversation in which the participant did (not) feel heard; within-subjects) design. Specifically, in Part A, based on random allocation, participants were either asked to think back to an online conversation in which they felt heard ($N = 108$) or one in which they did not feel heard ($N = 86$). This was done to maximize the variance in feeling heard experiences and test the differences between conditions. In Part B we examined the natural distribution of feeling heard in online conversations by asking participants to think back to their last online conversation. 89 participants began with Part A and 105 participants began with Part B.

The study was conducted in Dutch. Participants completed an online survey via the Qualtrics platform. After providing their demographics, participants, in both Part A and B, wrote down details about the conversation situation. In Part A, participants were additionally asked to write down *why* they felt heard or not. In both Part A and B, participants subsequently answered some general questions about the described conversation (see Conversation characteristics below), and then completed the feeling heard scale. The entire questionnaire can be found in the supplementary materials, section 1.2.

Materials

Conversation Characteristics. We included the following variables that might affect the experience of feeling heard: 1) quality of the internet-connection, 2) number of interaction partner(s), 3) acquaintance with the interaction partner(s), and perceived 4) quality and 5) equality of the relationship with the interaction partner(s). These variables also provide a characterization of the types of conversations described, see Table S1.⁴

Feeling Heard. Participants were first presented with the central item that formed the kernel of our scale “In this conversation, I felt heard by the other(s)” (Item 1).⁵ The rest of the feeling heard scale consisted of the five components described before. For each component, we designed three items and tried to include one negatively phrased item. The items were phrased according to the entity their component represented: a) voice items referred to “I”, b) attention, empathy, and respect items were about “the other(s)”, and c) common ground items assessed “we”. See Table 1 for the operationalizations and items of the components.

All items were preceded by the phrase “In this conversation...”. Depending on the number of interaction partners in the conversation, items referring to the interaction partner(s) were phrased with “the other” or “the others”. All items were measured on 5-point Likert scales (from 1 = *Completely disagree* to 5 = *Completely agree*).

⁴ Table or Figure numbers preceded by “S” can be found in the supplementary materials.

⁵ Due to a programming error, this single item was measured on a 7-point Likert scale. To make it compatible with the rest of the items, it was rescaled to a 5-point scale.

Table 1.

The operationalization and original items of the five aspects of feeling heard. The item numbering will be used to refer to the specific items in this results section. The last column contains the item numbers that were part of the final scale.

Aspect	Operationalization	Initial items	Item number	Items in the final scale
Voice	My experience of being able to express myself freely, that is, being able to say what I want to say.	...I could say what I really wanted to say	2	2
		...I could express my thoughts	3	
		<i>...I felt inhibited to say what I wanted to say</i>	4	
Attention	My impression that the other focused their attention on what I said (my voice).	<i>...the other was more concerned with him/herself than with what I said</i>	5	5, 6
		...the other listened to what I said	6	
		...the other paid attention to what I said	7	
Empathy	My perception that the other tried to take my perspective and emotionally understand me.	...the other tried to put him/herself in my shoes	8	8, 9
		<i>...the other was insensitive to my thoughts and feelings</i>	9	
		...the other was empathetic	10	
Respect	My feeling that the other valued what I said (my voice) and me as a person. In other words, I am worth listening to.	...the other showed genuine interest in me	11	13
		...the other took me seriously	12	
		...the other treated me with respect	13	
Common ground	My impression that we could take each other's perspective and understand each other's point of view	<i>...we looked at things differently</i>	14	15
		...we understood each other	15	
		...we were on the same wavelength	16	

Note. Reverse-coded items are italicized. We show the items in singular form (i.e., “the other”), some of the items were rephrased to plural form (i.e., “the others”) when participants described a conversation with more than one other person.

Results

We first describe the results of the exploratory content analysis on the answers to the open-ended questions in both Part A and Part B of the dataset. Then we present the results of the factor analyses performed on Part A of the data to select the items and factor structure that

best fit the data and best represent the concept. Lastly, we used Part B of the data to explore the reliability of the scale and the natural prevalence of feeling heard in online conversations.

Content Analyses

First, we analyzed the descriptions of the conversation situation by coding a) the type of relationship and b) the context of conversation (private or business). See Table 2 for the themes, their respective descriptions, and some examples. Second, we analyzed the reasons for feeling (not) heard through an inductive process, by iteratively coding and clustering answers. We allowed different themes to emerge per condition. Interestingly, these themes turned out to fall into the same four overarching categories.

All descriptions were independently coded by the first author and a second (also native Dutch) coder. Themes were coded as 0 if absent and 1 when present in the description. When relevant information about reasons was mentioned in the conversation descriptions or vice versa, this was coded as part of the reasons' descriptions or vice versa. The themes were non-exclusive, meaning that multiple themes could be present in one description, which often occurred. All Kappas were satisfactory (see Tables 3 and 4). For the analysis, we used the means of both coders, such that a description would get a score of .50 when only one of the coders coded it as present.

Answers that both coders considered too vague or abstract to code were excluded from the coding dataset. This resulted in differing sample sizes for conversation versus reasons descriptions. Note that uncodeable cases were still valid for the quantitative analyses, as nonsensical answers had already been removed in a previous step. When only one of the coders deemed an answer uncodeable, they discussed until agreement.

Table 2.

The themes used to code the conversation descriptions on relationship type and general context.

Theme	Description	Examples
<i>Relationship type</i>		
Service provider(s) – one-off	One-off exchanges with strangers, although another interaction might happen in the short term about the same issue. Oftentimes the participant is in a position of dependence.	A helpdesk of a (web-) shop, an advertiser, the police, a bank
Service provider(s) – repeated	Contacts are expected to be repeated over time and over issues. Participants feel a sense of connection with this person or the organization they represent. Oftentimes the participant is in a position of dependence.	A representative of the housing association, the bank, the neighborhood police, the municipality, a regular customer
Colleague(s)	Contacts are in-group members of equal or subordinate status to the participant.	Colleagues, classmates, fellow organizers
Supervisor(s)	Contacts are in-group members to whom the participant was subordinate.	Boss, teacher
Friend(s)	Contacts are in-group members with whom the participant is interdependent.	Friends
Family	Contacts are in-group members with whom the participant is interdependent.	Children, parents, cousins, spouse
Rest	Relationships that were only mentioned by a single or a few participants.	Sports coach, online community, date, researcher
<i>General context</i>		
Private	A relatively “closed” or personal conversational context and/or topic.	Asking a doctor for medical advice
Business	A more open conversational context and/or topic than <i>Private</i> .	Work meeting with colleagues

Conversation Situation. Table 3 shows the percentages of descriptions referring to the themes per condition. Three results stand out. First, considering these are quite rare contacts, as evidenced in their last conversation frequencies, the service provider(s) – one-off was rather frequently mentioned when people thought back to a situation in which they either felt heard or not. This suggests that interactions with strangers where one is in a dependent

role, relatively easily elicit experiences related to feeling heard. A similar discrepancy is visible for the supervisor(s) where one again is in a dependent, or subordinate, position.

The results further show that people thought relatively less of conversations with intimate others (i.e., family and friends) when asked about a conversation in which they did not feel heard, compared to what would be expected based on the last conversation frequencies. In contrast, conversations in which people did not feel heard were relatively frequently business-focused. Lastly, all conditions most often featured colleagues. Thus, presumably due to the COVID-19 lockdown, many online conversations involved work meetings with colleagues.

Table 3.

The interrater reliabilities and percentages of occurrence of each relationship and context theme in each conversation description: their last conversation, a conversation in which they felt heard, and a conversation in which they felt unheard.

Code	Kappa [95%CI]	Last (N = 206)	Felt heard (N = 103)	Felt unheard (N = 80)
<i>Relationship type</i>				
Service provider(s) – one-off	.81 [.72, .90]	6.80% ^a	12.62% ^a	12.50% ^a
Service provider(s) – repeated	.82 [.74, .90]	13.59% ^a	11.65% ^a	17.50% ^a
Colleague(s)	.92 [.88, .96]	32.04% ^a	24.27% ^a	31.25% ^a
Supervisor(s)	.84 [.75, .93]	5.83% ^a	9.71% ^{a, b}	13.75% ^b
Friend(s)	.87 [.79, .96]	7.77% ^a	10.68% ^a	5.00% ^a
Family	.95 [.91, .99]	20.39% ^a	14.56% ^a	5.00% ^b
Rest	.81 [.71, .91]	6.31% ^a	8.74% ^a	12.50% ^a
<i>General context</i>				
Business	.81 [.75, .87]	50.97% ^a	55.34% ^{a, b}	67.50% ^b
Private	.83 [.77, .88]	41.75% ^a	37.86% ^{a, b}	28.75% ^b

Note. The uncodeable conversation descriptions were excluded. Percentages do not add up as the categories were non-exclusive. Percentages in the same row that do not share the same superscript significantly differ at $p < .05$, based on a 2-sample z-test for equality of proportions.

Reasons For Feeling (Un)Heard. We identified four overarching reasons for feeling heard or not heard, but as the sub-themes differed slightly between these conditions, the content of the themes also differs. Below we list the four themes and shortly describe their

respective sub-themes, indicating differences between conditions. We also provide some illustrative quotes. Table 4 shows the occurrence of the themes per condition.⁶

Table 4.

The interrater reliability and the percentage of occurrence of the reasons' themes per condition.

Code	Feeling heard (N = 101)		Feeling unheard (N = 88)	
	Kappa [95%CI]	% occurrence	Kappa [95%CI]	% occurrence
1. (Lack of) Respect	.63 [.45, .80]	27.23% ^a	.66 [.50, .82]	36.36% ^a
2a. (Lack of) Engagement <i>Active</i>	.88 [.79, .97]	45.54% ^a	.85 [.72, .99]	19.32% ^b
2b. (Lack of) Engagement <i>Passive</i>	.86 [.76, .96]	50.00% ^a	.86 [.76, .97]	48.86% ^a
3. (Lack of) Effort	.76 [.64, .89]	48.51% ^a	.59 [.40, .79]	23.30% ^b
4. (Lack of) Common ground	.87 [.78, .97]	37.62% ^a	.82 [.69, .94]	31.25% ^a

Note. The uncodeable reasons descriptions were excluded. Percentages do not add up as the categories were non-exclusive. Percentages in the same row that do not share the same superscript significantly differ at $p < .05$, based on a 2-sample z-test for equality of proportions.

1. (Lack of) Respect. As reasons for both feeling heard and not heard, participants mentioned respectful treatment. Participants wrote about being taken seriously and receiving recognition. They also mentioned patience on the side of interaction partner(s).

“I had the impression the lady on the phone thought: ‘O this is another one with a problem due to the current circumstances.’ While I believe that every person must be helped, people simply need support in this period. [...]” Not feeling heard, P. 167

⁶ The reasons descriptions provided by participants that did not yet see our feeling heard items did not differ significantly from the reasons provided by participants that did and whose conception of feeling heard could have been influenced by our items.

“By arriving late and not having enough time for me, I got the impression that I am not important.” Not feeling heard, P. 184

For feeling heard specifically, participants mentioned a more general friendly or polite treatment. Some also mentioned clear communication, as well as a sincere and honest interaction.

A sub-theme that was found almost exclusively in the not feeling heard condition was that of dominant interaction partner(s). This could either take the form of the partner(s) being too self-involved to take notice of the participant or being pushy or intrusive in trying to influence the participant.

2. (Lack of) Engagement. Active engagement of interaction partner(s) was evidenced by reactions, asking follow-up questions, remembering, or summarizing what was said, and other signs of attention. Interestingly, (lack of) active engagement featured less in the reasons for not feeling heard (Table 4).

“He reacted to what I said and he asked follow-up questions.” Feeling heard, P. 157

There was also a more passive form of engagement. This involved interaction partner(s) giving the participant room to speak, by listening, not interrupting, and letting them finish.

“During the conversation, I could tell everything I wanted to tell. I had plenty of time for this and I didn’t have to rush my conversation. [...]” Feeling heard, P. 27

A frequent reason for feeling not heard was the presence of too many people and no chair in online meetings, sometimes in combination with a bad internet connection. In such a conversation people talk all at once, meaning no one is heard. Relatedly, participants felt not heard when others were distracted or paid attention to something or someone else.

“Everyone talked at once, was working on something else, people who were eating. Everyone was just talking. It was not pleasant. People were busy with everything, except with what they should be doing.” Not feeling heard, P. 197

3. (Lack of) Effort. Quite often, participants described a conversation in which they wanted to get something done. As such, participants felt heard when their interaction partner(s) came to action or promised to do so.

“Time and again I was sent from pillar to post and previously made agreements were not kept.” Not feeling heard, P. 91

In the feeling heard condition, participants also mentioned interaction partner(s) initiating help without request, such as comforting or giving tips.

Participants felt heard when they attained their predefined goal, or when they received a satisfactory answer for why they did not get what they wanted. Getting good quality answers could also be a goal in itself.

“There was some sort of standard answer. In the sense that they could no longer reach the supplier. And so there was nothing more that could be done.” Not feeling heard, P. 173

4. (Lack of) Common Ground. Interaction partners could create a sense of common ground by recognizing the participant’s situation or taking the participant’s perspective. In the feeling heard context, understanding also occurred on an emotional level (i.e., empathizing).

“This girlfriend asked if she could do something for me because I seemed so grumpy about the quiz team.” Feeling heard, P. 139

Some participants referred to the level of agreement between themselves and their interaction partner(s). Conversely, “closed” and stubborn others that stood firm to their own opinion would make the participant feel not heard.

“I did not agree with supervisor (or supervisor not with me). I was supported by a few colleagues, but supervisor stood firm. After 2 protests I stopped trying.” Not feeling heard, P. 174

Moreover, participants in the feeling heard condition explicitly mentioned that they felt heard when their interaction partner(s) collaborated with them, for example by making decisions or appointments together or by negotiating.

“To come to a decision together, the other has to listen and when you actually come to a decision together, that means that the other has heard you.” Feeling heard, P. 134

In sum, the themes and sub-themes that emerged from this content coding of the reasons’ descriptions overlap considerably with our scale. Except for empathy, which is not a distinct theme, but more a special case of understanding. Moreover, the effort theme is not present in our scale. We will return to this in Study 2.

Scale Dimensionality and Item Selection

Item Characteristics. We now turn to the analysis of the performance of the scale items which was based on Part A of the dataset. See Table S2 for the item means, standard deviations, skewness, kurtosis, and between-condition differences. Condition (feeling heard vs. not feeling heard) had a significant effect on all items (ranging from $t(124.84) = 23.12, p < .001$ to $t(165.83) = -6.17, p < .001$), suggesting that all items tapped into feeling heard. Both the Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity ($\chi^2(120) = 3431.06, p < .001$) and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test (MSA ranged between .84 and .98) showed that there was enough overlap between the items for conducting factor analysis (Kaiser, 1974). This is also visible in the inter-item correlations that were all significant with a mean of $|.63|$ (see Table S3).

Factor Analysis. We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis with the Lavaan package in R (version 0.6-7; Rosseel, 2012). To correct for the lack of multivariate normality

in our data we used maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors and a Satorra-Bentler scaled test statistic (MLM) for the model parameters.

Alongside the chi-square test (χ^2), we report the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) because this alternative fit index is less affected by the reliability paradox (Heene et al., 2011; Miles & Shevlin, 2007). This is the phenomenon that more reliable measures lead to worse fit: higher standardized factor loadings provide more reliable information about a latent variable and therefore a higher power to detect small misspecifications in the model. Especially the absolute fit indices, like RMSEA, are sensitive to this paradox (McNeish et al., 2017). We will additionally inspect modification indices and residual correlation matrices to assess fit.

Hypothesized Model Fit. We tested the fit of the hypothesized model with a Confirmatory Factor Analysis. Corresponding to the five feeling heard components, we specified five latent factors: Voice, Attention, Empathy, Respect, and Common ground, each with three unique items. All latent factors were additionally set to load on item 1. As can be seen in Figure 2, the fit of this hypothesized model was acceptable. However, the covariances among the five latent factors were notably high (ranging from .69 to .99), which might be indicative of unidimensionality. The modification indices and residual correlations (Tables S4 and S5) also suggested considerable overlap between and within all latent factors.

Moreover, as can be seen in Figure 2, the factor loadings of item 1 were unreliable. Because this item was set to load on all latent factors and all latent factors were very strongly related, the item's explained variance is distributed over all latent factors. It is a zero-sum situation: the variance explained by one factor overlaps with that explained by another, but the variance can only be explained once. The loadings do confirm however that this item is not exclusive to any one latent variable, because it loads somewhat on various factors.

Figure 2.

The results of the confirmatory factor analysis of the hypothesized model.

Covariances latent factors

Voice – Attention:	.81
Voice – Empathy:	.75
Voice – Respect:	.71
Voice – Common ground:	.69
Attention – Empathy:	.94
Attention – Respect:	.92
Attention – Common ground:	.85
Empathy – Respect:	.99
Empathy – Common ground:	.94
Respect – Common ground:	.91

Note. Rectangles represent observed variables and circles represent latent variables. The loadings of items 2, 6, 19, 13, and 15 were set to 1, as these were considered the defining items of their respective components. Estimation methods: Maximum likelihood with robust standard errors and a Satorra-Bentler scaled test statistic (MLM). Both latent and observed variables are standardized.

Exploratory Factor Analysis. Since the results above suggested item redundancy, we inspected the inter-item correlations (see Table S3). Correlations of $r \geq |.80|$ (equaling a shared variance of 64%) were considered indicative of redundancy. Correlations of this magnitude that involved item 1 were not considered problematic as this is the scale's central item. If the other highly correlated item pairs were also conceptually considered redundant, we excluded one of the items. This led to the exclusion of items 3, 7, 11, 12, and 16. There were also items with consistently low inter-item correlations of $r \leq |.40|$ (equaling a unique variance of 84%): items 4, 10, and 14. These were excluded too.

The number of factors to extract from the remaining eight items was based on a scree-plot and Kaiser's criterion to remove components with eigenvalues < 1 (using the nFactors package in R, version 2.4.1, Raiche & Magis, 2020). This suggested a one-component solution (see Figure S1), which is in line with the interpretations above. The eight items were accordingly submitted to a maximum likelihood exploratory factor analysis with a one-factor solution and Promax rotation using the Factanal function in R. This resulted in a good fit with factor loadings ranging from $|.64|$ to $|.92|$ and 71% explained variance (Table S6).

One-factor Model Fit. We then specified the same one-factor model in a confirmatory factor analysis. The fit was satisfactory ($\chi^2(20) = 46.72, p < .001$; CFI = .98), but the modification indices and the residual correlations suggested a theoretically sensible correlation between the residuals of the two reverse coded items (see Tables S7 and S8). Allowing this correlation resulted in a significantly better model fit ($\chi^2(1) = 5.76, p = .02$).

The fit was satisfactory on all indices: $\chi^2(19) = 34.53, p = .02$; CFI = .99; all modification indices < 15; all residual correlations < |.09|, see Figure 3, and Tables S9 and S10.

The resulting feeling heard scale was highly internally consistent with an average item-total correlation of .72 (and a range of .53 to .78), and a coefficient omega of .95, 95%CI = [.93, .96].⁷ Factor loadings ranged from .64 to .93 with the highest loading for item 1 which was also conceptually the central item of the scale. This item, with an item-total correlation of .75, explained 56% of the variance in feeling heard as measured by the full scale.

⁷ We report hierarchical omega with bias corrected and accelerated (1000) bootstraps. These were calculated with the ci.reliability function of the MBESS package (version 4.6.0, Kelley, 2019).

Figure 3.

Results of the confirmatory factor analysis of the final model.

Note. Rectangles represent observed variables and circles represent latent variables.

Estimation methods: Maximum likelihood with robust standard errors and a Satorra-Bentler scaled test statistic (MLM). Reported are the completely standardized solutions: both latent and observed variables are standardized.

Influence of Conversation Characteristics

We explored the correlations between feeling heard and other characteristics of the conversation or the social relationship. Participants were slightly more likely to feel heard when they had a good internet connection ($r = .15, p = .04$). Feeling heard was not related to the number of interaction partners ($r = -.07, p = .30$), nor to whether participants knew these partners before their conversation ($r = .08, p = .25$). Participants felt more heard when they had a good relationship with their interaction partner(s) ($r = .38, p < .001$). Lastly, participants also felt more heard when they felt this relationship was equal than when they considered either their interaction partner(s) or themselves of greater authority ($F(3,190) = 5.74, p < .001$; $M_{equal} = 3.70, 95\%CI = [3.51, 3.88]$ versus $M_{other-authority} = 3.26, 95\%CI = [2.96, 3.56]$ and $M_{self-authority} = 3.30, 95\%CI = [2.59, 4.01]$). Participants that indicated “don’t know” to this question of equality felt least heard ($M_{don't-know} = 2.78, 95\%CI = [2.33, 3.23]$). The demographic variables (age, gender, education, and employment status) did not correlate with feeling heard. In sum, having a good internet connection, and a positive and equal relationship with one’s interaction partner(s), seems to make it more likely that one feels heard.

Last Conversation Description

We analyzed Part B of the dataset to explore the reliability of the scale and the natural prevalence of feeling heard in online conversations. Excluding the nonsense descriptions of last online conversations resulted in a sample size of 214 participants for Part B. The single-factor model fitted the data well and the loadings were very similar to Part A.⁸ The scale was internally reliable with an omega of .91, 95%CI = [.88, .94]. The item-total correlation

⁸ Part B also allowed an assessment of the measurement invariance of the scale or “the psychometric equivalence of a construct across groups or across time” (Putnick & Bornstein, 2016, p.1). We used the measurement invariance function of the semTools package (version 0.5-4, Jorgensen et al., 2021). Results show that the model specified on Part A of the dataset also provides a good fit to Part B. This is evidence that the scale’s psychometric characteristics replicate across measures within the same sample. See Table S11.

averaged $|.62|$ and ranged from $|.46|$ to $|.71|$. See Table S12 for the item means, standard deviations, and correlations. The distribution of feeling heard in Part B was negatively skewed (skewness = -1.10 ; $M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.82$). This suggests that people tend to feel heard in their online conversations.

Discussion

People do not seem to meaningfully distinguish between the five components – voice, attention, empathy, respect, common ground – deduced from the literature review. Feeling heard appears to be a unitary concept that can be measured with a concise eight-item scale. This scale does however contain elements of all five components and therefore taps into three entities (me, you, and we) at two levels of analysis (interpersonal and collective). These findings corroborate our definition of feeling heard as stated in the introduction. Providing initial evidence of the reliability of the scale, a good fit to Part B of the dataset was obtained. Study 2 examines whether the scale is also reliable in another, unrelated dataset.

The themes derived from a qualitative analysis of participants' reports of feeling heard overlapped to a great extent with our definition. One new theme came up: effort. Central to this theme is the accomplishment of goals, that is, getting out of the conversation what one wanted or expected. In light of procedural justice being as important as distributive justice (Lind et al., 1990), we do not expect goal accomplishment to be a required component of feeling heard. That is, people can feel heard when they do not accomplish their goals, and, vice versa, people can feel not heard even though they do get what they asked for. To be sure and verify that goal accomplishment and feeling heard are not the same, we include a goal accomplishment measure as part of the convergent validity testing in Study 2.

We further find that, in most online interactions, people do feel heard. It is likely that this holds for interactions in general, since there are indications that people feel more heard in

face-to-face interactions than in online chats (e.g., Roos et al., 2020a). The context of Study 2 was therefore not limited to online interactions but concerned conversation in general.

Study 2

Aims and Hypotheses

Study 2 aimed to establish the 1) reliability, and 2) convergent, 3) predictive and 4) divergent validity of the feeling heard scale. Unlike study 1, the context was not restricted to a certain medium but concerned conversation in general. We formulated three hypotheses, preregistered at the Open Science Framework⁹:

Hypothesis 1: The eight items load on a single latent factor and the feeling heard scale has good reliability.

Hypothesis 2A: The feeling heard scale will moderately to strongly and positively correlate with, but not be identical to: A) intimacy of interaction partner(s) in conversation, B) attraction towards interaction partner(s), C) responsiveness of interaction partner(s), D) perceived goal accomplishment in conversation.

Hypothesis 2B: The feeling heard scale will moderately to strongly and negatively correlate with, but not be identical to: E) dominance of interaction partner(s) in conversation, F) distrust towards interaction partner(s), G) communication apprehension.

Hypothesis 3: The less heard participants felt in a conversation, the stronger their intentions to *negatively* avoid having another conversation with the same interaction partner(s). Negative avoidance means avoidance without relational maintenance efforts, i.e., without being polite or friendly.

⁹ The design and hypotheses of this study were preregistered prior to data collection at: https://osf.io/n4r32/?view_only=6692308299f048e980f6e48fd57be40f.

To establish its divergent validity, we additionally tested to which conversational variables (e.g., number of interaction partners) feeling heard does *not* relate. This was an exploratory analysis and not included in the preregistration.

Method

Sample Size Rationale

As we wanted to sample the different types of conversations in which people felt heard and not heard, we decided to recruit a sample of 1000 respondents. This enables us to compare the most often mentioned types with a decent N in potential future analysis. With this sample size, correlations of $|\text{.08}|$ (small effect; Cohen, 1988) can be reliably estimated with $\alpha = .05$ (two-tailed) and power = .80. Because of this high power, we interpret the effects in terms of their effect size rather than their statistical significance alone.

Participants

Participants were recruited via the online platform Prolific. As the questionnaire was in English, the selection criteria were being fluent in English and living in the United States. We collected 50% female and 50% male participants. We excluded 28 participants that did not provide serious answers (as visible in their conversation descriptions and/or two failed attention checks) and replaced them with new participants. The final sample therefore consisted of 1000 participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 34.89$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.94$) of which 49.30% were female and 49.10% were male (1.60% indicated either “other” or “do not want to say”). Most participants (59.00%) were higher educated (undergraduate, graduate, or doctoral degree obtained), 21.40% were of middle education level (college degree), and 19.60% were lower educated (no formal qualifications or secondary school completed) (classification based on United States Census Bureau, 2020). About two-thirds of the sample (66.50%) was either full- or part-time employed, 21.50% was unemployed or retired, and 12.00% was studying.

Design and Procedure

Participants completed an online survey via the Qualtrics platform. Participants read the following instruction: *Think back to a conversation in which you wanted to share your thoughts or feelings, make a point, speak your mind, and/or get something done (regardless of whether this was successful or not). Describe this conversation in a couple of sentences below.* This instruction was designed to make people think back to conversations in which feeling heard is relevant, and to exclude things like a hello-goodbye “conversation” with the cashier. With this conversation in mind participants then completed the rest of the questionnaire, described below. Lastly, participants provided their demographics and were thanked, debriefed, and paid. The entire questionnaire can be found in the supplementary materials, section 2.2.

Materials

Throughout the questionnaire, items about interaction partner(s) were phrased in singular (“the other person”) or plural (“the other people”) form, depending on whether the described conversation was held with one or more than one person respectively. The example items below are all phrased in singular form.

Reliability. Participants were first presented with the eight-item feeling heard scale, translated to English (1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*).

Convergent Validity. After careful consideration, we decided to include the following seven scales to assess convergent validity. See S2.3 for our inclusion criteria and reasoning.

Two subscales of the relational communication scale of Burgoon and Hale (1987): 1) conversational intimacy (20 items, 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 7 = *Strongly agree*), for example, “The other person was intensely involved in our conversation.” ($\omega^{10} = .95$), and 2) dominance

¹⁰ We report omega (hierarchical) with bias corrected and accelerated bootstraps (1000), calculated with the ci.reliability function of the MBESS package (version 4.8.0, Kelley, 2020).

vs. equality (nine items), for example: “The other person tried to control the interaction.” ($\omega = .69$).

The individualized trust scale of Wheelless and Grotz (1977) (15 items, 7-point scales without anchors; Meyers & Johnson, 2004). This is a semantic differential scale asking to what extent each characteristic applies to a certain person, for example: “Trustworthy-Untrustworthy” ($\omega = .97$). Higher scores indicate a more distrustful attitude.

The affective attraction scale of Montoya and Insko (2008) (five items, 1 = *Extremely [unpleasant]* to 9 = *Extremely [pleasant]*), for example: “How unpleasant/pleasant do you feel about the other person?” ($\omega = .89$).

The perceived partner responsiveness scale of Reis et al. (2018) (18 items, 1 = *Not at all true* to 9 = *Completely true*), e.g., “The other person is responsive to my needs.” ($\omega = .98$).

A self-devised perceived goal accomplishment measure (three items, 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*): “In this conversation, I accomplished the goals I had prior to this conversation.”, “I was unsuccessful in achieving what I wanted in this conversation.” (reverse-coded), and “I got what I aimed for in this conversation.” ($\omega = .90$).

The dyad subscale of the communication apprehension scale by McCroskey (1982) (six items, 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*), for example, “Ordinarily I am very tense and nervous in conversations.” ($\omega = .93$).

Predictive Validity. One of the most important consequences of not feeling heard is that it may catalyze conflict. Specifically, we expect that people who feel not heard are likely to engage in interaction behaviors that may contribute to conflict. To test this, we developed items to assess intentions for a next conversation with the same partner(s).

The items were based on the classic distinction between approach and avoidance reactions. Within these reactions, we distinguished between *positive* approach/avoidance: behaviors that steer towards relationship maintenance, and *negative* approach/avoidance:

behaviors that do not seem conducive to relationship maintenance. For each combination of reaction (approach vs avoidance) X relationship (positive vs negative), we made two items: Negative avoidance, e.g., “Next time, I would avoid having this conversation altogether.” ($r = .85, p < .001$), positive avoidance, e.g., “Next time, I would change the topic compared to the last conversation.” ($r = .64, p < .001$), negative approach, e.g., “Next time, when discussing the same topic, I would make my point(s) more forcefully.” ($r = .40, p < .001$), and positive approach, e.g., “Next time, I would enter the conversation with an open mind.” ($r = .50, p < .001$). All items were rated on 5-point Likert scales from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*. We only formulated predictions for negative avoidance intentions because this was the first time that we used these items, and we expected this behavioral intention to show the strongest effects. The other intentions were measured exploratively.

Divergent Validity. We included the following four variables deemed of importance for conversational experiences (same as Study 1) in order to establish the scale’s divergent validity, and to include as regression covariates: 1) the number of interaction partner(s) in the conversation (1 = *1 other*, 2 = *2 others*, 3 = *3 others*, 4 = *more than 3 others*), 2) to what extent participants knew the interaction partner(s) before (1 = *Not at all*, 2 = *Barely*, 3 = *A bit*, 4 = *Quite well*, 5 = *Very well*), 3) how positive participants felt about their relationship with the interaction partner(s) in general (1 = *Very negative*, 2 = *Negative*, 3 = *Neutral*, 4 = *Positive*, 5 = *Very positive*), and 4) whether participants experienced this relationship as equal or not (1 = *Yes, we are equals*, 2 = *No, the other has more authority (e.g., other is my employer)*, 3 = *No, I have more authority (e.g., other is my child)*, 4 = *Don’t know*).

Results

As in Study 1, participants described a variety of conversations, see Table S13 for a characterization. We did not analyze these descriptions because we already performed a content analysis on the descriptions provided in Study 1. The distribution of feeling heard was

again, but less strongly than in Study 1, skewed to the left (skewness = -0.55; $M = 3.51$, $SD = 0.98$, Figure S2). This means that most participants wrote about a conversation in which they did feel heard.

Reliability

We performed a maximum likelihood confirmatory factor analysis on the eight feeling heard items to test Hypothesis 1. As in Study 1, we used the lavaan package (version 0.6-7; Rosseel, 2012). The model was specified in line with Study 1: the eight items loading on a single factor with a residual correlation between the two negative items. This resulted in a good model fit: $\chi^2(19) = 67.46$, $CFI = .99$. The factor loadings ranged between $|.67|$ (for the reverse coded items) and $|.89|$ (for the central feeling heard item), see Figure 4. The omega of the scale was $.93$, indicating high internal consistency. The inter-item correlations averaged $|.66|$ and ranged between $r = |.45|$ and $r = |.79|$, which means they did not exceed the item exclusion cutoffs used in Study 1. See Table S14 for all inter-item correlations as well as the means and standard deviations per item. Taken together, we find strong support for Hypothesis 1: the feeling heard scale is reliable.

Figure 4.

Factor loadings resulting from the confirmatory factor analysis in Study 2.

Note. Rectangles represent the observed variables and the circle represents the latent variable.

Standardized factor loadings are displayed.

Convergent Validity

To test Hypothesis 2, we calculated the correlations between the feeling heard scale and scales assessing related constructs. As can be seen in Table 5, correlations are significant and in expected directions. Two observations stand out. First, communication apprehension was very weakly related to feeling heard and the other scales. This could be because it is the only scale *not* tapping into evaluations of the specific conversational experience or the specific interaction partner(s), but into participants' attitudes towards conversation in general. Second, the correlation between feeling heard and intimacy exceeded $|.80|$, which suggests these scales might be measuring the same thing. It is probably no coincidence that conversational intimacy is a subscale of the only scale we could find that, like feeling heard, taps into conversational experiences but is not a component of feeling heard. The analyses below, however, show that feeling heard differs from intimacy: in conversations with partners one feels less positive towards, whether one felt heard is more consequential for intentions to avoid a next conversation with those others than the degree of intimacy one experienced.

Table 5.

The correlations between the scales as well as their respective means and standard deviations.

Variable	Mean (SD)	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Feeling heard ^a	3.51 (0.98)	.84	-.68	.66	-.72	.63	.75	-.13
2. Intimacy ^b	4.86 (1.32)		-.60	.76	-.78	.72	.65	-.17
3. Dominance ^b	3.59 (1.10)			-.53	.60	-.54	-.55	.11
4. Responsiveness ^c	5.75 (2.16)				-.76	.78	.51	-.15
5. Distrust ^b	2.41 (1.31)					-.80	-.55	.11
6. Attraction ^c	6.54 (2.00)						.49	-.12
7. Goal accomplishment ^a	3.37 (1.22)							-.12
8. Communication apprehension ^a	2.86 (1.04)							

Note. All the correlations reported in this table are significant at *** $p < .001$.

^aMeasured on 5-point Likert scales.

^bMeasured on 7-point Likert scales.

^cMeasured on 9-point Likert scales.

Predictive Validity

To test Hypothesis 3, we regressed negative avoidance intentions onto the feeling heard scale; in line with the preregistration, no covariates were included at this point. Feeling heard strongly predicted negative avoidance intentions ($b = -.74$, 95% CI $[-.80, -.68]$, $\beta = -.62$, $R^2 = .38$). The less people felt heard, the more likely they were to negatively avoid a next conversation with the same person(s), for instance by withdrawing from the conversation. To explore the robustness of this effect, we performed a hierarchical linear regression. Block 1 only included the demographic variables as predictors, to which we added the covariates in

block 2. In block 3, we added feeling heard, and in block 4 we included all the convergent validity scales. Does feeling heard predict intentions to negatively avoid future conversations over and above factors like being acquainted, having a good relationship, or experiencing intimacy with this person?

As can be seen in Table S15, feeling heard was the strongest predictor, after controlling for the influence of all demographic variables and covariates (with $\beta = -.54$ for feeling heard and β between $|.01|$ and $|.16|$ for the other variables). Including feeling heard in the model increased its explained variance from $R^2_{adj} = .22$ to $R^2_{adj} = .42$. Importantly, the amount of explained variance only increased by 3% after including the seven scales that measure constructs closely related to feeling heard (from $R^2_{adj} = .42$ to $R^2_{adj} = .45$). This means that the other scales do not capture variance in negative avoidance intentions that feeling heard misses. Moreover, feeling heard remained the strongest predictor of negative avoidance intentions with a β of $-.24$, whereas the standardized beta coefficients of the other 15 predictors ranged between $|.01|$ and $|.13|$.

In additional explorative analyses, we assessed the effect of feeling heard on the other behavioral intention measures, controlling for all demographics and covariates. Although the effects were somewhat smaller, feeling heard significantly predicted positive avoidance ($b = -.57$, 95%CI $[-.65, -.50]$, $\beta = -.50$, $R^2 = .29$), negative approach ($b = -.22$, 95%CI $[-.29, -.14]$, $\beta = -.21$, $R^2 = .11$) and positive approach intentions ($b = .29$, 95%CI $[.23, .35]$, $\beta = .33$, $R^2 = .28$). See Table S16.

The central item of the scale (i.e., “In this conversation, I felt heard by the other(s)”) also strongly predicted behavioral intentions. Controlling for the demographics and covariates, the unstandardized betas of this item ranged between $|.12|$ (negative approach) and $|.41|$ (negative avoidance) with explained variances from 9% to 37%. Similar to Study 1, the item-total correlation of this central item was $.71$, meaning that it can account for 50% of the

variance measured with the full scale. This suggests that this single item might be a good short alternative for the full scale.

Thus, we find support for Hypothesis 3 and show that feeling heard is a distinct and powerful predictor of post-conversation avoidance intentions. Besides being a strong predictor, feeling heard explained variance over and above 15 related constructs. This again shows that feeling heard means something else than experiencing intimacy, dominance, distrust, liking, etc.

Feeling Heard and Intimacy. An important plausible cause for the high correlation between feeling heard and conversational intimacy is the fact that most of the sample described what can be considered an intimate relationship: more than 80% felt positive to very positive about their relationship with the interaction partner(s).

Whereas intimacy should be relevant and predictive of intentions among close others, feeling heard should be predictive in all subsamples. We test this in two subsamples: 1) participants that felt not or only moderately positive about their relationship ($N = 192$), and 2) participants that felt positive or very positive about their relationship ($N = 808$).

First, in the “non-positive” subsample, when both constructs were simultaneously included in a multiple regression, feeling heard was still strongly predictive of negative avoidance intentions ($\beta = -.49$) while intimacy was not ($\beta = .02$). In contrast, in the “positive” subsample, both constructs maintained predictive value: $\beta = -.35$ for feeling heard and $\beta = -.26$ for intimacy. Thus, whereas conversational intimacy only predicted negative avoidance intentions when people felt positive about their relationship, feeling heard was also predictive in the context of less positive relationships. We can conclude that, especially in this context, feeling heard and intimacy are not the same.

Divergent Validity

Lastly, to establish divergent validity, we explored the correlations between feeling heard and other variables relevant for conversational experiences. Feeling heard was not related to the number of interaction partner(s) in the conversation ($r = -.04, p = .178$) and to whether people knew these interaction partner(s) before the conversation ($r = .08, p = .014$). In contrast, feeling heard was strongly positively related to the perceived quality of this relationship ($r = .52, p < .001$). Moreover, participants felt more heard when they described a conversation with other(s) of equal status than when they considered either the other(s) or themselves of greater authority, or when participants indicated they did not know whether their relationship was equal or not ($F(3,996) = 15.211, p < .001$; $M_{equal} = 3.63, 95\%CI = [3.56, 3.71]$ versus $M_{other-authority} = 3.24, 95\%CI = [3.11, 3.37]$, $M_{self-authority} = 3.25, 95\%CI = [3.09, 3.61]$, and $M_{don't-know} = 2.82, 95\%CI = [2.48, 3.16]$). The demographic variables (age, gender, education, and employment status) did not significantly affect feeling heard. We thus replicate the results of Study 1 regarding the correlations between feeling heard and these conversational variables as well as the demographics. The finding that feeling heard is not the same as being acquainted suggests that the scale has divergent validity.

Discussion

Study 2 shows that the feeling heard scale is reliable and has high internal consistency, not only in the context of online interactions but in conversation in general. The scale further showed convergent validity: Feeling heard is related to, but different from, conversation behaviors that communicate intimacy and dominance, perceived responsiveness of interaction partner(s), attraction and distrust towards interaction partner(s), and the experience of having accomplished conversational goals. Divergent validity was evidenced by the lack of a relation between the FHS and pre-conversation acquaintance. Lastly, we found that the scale is a distinct and strong predictor of conversational intentions related to conflict. Not feeling heard in a conversation can motivate people to avoid another conversation with the same partner(s),

and, conversely, the experience of feeling heard makes it more likely that people will enter a next conversation with an open mind.

Having developed and validated the scale, Study 3 tests whether the experience of feeling heard can be experimentally manipulated. Research suggests that text-based online communication can lead people to feel ignored (Roos et al., 2020a), these people might also end up feeling not heard. We therefore tried to manipulate feeling heard by asking people to engage in two forms of mediated communication: through text and through audio channels.

Study 3¹¹

Aims and Hypotheses

We expected that participants would feel more heard when they were able to communicate by voice than when they were restricted to communicating by text (Hypothesis 1). We further predicted feeling heard to correlate positively with, but also to still be distinct from, other relevant variables: solidarity, conversational flow, and self-esteem (Hypothesis 2). We also explored the effects of different roles (sender versus responder) within media conditions. The latter was aimed to investigate how the role by condition interaction effect on feeling heard compared to the other variables.

Method

Participants and Post-hoc Power

¹¹ This study's design was preregistered prior to data collection at https://osf.io/bkd7t/?view_only=a3cad5dc34384c74bb3ec99ac954c6cf. As can be seen in the preregistration, the original purpose and hypotheses of this study differ from the ones reported in this paper. There was one more condition in the original study which we ignore here. In this condition the responder talked back via a text-based chat enriched with a tool for making interjecting sounds (the so-called VoxBox). However, the results suggested that participants experienced this tool as unfamiliar, unnatural and for some it was experienced as awkward. For the present research question, we only focus on the comparison between the more familiar modes of textual and verbal interaction. Moreover, as it ran parallel to Study 1, this study was exploratory concerning the measurement of feeling heard.

A sample of 74¹² students, 72 of whom were first-year psychology students, ($M_{age} = 20.18$, $SD_{age} = 2.24$; 66.22% female, 31.08% male, 2.70% other) participated for partial course credit. English fluency was an inclusion criterion. The experiment involved dyads, 91.89% of whom not know or barely knew each other before the experiment started.

A sensitivity analysis showed that this sample size yielded 80% power to detect between-condition (within-subjects) effects of at least $F = .17$ (small effect; Cohen, 1988) with alpha .05 (two-tailed), assuming sphericity and a correlation of .50 among repeated measures. Similarly, within-between interaction effects of at least $F = .17$ could be detected with 80% power, and alpha .05 (two-tailed).

Design and Procedure

Participants entered the lab in duos. Both participants were immediately seated in separate cubicles with a computer and a headset. The study had a 2x2 factorial design with a communication medium condition: talking versus typing, and a participant role condition: sender versus responder. Communication medium was a repeated measures factor on the dyad level: each dyad engaged in the talking and the typing condition (in randomized order). Participant role was a between-participants factor and nested within dyads: each participant was either sender or responder (randomly allocated) and kept this role through both conditions.

In both conditions, the sender told the responder about either their holidays, hobbies, or favorite TV shows through a headset. It is important to note that the sender always used audio, which means that the conditions were defined by the task of the responder. In the talking condition, the responder could talk back via a headset connected to the same audio channel that the sender used. In the typing condition, the responder could only react through

¹² The original sample consisted of 78 participants, but three dyads were discarded because they either did not follow the instructions or did not finish the experiment.

text-based chat, which appeared on the screen of the sender. There was no visual contact: in none of the conditions could participants see each other. The experimenter stopped the conversation after 5 minutes unless participants decided to finish beforehand. After each conversation, participants individually completed a questionnaire on their computers (see supplementary materials, section 1.3).

Materials

Because Study 1 and 3 were conducted simultaneously, the feeling heard scale was still under development at the time of the current study. Therefore, only four items of the feeling heard scale were included in the questionnaire:

1. “During this conversation, I felt heard by the other person”.
2. “During this conversation, I could express myself freely”.
3. “During this conversation, the other person respected what I said/wrote”.
4. “During this conversation, we misunderstood each other” (reverse-coded).

In Study 1, this four-item subscale correlated very strongly with the full feeling heard scale: $r = .97$. It thus captures 94% of the variance in the full scale. This means that we can assume that the selected items represent the full scale well. In the current study, the four items also formed a reliable scale with a hierarchical omega of .71.

We additionally measured three constructs that might be closely related to feeling heard. All items were measured on Likert scales ranging from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*. First, we measured solidarity with four items adapted from Koudenburg et al., (2015), for example, “During this conversation, I identified with the other person” and “During this conversation, I felt a sense of belonging with the other person” ($\omega = .80$).

Secondly, we measured conversational flow (Koudenburg et al., 2017) with four items: “This conversation was [coordinated and smooth/ difficult (reverse-coded)/ pleasant/ harmonious]” ($\omega = .88$).

Lastly, we adjusted the Rosenberg (1965) self-esteem scale to construct a reliable three-item-measure of conversational self-esteem: “During this conversation, I felt confident about myself”, “During this conversation, I experienced a sense of failure” (reverse-coded), and “Right now, I feel good about myself” ($\omega = .80$).

Results

We tested the main effect of medium condition (talking vs typing), the main effect of participant role (sender vs responder), and their interaction effect on feeling heard, solidarity, flow, and self-esteem.

As participants were part of a dyad and were measured two times (in both conditions), the statistical analysis had to take into account these two sources of non-independence of observations. We therefore analyzed the data with multilevel repeated measures models, using the lmer function in the R package lme4 (version 1.1-21, Bates et al., 2015). For each dependent variable, we defined models with condition, role, and their interaction term as fixed-effect predictors, and participant and group as random effects. We used the emmeans package (version 1.5.5-1, Length et al., 2021) to estimate means and confidence intervals. These results are presented in Figure 5.

Figure 5.

The main and interaction effects of communication medium condition and participant role on the four dependent variables.

Note. $p > 0.05$ ns; $p < 0.01$ **; $p < 0.001$ ***

In line with Hypothesis 1, both senders and responders felt significantly less heard in the typing condition than in the talking condition ($F(1,72) = 56.42, p < .001$). They also felt less solidarity towards one another ($F(1,72) = 15.14, p < .001$), experienced their conversation

as flowing less smoothly ($F(1,72) = 83.08, p < .001$), and felt less self-confident in the typing condition ($F(1,72) = 24.27, p < .001$).

But importantly, feeling heard was the only variable that also showed a significant main effect for participant role ($F(1,72) = 5.97, p = .017$): responders felt less heard. This main effect was qualified by a significant role by condition interaction effect ($F(1,72) = 5.26, p = .024$). The simple main effects revealed no difference in feeling heard between senders and responders in the talking condition, but in the typing condition, responders felt significantly less heard than senders. For solidarity, flow, and self-esteem there was no main effect of participant role ($F(1,72) = 2.90, p = .097$, $F(1,72) = 0.12, p = .730$, and $F(1,72) = 0.04, p = .835$, respectively) and no role by condition interaction effect ($F(1,72) = 2.26, p = .137$, $F(1,72) = 0.48, p = .491$, and $F(1,72) = 0.00, p = .963$, respectively). Thus, the feeling heard measure picked up on additional variance of the differences manipulated in this study.

The distinct character of feeling heard is also evident in the partial correlations among the variables, see Table 6. In line with Hypothesis 2, while all variables were significantly positively correlated to feeling heard, there were no indications for redundancy because all correlations were below .80 (the highest is $r = .65$). Together with the condition effects, this shows that feeling heard is closely related to but also distinct from solidarity, conversational flow, and self-esteem.

Table 6.

Correlations between the four dependent variables (partialling out the effect of condition).

Variable	Feeling Heard	Solidarity	Flow
Solidarity	.33**		
Flow	.65***	.43***	
Self-esteem	.56***	.38***	.60***

Note. $p < 0.01$ **; $p < 0.001$ ***

These are partial correlations between the variables, controlling for the effects of condition, calculated by taking the average of the correlations between all sets of variables in the two conditions (using z-transformations).

General Discussion

Based on a comprehensive literature review, expert interviews, and scale validation studies, we define feeling heard as a two-level concept covering the three entities in interaction: feeling heard is about me, about you, and about us. We distinguished five complementary components of feeling heard - voice, attention, empathy, respect, and common ground - based on the literature review. Empirically these loaded on one single factor. This suggests that feeling heard is a unitary concept, a unidimensional feeling. We then developed and validated a reliable and concise eight-item scale to measure it: the Feeling Heard Scale (the FHS).

Feeling Heard Matters across Contexts

We found that feeling heard is relevant in many different contexts and relationships. When respondents are asked in an open-ended manner to describe situations in which they felt heard or not (Study 1), they report these feelings in conversations ranging from insurance negotiations, fobbing off an advertiser, or business meetings, to exchanging intimate details with friends or catching up with distant family. In both Study 1 and 2, feeling heard was

unrelated to acquaintance, meaning that feeling heard (or not) is experienced in encounters with close friends as much as with strangers.

Across different contexts and relationships, we find that when people reflect on a significant social interaction they recently had, the experience of not feeling heard appears to be somewhat more uncommon than feeling heard. It follows that across many individuals, there is a base rate for people to feel heard in most of the conversations. If this also holds within individuals, this may make not feeling heard a negative expectancy violation which could lead to negative arousal (see also Burgoon and Hale, 1988). By extension, feeling heard might play an especially central role in contexts where people more often do not feel heard. Our research suggests that these can be situations of unequal status (Study 1 and 2) and online social interactions (Study 3).

Situations in which people tend to feel less heard are also quite diagnostic and can aid our understanding of what feeling heard (and not heard) entails psychologically and socially. First, the qualitative analysis (Study 1) showed that people felt not heard relatively often in interactions with higher status others (i.e., supervisors) and in business contexts. This might be because a person dominating the conversation makes others feel less heard (indeed, conversational dominance and feeling heard were negatively correlated in Study 2). A dominant other tends to hold the floor and is likely to be somewhat less concerned with others. This may mean that there is less room for the participant to express (voice) and makes it less likely that the participant feels attended to and respected. Interestingly however, people who occupied the higher status position in the conversation they reported about, did not feel *more* heard than those reporting about being in the subordinate position. This might be because in such an interaction, the other cannot reciprocate since they themselves do not feel heard. So, it would appear that in unequal status interactions, both sides lose out. All this is in comparison to equal status interactions, where people tend to feel most heard. This suggests

that feeling heard is not facilitated when one dominates the conversation – in this sense, it may indeed be lonely at the top. Rather, it appears that the optimal situation is when both parties in an interaction are on equal footing. This finding reinforces our impression that feeling heard could be seen as a product of a *successful collaboration* in conversation.

Second, people also tend to feel less heard online. In line with previous research (Roos et al., 2020a), Study 3 showed that interaction partners felt less heard when they communicated via text-based chats than via audio-channels. In the typing condition of Study 3, one of the interaction partners spoke via a headset (audio) while the other reacted via text messages rather than audio. This way, our design allowed us to partial out the unique effects of *speaking* via text-based communication (while another speaks via a headset), and of *listening* to text-based communication (while you are able to speak via a headset). It appeared that both speaking and listening to text-based communication led to reductions in feeling heard compared to the condition where both parties could speak. This is rather unsurprising for responders as the manipulation clearly restricted their voice. The fact that senders also felt less heard is less obvious. This can be explained by considering that responders could not use many of the passive engagement behaviors that make people feel heard (see open answers Study 1), since these are more difficult to enact in text-based chats. For example, listening is importantly communicated with short expressions like “hmm”, “yes”, and nodding (Reis & Clark, 2013). In contrast, speaker interruptions are more likely online. Senders might have interpreted all this unresponsiveness as signs of lacking attention, empathic concern, and respect on the side of responders. On top of this, both senders and responders likely experienced a reduced sense of “us” (also visible in their reduced solidarity ratings). This could be due to the time lags caused by the longer time typing takes, and its mismatch with the speed of talking, which disrupts the smooth conversational turn-taking that is needed for grounding (Koudenburg et al., 2013; Roos et al., 2020b).

In sum, these and other situations in which feeling heard tends to be most threatened underline the defining components of feeling heard and can provide additional insights into their workings.

The FHS Explains Unique Variance

The results of Study 3 demonstrate that the FHS explains variance in conversational experiences that other variables do not. Although both parties felt less heard in the typing condition, responders were more affected than senders. Responders were clearly most limited in their communication (only by text), and likely also felt that their partner, who used voice and therefore could talk on while they were still typing, did not really listen and react well to them. Notably, none of the other variables picked up this differing experience between interaction partners. Both parties experienced equal amounts of solidarity, flow, and self-esteem, which were all reduced in the typing condition compared to the speaking condition. This finding shows not only that the FHS is highly sensitive to picking up differences in communication setting, but also that it explains unique variance that other variables do not.

The FHS is a Strong Predictor

We found that feeling heard is a distinct and powerful predictor of conversation intentions related to conflict. The FHS is an especially strong predictor of intentions to engage in another conversation with the same partner(s), univariate as well as when many other relevant predictors are included. In both cases the FHS explains around 30 percent of variance in conversation avoidance intentions. The FHS explains a similar amount of variance in intentions to enter a next conversation with an open mind.

This echoes research showing that perceived responsiveness and listening can lessen defensive reactions (Bruneau & Saxe, 2012; Itzchakov & Reis, 2020). Note that this is not about being in agreement, but about the way people discuss about their *disagreements*. In fact, the item implying disagreement “we had a different perspective” did not fit the FHS well, and

disagreement was barely mentioned in the open answers. This suggests that people can disagree but still feel heard. Feeling heard could therefore help bridge social divisions within society, whilst maintaining a plurality of voices. There is already evidence that feeling understood by an outgroup can have these positive effects, such as increasing trust and forgiveness (e.g., Bruneau & Saxe, 2012; Livingstone et al., 2020).

Notably, feeling heard was the strongest predictor of negative avoidance intentions across a broad range of contexts and relationships, explaining variance over and above 15 related variables, such as interpersonal acquaintance. The FHS might be such a good predictor, because, in the way we operationalized it, feeling heard is not just an assessment of the relational qualities of self, other, *or* the relationship (as most variables in the interpersonal relations literature tend to be) but rather a variable that reflects the social interaction and is therefore about me, you, and us, all at the same time. For instance, the FHS was predictive in the subsamples of participants who reported about interactions with both people they were positive and less positive about, while the closely related conversational intimacy scale was only predictive in interactions with others that participants were initially positive about. Conversational intimacy therefore seems to be better equipped to operationalize aspects of the quality of “strong ties” relationships, whereas the FHS is a good predictor in conversations with partners who have either strong or weak ties.

Practical Recommendations

Feeling heard can be considered a process variable. It is shaped by and shapes interaction dynamics. Whether one feels heard depends on the behaviors of one’s interaction partner(s) and one’s attributions and perceptions of these behaviors. The degree to which one feels heard then shapes one’s behaviors towards these partners who, in turn, interpret and respond to one’s behaviors. This focus on conversational experiences is also what makes the

FHS unique; most related scales measure general perceptions and feelings towards either the self, partner(s), or relationship.

In many contexts, to fully understand (and predict) the consequences of certain interaction behaviors, the valid assessment of feeling heard can thus be essential. Beyond the contexts in which feeling heard is known to play a role (intimate relationships, healthcare, work), the FHS can be relevant in any context that involves direct interpersonal interaction. In therapeutic contexts, the FHS could help understand why certain treatments might be more (or less) effective; knowing whether a client feels heard by their therapist might be essential to understand the effectiveness of certain listening techniques. Call centers or helpdesks could monitor customer satisfaction by assessing the extent to which customers feel heard. In ongoing relationships, the FHS may be found suitable as an instance-by-instance measure to track patterns of relationship development and maintenance.

At a different level, feeling heard might also have an important role to play in the relationship between governmental institutions and citizens: whether citizens that are affected by a certain governmental decision feel heard in their contact with governmental representatives might predict their acceptance of that decision. It holds for all these settings that now we can measure feeling heard, we can test the assumptions surrounding this construct: How important is feeling heard in a specific context? What makes people feel heard in conversation? What kinds of processes are mediated by feeling heard? Instructions on how to use the Feeling Heard Scale can be found in the user manual in section 4 of the supplementary materials. Please note however, that further research is needed to validate and standardize the FHS in clinical and other applied settings, as well as other populations, such as children and respondents with a non-western cultural background.

The FHS is a relatively compact and effective measure to use in most settings. But in research environments where space is at a premium, we recommend using the central item:

“In this conversation, I felt heard by the other(s)”. Of course, there is always a loss of precision when using a single item, but on the basis of the research we can quantify its magnitude. Both studies 1 and 2 show that the amount of variance in the full scale that is accounted for by the single-item alternative is about 50%. That means that the full scale explains about 50% more variance than the single item. If one chooses to use the single item, one should be mindful of this loss of precision, and transparent about it in communicating its results. Larger sample sizes could compensate for this, but in a clinical setting or other context where $N = 1$, we strongly recommend the use of the full scale for a reliable and precise assessment of feeling heard.

Finally, our theoretical framework provides guidelines on how to increase interaction partners’ experience of feeling heard. One could assess which of the five components of feeling heard is lacking in interaction and try to improve this. Depending on the component(s) one decides to tackle, the commitment of one to three entities is needed: the speaker, the listener, and/or both of them together. Can the person that does not feel heard make sure they can have their say? This would depend importantly on the exact source of the silencing: maybe the speaker should speak louder or explicitly ask for attention. Does the person that wants to make another feel heard show enough attention, empathy, and respect? Here active listening techniques could be of help, e.g., paraphrasing, open-ended questions (Rogers & Farson, 1957). Or do both parties need to work on establishing a sense of common understanding? This could be done by common grounding techniques, e.g., checking for understanding and asking for clarification (Bavelas et al., 2012).

Limitations and Future Directions

Studies 1 and 2 show that feeling heard is related to the quality (not to be confused with quantity: acquaintance) and equality of the relationship. But the direction of these relationships is not clear. It might be a bi-directional process in which “I feel positive towards

the other because I feel heard, and I feel heard because I feel positive towards the other”, or “I feel equal to the other because I feel heard, and I feel heard because we are equals”. Feeling heard might affect and/or be affected by many more dispositional (e.g., rejection sensitivity, self-esteem), situational (e.g., expectations), and cultural (e.g., norms) factors. For instance, people that are low in self-esteem or especially sensitive to signals of rejection might tend to feel not heard more easily (such effects have been observed for ostracism, see Downey & Feldman, 1996; Murray et al. 2002). As an example of cultural influences, a Turkish-Dutch scientist we interviewed about feeling heard stressed the importance of status (see supplementary materials, section 1.3). The right to be (and feel) heard might need to be earned in more collectivist cultures. These are all interesting directions for future research.

The current paper looked at feeling heard in conversations. However, as alluded to previously, the experience of feeling heard may also exist at a more abstract level, without direct interpersonal interaction. One prominent example that comes to mind is reflected in the quote by Dr. Martin Luther King at the start of this paper: citizens feeling not heard by government. The consequences of this experience are well-documented. For example, political discontent tends to be highest among less educated people because they feel politicians do not truly understand their lived experiences and do not respect them (Noordzij et al., 2020). Moreover, qualitative research suggests that not feeling heard plays an important role in the reasons for activists to step up their actions, become more vocal, and ultimately to embrace more radical forms of collective action (Greijdanus & Postmes, 2018). Future empirical investigation is required to establish the nature of feeling heard at the abstract level and its relationship to feeling heard in conversations. It might be that feeling heard in conversations with representatives of an institution or another group can spill over to feeling heard by that institute or group as a whole.

Conclusion

In many, if not all, interpersonal contexts, from work meetings and customer support to parent-child interactions and therapeutic contacts, the experience of feeling heard reflects an essential component of social interaction. By developing and validating a scale to measure feeling heard, this paper opens up the possibility to study this key process variable. The central conceptual contribution of this research is that it shows that feeling heard is not about any individual participant in the interaction, nor is it just about the collective, nor is it just about the appreciation of the interaction itself. Feeling heard is about all these things together, at the same time. This concept reflects the interpersonal and social *dynamics* of conversation, as they constitute the relational *outcomes* for self, other, and for “us”. We believe that in individualized societies, where the sense of self occupies an increasingly central role, this concept may become increasingly important not just for self-esteem and well-being of the individual and for high quality social relations, but more generally for maintaining the social fabric of societies.

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Supplementary materials
1.1 Tables & Figures Study 1

Table 1.

A characterization of the described conversation based on the percentage of participants scoring in each category of the conversation characteristics.

Question	Answer option	Part A (N = 194) ¹	Part B (N = 214) ¹
Good internet-connection?	Yes	90.21%	93.93%
	A bit	7.73%	5.14%
	No	2.06%	0.93%
How many interaction partner(s)?	One	57.22%	57.94%
	Two	8.25%	10.28%
	Three	5.67%	8.88%
	More than three	28.87%	22.90%
Acquaintance before the conversation?	Yes	61.34%	68.69%
	A bit	8.76%	8.41%
	No	29.90%	22.90%
Good relationship?	Yes	50.00%	67.29%
	A bit	26.80%	18.69%
	No	23.20%	14.02%
Equal relationship?	Equal	62.89%	74.77%
	Self authority	4.12%	5.14%
	Other authority	22.68%	14.95%
	Don't know	10.31%	5.14%

¹ N's after excluding the non-serious conversation descriptions. Percentages are calculated relative to these.

Table 2.

The means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis of the original set of 16 feeling heard items. The last column shows the result of the t-test of the differences between (feeling heard and feeling not heard) conditions, with the felt heard conversation as the reference condition.

Item	Mean (SD)	Skewness	Kurtosis	t (df)
1. I Felt Heard	3.47 (1.44)	-0.50	1.67	23.12 (124.84)
2. I Speak Freely	3.82 (1.04)	-0.89	3.09	9.75 (117.56)
3. I Speak Mind	3.60 (1.12)	-0.43	2.18	11.39 (142.58)
4. I Felt Inhibited	2.42 (1.22)	0.58	2.16	-6.17 (165.83)
5. Other Self Concerned	2.68 (1.36)	0.30	1.78	-15.07 (182.03)
6. Other Listened	3.53 (1.20)	-0.59	2.36	15.11 (130.01)
7. Other Attentive	3.59 (1.21)	-0.65	2.52	15.16 (123.88)
8. Other Took Perspective	3.27 (1.20)	-0.36	2.21	14.83 (148.80)
9. Other Insensitive	2.58 (1.26)	0.40	2.07	-11.74 (173.11)
10. Other Emphatic	3.21 (1.08)	-0.25	2.54	7.90 (188.42)
11. Other Genuine Interest	3.40 (1.18)	-0.45	2.29	16.00 (145.78)
12. Other Took Serious	3.61 (1.17)	-0.68	2.57	15.65 (119.39)
13. Other Respectful	3.72 (1.11)	-0.88	3.21	12.19 (118.26)
14. We Different Perspective	3.20 (1.18)	-0.13	2.13	-6.62 (186.29)
15. We Understood	3.34 (1.21)	-0.50	2.17	17.21 (133.17)
16. We Wavelength	3.26 (1.21)	-0.39	2.07	17.37 (141.63)

Note. *** $p < 0.001$.

^a Welch two-sample to-sided t-test of the difference between conditions (feeling heard vs not feeling heard). All were significant at $p < .001$.

Table 3.

The Pearson correlations between the 16 feeling heard items.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
2	.57***															
3	.81***	.65***														
4	-.34***	-.58***	-.51***													
5	-.76***	-.61***	-.66***	.55***												
6	.81***	.64***	.72***	-.35***	-.78***											
7	.79***	.66***	.73***	-.33***	-.76***	.90***										
8	.81***	.52***	.66***	-.27***	-.69***	.79***	.80***									
9	-.71***	-.47***	-.54***	.39***	.76***	-.6***	-.65***	-.65***								
10	.51***	.37***	.48***	-.20***	-.48***	.50***	.50***	.55***	-.37***							
11	.83***	.55***	.64***	-.30***	-.73***	.82***	.84***	.86***	-.68***	.53***						
12	.83***	.57***	.60***	-.35***	-.69***	.80***	.76***	.80***	-.64***	.49***	.82***					
13	.78***	.53***	.60***	-.31***	-.65***	.76***	.78***	.80***	-.60***	.46***	.82***	.82***				
14	-.46***	-.15*	-.21**	.20**	.41***	-.35***	-.32***	-.40***	.46***	-.28***	-.36***	-.36***	-.36***			
15	.86***	.55***	.62***	-.40***	-.74***	.78***	.74***	.79***	-.71***	.50***	.80***	.80***	.80***	.80***		
16	.87***	.57***	.64***	-.36***	-.73***	.78***	.74***	.81***	-.67***	.51***	.80***	.80***	.80***	.80***	.80***	

11. Other Respect- ful	10. Other Insen- sitive	9. Other Took Perspec- tive	8. Other Emphatic	7. Other Attentive	6. Other Self Con- cerned	5. Other Listened	4. I Felt Inhibited	3. I Speak Mind	2. I Speak Freely	1. I Felt Heard
										-.02
									.00	.01
								.02	-.08	.05
							.09	.00	-.03	.00
						.00	.17	-.04	-.02	-.05
					.02	.01	.10	.01	.00	-.02
				.00	-.03	.00	.04	.08	.00	.00
			.05	.00	.01	-.02	.11	.03	-.07	-.01
		.01	.05	.01	.18	-.01	.07	-.01	.02	-.03
	.05	.01	-.04	.00	.03	-.02	.05	.01	-.02	-.03
-.01	.00	.03	.01	.04	-.03	.02	.07	.03	-.02	.00
.05	.03	-.01	-.02	-.04	.01	.00	.02	-.01	.00	.02
-.02	-.05	-.02	.00	-.02	-.07	.01	-.02	.00	-.02	.00
.06	.11	.02	-.02	.08	.06	.05	.01	.12	.15	.00
-.01	.00	.00	.00	-.03	-.06	.01	.02	.02	-.01	.00

16. We Wave- length	15. We Different Perspec- tive	14. We Under- stood	13. Other Took Serious	12. Other Genuine Interest
				-.03
			.02	.00
			.05	.06
		-.01	.03	-.01
		.00		

Figure 1.
Scree plot of the eight items.

Table 6.

Results exploratory factor analysis for the eight items one factor solution.

Dimensio n	Items	Factor loadings	Uniqueness	Sum of squared loadings	Proportion of variance
Feeling heard				5.64	.71
	1	.92	.15		
	2	.64	.59		
	5	-.83	.30		
	6	.89	.21		
	8	.87	.24		
	9	-.77	.40		
	13	.84	.29		
	15	.91	.18		

Note. Extraction method: maximum likelihood. Rotation method: Promax rotation.

Table 7.

Modification Indices > 10 of the CFA with one factor and eight items.

Parameter	Modification indices	Expected parameter change
5 ~~ 9	23.91	.23
8 ~~ 13	15.71	.12
1 ~~ 15	10.96	.10

Note. ~~ indicates a covariance.

Table 8.

Residual correlation matrix of the CFA with one factor and eight items.

Item	2	5	6	8	9	13	15
1	-.02	.01	-.01	.00	.01	.00	.03
2		-.07	.07	-.04	.03	-.01	-.03
5			-.04	.04	.11	.06	.01
6				.01	.02	.01	-.03
8					.02	.06	.00
9						.05	-.01
13							.00

Table 9.

Modification Indices > 10 of the CFA of the final model.

Parameter	Modification indices	Expected parameter change
-----------	----------------------	------------------------------

8 ~~ 13	13.52	.11
5 ~~ 6	12.66	-.12
1 ~~ 15	10.25	.10

Note. ~~ indicates a covariance.

Table 10.

Residual correlation matrix of the CFA of the final model.

Item	2	5	6	8	9	13	15
1	-.02	.00	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.01	.02
2		-.08	.07	-.04	.01	-.01	-.03
5			-.05	.04	.00	.05	.00
6				.01	.00	.00	-.03
8					.01	.06	-.01
9						.04	-.03
13							-.01

Table 11.

Results of the measurement invariance test on the data of Part B.

Model	χ^2 (df)	CFI	RMSEA	Model comp.	$\Delta\chi^2$ (Δ df)	Δ CFI	Δ RMSEA
M1 configural invariance	75.04 (38)	.98	.09				
M2 metric invariance	94.75 (45)	.97	.09	M1	19.77 (7)**	.007	.006
M3 Scalar invariance	115.52 (52)	.97	.09	M2	24.21 (7)**	.006	.002
M4 Residual invariance	131.29 (53)	.96	.10	M3	34.14 (1)***	.007	.009

Note. N total = 384; N group 1 = 192; N group 2 = 192.

Method: maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors and a Satorra-Bentler scaled test statistic.

** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

Table 12.

The means, standard deviations, and inter-item correlations of the eight items of the feeling heard scale in Part B.

Item	Mean (SD)	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	4.07 (1.10)	.66	-.56	.66	.64	-.43	.74	.70
2	4.10 (0.95)		-.52	.68	.59	-.46	.69	.68
5	2.21 (1.14)			-.57	-.47	.69	-.56	-.54
6	3.94 (0.99)				.63	-.42	.70	.72
8	3.55 (0.99)					-.46	.65	.65
9	2.16 (1.09)						-.55	-.56
13	4.08 (0.93)							.84
15	3.98 (0.94)							

Note. All correlations were significant at $p < .001$.

1.2 Questionnaire Study 1¹³¹⁴

To participate in this study, you need to be 18 years or older. Is this the case for you?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

In addition, you must have experience with conducting online conversations. Is this the case for you?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Finally, Dutch should be your native language. Is this the case for you?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

First of all, we would like to ask you some general questions.

What is your age?

- ☐ 18-24 years
- ☐ 25-31 years
- ☐ 32-38 years

¹³ Translated to English by the first author. The original questionnaire was in Dutch.

¹⁴ We show the questionnaire in singular form (i.e., “the other”), some of the items were rephrased to plural form (i.e., “the others”) when participants described a conversation with more than one other person.

- ☐ 39-45 years
- ☐ 46-52 years
- ☐ 53-59 years
- ☐ 60-67 years
- ☐ 67+ years

What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other, namely: _____

What is your origin?

- ☐ The Netherlands
- ☐ Other, namely: _____

In which province do you live?

- ☐ Limburg
- ☐ Noord-Holland
- ☐ Zuid-Holland
- ☐ Utrecht
- ☐ Overijssel
- ☐ Drenthe
- ☐ Groningen
- ☐ Friesland
- ☐ Noord-Brabant
- ☐ Flevoland
- ☐ Gelderland

What is your current living status?

- ☐ Single
- ☐ Single with child/children
- ☐ Co-habiting
- ☐ Cohabiting with child/children

Which of the following options describes your current situation best?

- ☐ Studying
- ☐ Part-time job
- ☐ Full-time job
- ☐ Volunteerwork
- ☐ Unemployed
- ☐ Retired

- Incapacitated

What is the highest education level you have completed?¹⁵

- Geen
- Basisschool
- Lager/voorbereidend onderwijs (lbo/vmbo)
- Middelbaar algemeen voortgezet onderwijs (mavo)
- Middelbaar beroepsonderwijs (mbo)
- Hoger algemeen voortgezet onderwijs (havo)
- Voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs (vwo)
- Hoger beroepsonderwijs (hbo)
- Wetenschappelijk onderwijs (WO)

Now describe the last ONLINE conversation you had (use at least 100 characters).

*What was the situation?*¹⁶

Now describe an ONLINE conversation in which you felt heard (use at least 100 characters).

What was the situation?

Why did you feel heard?

Now describe an ONLINE conversation in which you felt unheard (use at least 100 characters).

What was the situation?

¹⁵ The answer options below were not translated to English as they represent the Dutch education system which is rather different from that in the UK or US.

¹⁶ Participants saw only one of the italicized phrases, depending on conditions.

Why did you feel unheard?

The following questions will be about your experiences during the online conversation you just described.

Was the internet connection good during this conversation?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ A bit
- ☐ No

How many other people participated in this conversation?

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ More than 3, namely: _____

Did you know this person before the conversation started?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ A bit
- ☐ No

Do you have a good relationship with this person?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ A bit
- ☐ No

Do you have an equal relationship with this person?

- ☐ Yes, we are equals
- ☐ No, the other has more authority (e.g., the other is my employer)
- ☐ No, I have more authority (e.g., the other is my children)
- ☐ Don't know

To what extent do you agree with the following statement?

In this conversation I felt heard by the other.

- ☐ Disagree completely
- ☐ Disagree

- ☐ Disagree a bit
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree a bit
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Agree completely

Think back to the online conversation you just described and indicate to what extent you agree with each of the following statements. Note: these statements are about YOUR experiences during the conversation.

In this conversation...

	Disagree completely	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Agree completely
...I could say what I really wanted to say.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
... I could express my thoughts.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
... I felt inhibited to say what I wanted to say.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
... the other was more concerned with him/herself than with what I said.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
... the other listened to what I said.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
... the other paid attention to what I said	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
... the other tried to put him/herself in my shoes.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

... the other was insensitive to my thoughts and feelings.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
... the other was empathetic.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
... the other showed genuine interest in me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
... the other took me seriously.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
... the other treated me with respect.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
... we looked at things differently.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
... we understood each other.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
... we were on the same wavelength.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...now select "Disagree".	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Now here are some questions about the impact of COVID-19 (the coronavirus) on your daily life.

Please indicate how often you have experienced the following emotions in the past week.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Constantly
Anxious	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Stressed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sad	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Lonely

Since the corona crisis, how many different people do you speak to ONLINE per day on average?

- ☐ None
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ More than 3

How many was that on average per day before that?

- ☐ None
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ More than 3

Since the corona crisis, how many different people do you speak to ORALLY (i.e. offline or face-to-face) per day on average?

- ☐ None
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ More than 3

How many was that on average per day before that?

- ☐ None
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ More than 3

Since the corona crisis, how often do you leave the house on average?

- ☐ At least once a day
- ☐ At most once a day
- ☐ At most once every two days
- ☐ At most once every three days
- ☐ At most once a week

You are approaching the end of this study. If you have any comments, please leave them in the text box below (optional).

1.3 Interviews Study 1¹⁷

To gain additional insight into the meaning of feeling heard, we conducted semi-structured interviews with four people that we expected to have practical experience with and knowledge about feeling heard. We asked what feeling heard meant to them, and about the situations, the preconditions and the consequences of (not) feeling heard.

The first interviewee was the former director of the Dutch compensation fund for violent crimes, and in this function changed the way employees communicate with clients about the procedures and outcomes. In effect, her intervention made clients feel more heard. She noticed that the money the fund gives to victims was seen as a sort of recognition. She further noticed that “people wanted to tell their story, wanted to be heard”. She instructed her employees to “Listen to hear more about the story and also give something back [to show] that you really heard someone. Second is to explain the context and manage the expectations of this is possible and that isn’t.” This had to be done in a clear and calm manner in colloquial speech. Once a decision has been made, she deems it important to explain it and give clients the opportunity to react, also to check whether the decision was based on correct information. This communicates that one takes the client and his/her story serious and that one puts in effort to help him/her. In this way she attempted to remove the straitjacket imposed by the impersonal juridic procedures. She thinks that a lot of anger towards the government is instigated by being seen as a number. Thus, the personal encounter is of importance: “that you are a governmental agency with a face or a voice”. This greatly improved client satisfaction.

¹⁷ The interviews were conducted in Dutch and audio-recorded by the first author. The English summary of these recordings is printed below.

She quotes the feedback she got from clients as: “I do not get any money, that’s unfortunate, but I am still very happy because you are the first person that wants to listen to me”. From this she concludes that one can give recognition without providing what is asked for, so that the recognition can be in the procedure by clearly explaining why you make a decision. “There can be disagreements about the content, but how do you find the form in which you can respectfully disagree?” Importantly, also the employees putting the new approach into practice felt enriched by the positive responses it elicited.

The first interviewee was helped by a researcher that often acts as a mediator in conflicts between citizens and government; a context in which feeling heard also plays an important role. This person was our second interviewee. She thinks that feeling heard becomes especially important in situations where people lose autonomy and are dependent on others, so where they have to deal with others making decisions for them that have an impact on their life. She thinks that feeling heard in these situations often leads to more trust in the person making the decision. In her work, she relies on the procedural justice literature: “That means that people feel heard during the process, and, in the way I do it, that virtually always goes hand in hand with personal contact. That means that people are able to tell their story, [and] that they notice that the story has landed with the person who listens.”. The expectations and goals of both parties have to be mentioned and recognized at the start of the conversation. When people’s interests clash, the recognition of that fact and of the potential frustrations that this yields, already helps a lot by bringing clarity. But she stresses the importance of sensing whether the other person is ready to listen to your explanation, and not still in fight-flight-or-freeze modus, which is often forgotten in practice. She also referred to not feeling heard as an instigator for protest and polarization: “Oftentimes when people do not feel heard, they start to look for support, and when they do not feel heard after several attempts, that can lead to frustration, conflict, and also expansion of the conflict, because

people that do not feel heard will often seek support from others and that with that also an escalation [...], or, at any rate, polarization can arise.” This would give rise to a strong us-versus-them rhetoric and make emotions run high.

The third interviewee was a speech therapist and leads an organization that helps others overcome stuttering by means of speech therapy. People that stutter have difficulty expressing themselves and might therefore also feel less heard. He tells us that this hearing applies on a more abstract level as well: the parents of children that stutter are often so focused on “curing” and “improving” the child that the child feels like a failure and not heard and not understood *as a person*, but treated as a number. This breeds anger and a lot of frustration, but also makes people who stutter feel guilty and lack self-esteem. Stuttering is a symptom of this underlying tension of feeling not good enough. He mentioned an interesting reason for not feeling heard: “The reason why a lot of people do not feel heard is because the listener is often self-involved.” If someone is speaking, they immediately think: “ok, what can I do with this, how should I react to this, how does this fit in my world-view?” Then they are not completely open to what the other tries to convey. This also tends to happen a lot with people who stutter, because others focus on the stuttering itself and start to worry about how they can help, which distracts from what the person who stutters wants to say. It would help to stay calm and patient, and open to really listen to what the person tells you, surrendering to the moment and to the other. “But it has to come from two sides, I think. The listener can be too self-involved, but also the speaker, which makes him or her not open to that connection and thus does not feel heard.” So, the bidirectional connection is important to feel heard. According to the interviewee, simple attentive listening is not enough, it should be sincere: “If someone is trying too hard, then I pull back a bit, I find that a bit weird, because someone is trying too hard, there is no need for that, why is that?” Thus, being too attentive, can also raise the suspicion of ulterior motives. According to the interviewee, feeling heard is strongly

related to being on one line and feeling understood, and is of importance to the formation of a good and close relationship.

To gain some initial insight into the role of culture in feeling heard, our fourth interviewee was a Turkish-Dutch social scientist. He brought an interesting perspective by shifting the focus to cultural norms that dictate when someone has the right to speak. In the Turkish culture that he characterizes as patriarchic and quite authoritarian, feeling heard is influenced by “whether or not one is allowed to have a voice at all in a certain context”. The interviewee mentions that this strongly depends on the topic of discussion and the role of the person in the community. There are certain themes about which not everyone can have a say. The right to speak is dependent on age in particular and also on gender. For example, in the case of a violation of the honor of a traditional family, the elderly will gather to make a decision. It is even a Turkish saying: “When the elderly speak the children remain silent.” Similarly, there are male and female themes. The right to speak thus has to be earned by gaining status, making feeling heard status-dependent. This status can be earned by showing signs of adulthood, e.g., marriage, job. So, status confers the right to be heard, but also the other way around being heard confers status. The moment someone is allowed to take the floor and is not interrupted, this means that he or she is being listened to and thus has the right or status to speak. These rules of speaking and hearing are not written down but handed down by socialization. If someone internalizes authoritarian values and therefore accepts hierarchy, this person might also accept not having a say about certain things. “So, then it might also be acceptable to not be heard”. But, according to the interviewee, the need to be recognized as a person is quite natural, and he thinks that also involves the need to have say about certain things, especially if it involves you.

2.1 Tables & Figures Study 2

Table 13.

A characterization of the described conversations based on the percentage of participants scoring in each category of the conversation characteristics.

Question	Answer option	Percentage
How many interaction partners?	One	71.10%
	Two	13.10%
	Three	7.70%
	More than three	8.10%
Acquaintance before the conversation?	Very well	59.60%
	Quite well	22.50%
	A bit	11.70%
	Barely	3.40%
	Not at all	2.80%
Feelings about relationship?	Very positive	39.60%
	Positive	41.20%
	Neutral	12.90%
	Negative	4.50%
	Very negative	1.80%
Equal relationship?	Equal	70.30%
	Self authority	5.40%
	Other authority	21.30%
	Don't know	3.00%

Note. $N = 1000$.

Figure 2.

The frequency distribution of feeling heard.

Table 14.

The correlations between the feeling heard items as well as their respective means and standard deviations.

Item	Mean (SD)	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. I Felt Heard	3.57 (1.23)	.62	-.62	.79	.65	-.58	.73	.79
2. I Speak Freely	3.84 (1.19)		-.45	.61	.49	-.45	.59	.63
3. Other Self Concerned	2.92 (1.30)			-.61	-.51	.66	-.57	-.60
4. Other Listened	3.74 (1.10)				.65	-.58	.73	.77
5. Other Took Perspective	2.88 (1.16)					-.46	.60	.64
6. Other Insensitive	2.47 (1.29)						-.64	-.59
7. Other Respectful	3.84 (1.09)							.74
8. We Understood	3.60 (1.24)							

Note. All the correlations reported in this table are significant at *** $p < .001$.

Table 15.*The results of the hierarchical regression on negative avoidance intentions.*

Variable	Block 1		Block 2		Block 3		Block 4	
	<i>b</i> (SE)	β	<i>b</i> (SE)	β	<i>b</i> (SE)	β	<i>b</i> (SE)	β
Age	-.01* (.00)	-.07	-.01* (.00)	-.07	-.00 (.00)	-.05	-.00 (.00)	-.04
Gender ^a	.04 (.08)	.02	.08 (.07)	.03	.13* (.06)	.06	.11 (.06)	.05
Man								
Gender Other	-.02 (.30)	-.00	-.13 (.26)	-.01	-.23 (.23)	-.02	-.27 (.22)	-.03
Education ^b	-.12 (.12)	-.04	-.28** (.10)	-.10	-.18* (.09)	-.06	-.15 (.09)	-.05
Middle								
Education High	-.06 (.10)	-.02	-.13 (.09)	-.05	-.02 (.08)	-.01	.02 (.07)	.01
Employ- ment ^c	.19* (.09)	.07	.20* (.08)	.07	.21** (.07)	.07	.22** (.07)	.08
None								
Employ- ment	-.27* (.13)	-.07	-.22 (.11)	-.06	-.22* (.10)	-.06	-.24* (.09)	-.07
Student								
Number of others			-.01 (.04)	-.01	-.02 (.03)	-.02	-.03 (.03)	-.02
Know before			.17*** (.04)	.15	.04 (.03)	.04	.04 (.03)	.03
Quality relation			-.61*** (.04)	-.48	-.20*** (.04)	-.16	-.05 (.05)	-.04
Equality ^d			.26** (.08)	.09	.18* (.07)	.06	.07 (.07)	.02
Other authority								
Equality Self			-.20 (.15)	-.04	-.30* (.13)	-.06	-.42*** (.13)	-.08
authority								
Equality Don't know			.29 (.20)	.04	.16 (.17)	.02	.11 (.17)	.02
Feeling heard					-.64*** (.04)	-.54	-.29*** (.06)	-.24
Intimacy							-.11* (.05)	-.13

Dominance				.12*** (.04)	.12
Responsiveness				.01 (.03)	.02
Distrust				.05 (.04)	.06
Attraction				-.06* (.03)	-.11
Goal accomp.				-.09* (.03)	-.09
Comm. appr.				.08** (.03)	.07
R^2	.01	.23	.42	.46	
R^2 adj.	.01	.22	.42	.45	
F	1.81 (df = 7; 992)	22.37*** (df = 13; 986)	51.71*** (df = 14; 985)	39.39*** (df = 21; 978)	

Notes. * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

As the maximum values of the Generalized Variance Inflation Factor (GVIF) were 1.29 for Model 1, 1.38 for Model 2, 1.91 for Model 3, and 5.25 for Model 4, there was no reason to suspect problematic multicollinearity.

^a The reference level of gender was woman.

^a The reference level of education was low.

^a The reference level of employment status was working.

^a The reference level of equality of relationship was equal.

Table 16.

The results of the univariate linear regressions of the other behavioral intention measures on feeling heard, controlling for the effect of the covariates and the demographical variables.

	b (SE)	β	$F(1,998)$	R^2
Positive avoidance intentions	-.57 (.04)	-.50	239.98***	.29
Negative approach intentions	-.22 (.04)	-.21	34.39***	.11

Positive approach intentions	.29 (.03)	.33	102.12***	.28
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Note. *** $p < 0.001$. We report the unadjusted multiple R^2 .

2.2 Questionnaire Study 2¹⁸

Think back to a conversation in which you wanted to share your thoughts or feelings, make a point, speak your mind, and/or get something done (regardless of whether this was successful or not).

Describe this conversation in a couple of sentences below:

Besides you, how many people were there in this conversation?

- ☐ 1 other
- ☐ 2 others
- ☐ 3 others
- ☐ More than 3 others, please specify: _____

The following statements are about your experiences of the conversation you just described. Please rate your agreement with each of these statements.

In this conversation, ...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
...I felt heard by the other person.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...I could say what I really wanted to say.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...the other person was more concerned with him/herself	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

¹⁸ We show the questionnaire in singular form.

[illegible]

Please select “Strongly disagree”.							
...did not treat me as an equal.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...wanted to cooperate.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please indicate to what extent you think the following characteristics apply to the other person in the conversation you described.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Trustworthy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Untrustworthy
Trustful of this person	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Distrustful of this person
Confidential	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Divulging
Benevolent	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Exploitive
Safe	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Dangerous
Candid	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Deceptive
Not Deceitful	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Deceitful
Straightforward	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Tricky
Respectful	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Disrespectful
Considerate	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Inconsiderate
Honest	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Dishonest
Reliable	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Unreliable
Faithful	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Unfaithful
Sincere	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Insincere
Careful	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Careless

The following questions are about the way you feel towards the other person in the conversation you described.

How unpleasant/pleasant do you feel about the other person?

- ☐ Extremely unpleasant
- ☐

- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐ Extremely pleasant

How cold/warm do you feel about the other person?

- ☐ Extremely cold
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐ Extremely warm

How positive/negative do you feel about the other person?

- ☐ Extremely positive
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐ Extremely negative

How distant/close do you feel to the other person?

- ☐ Extremely distant
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐ Extremely close

How friendly/unfriendly do you feel toward the other person?

- Extremely friendly
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
- Extremely unfriendly

Please answer the following questions about the other person in the conversation you described.¹⁹

The other person...

	Not at all true	Some -what true	Mode- rately true	Very true	Compl- etely true
...really listens to me.	○	○	○	○	○
...is responsive to my needs.	○	○	○	○	○
...is an excellent judge of my character.	○	○	○	○	○
...sees the “real” me.	○	○	○	○	○
...sees the same virtues and faults in me as I see in myself.	○	○	○	○	○
...“gets the facts right” about me.	○	○	○	○	○
...is aware of what I am thinking and feeling.	○	○	○	○	○

¹⁹ In line with the original scale (Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale; Reis et al., 2018), these items were presented in randomized order.

...understands me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...is on “the same wavelength” with me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...knows me well.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...esteems me, shortcomings and all.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...values and respects the whole package that is the “real” me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...seems to focus on the “best side” of me. (13)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...expresses liking and encouragement for me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...seems interested in what I am thinking and feeling.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...seems interested in doing things with me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...values my abilities and opinions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...respects me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

The following statements are about the extent to which you accomplished your goals in the conversation you described.

Please rate your agreement with each of these statements.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
In this conversation, I accomplished the goals I had prior to this conversation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I was unsuccessful in achieving what I wanted in this conversation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I got what I aimed for in this conversation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

The following statements are about the way you **generally** feel about communicating with other people.

Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
While participating in a conversation with a new acquaintance, I feel very nervous.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have no fear of speaking up in conversations.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Ordinarily I am very tense and nervous in conversations.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

It's important
that you pay
attention to
this study.
Please select
"Undecided".

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Ordinarily I
am very calm
and relaxed in
conversations.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

While
conversing
with a new
acquaintance,
I feel very
relaxed.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I'm afraid to
speak up in
conversations.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Now, think back again to the conversation you described at the start of this questionnaire.
What would you do if you were to have another conversation with this same person?
Please indicate to what extent you agree with each of the following statements.

Next time, ...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
...I would avoid having this conversation altogether.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...I would withdraw myself from this conversation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...I would hold back in conversation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...I would change the topic compared to	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

the last
conversation.

...when
discussing the
same topic, I
would make
my point(s)
more
forcefully.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

...I would
stand my
ground.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

...I would
enter the
conversation
with an open
mind.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

...I would be
as nice as
possible to
the other
person.

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

The following questions are about your relationship with the other person **before** you had the conversation you described.

How well did you know this person before the start of the conversation?

- ☐ Very well
- ☐ Quite well
- ☐ A bit
- ☐ Barely
- ☐ Not at all

In general, how do you feel about your relationship with this person?

- ☐ Very positive
- ☐ Positive
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Negative
- ☐ Very negative

In general, do you consider yourself to be on an equal footing with this person?

- ☐ Yes, we are equals

- ☐ No, the other has more authority (e.g., the other is my employer)
- ☐ No, I have more authority (e.g., the other is my child)
- ☐ Don't know

To conclude this survey, we want to ask you a couple of demographic questions.

How old are you?

Dropdown ranging from "Under 18" to "100"

What gender do you currently identify with?

- ☐ Woman
- ☐ Man
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Which country do you live in?

- ☐ United States
- ☐ England
- ☐ Other, please specify: _____

What is the highest education level you have completed?

- ☐ No formal qualifications
- ☐ Secondary school/GCSE
- ☐ College/A levels
- ☐ Undergraduate degree (BA/BSc/other)
- ☐ Graduate degree (MA/MSc/MPhil/other)
- ☐ Doctorate degree (PhD/MD/other)

Q25.6 What is your current employment status?

- ☐ Employed full-time
- ☐ Employed part-time
- ☐ Self-employed
- ☐ Unemployed
- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Student
- ☐ Other, please specify: _____

Q26.1 You are approaching the end of this survey. If you have anything to add, please do so in the text box below (optional).

2.3 Reasoning behind the scales included to assess convergent validity

To establish convergent validity, we searched the literature for measures that 1) related to the construct of feeling heard, without being an aspect of feeling heard (e.g., empathy, respect), and 2) were relevant in the context of interpersonal interactions. Interestingly, we found very few scales measuring conversational experiences that did not measure aspects of feeling heard. Most related scales measured general perceptions and feelings towards either the self, partner(s), or relationship, rather than the experiences and perceptions of the interaction partner(s) within a single conversation. A notable exception is the relational communication scale (Burgoon & Hale, 1987). But, in contrast to feeling heard, this scale only taps into the perceived behavior of the listener and thus is measured exclusively on the “you-level”. Nevertheless, the scale’s sub-scales of conversational intimacy and dominance vs. equality were deemed very relevant for feeling heard experiences.

We further thought feeling heard might be intertwined with other positive feelings towards interaction partner(s), most prominently trust and liking. We therefore included the established measure of individualized (dis)trust (Wheless & Grotz, 1977), and an indicator of interpersonal liking that best fitted the context: the affective attraction scale (Montoya & Insko, 2008).

As mentioned in the introduction, perceived partner responsiveness (Reis et al., 2018) might be very similar to feeling heard. Since this scale is designed to assess people’s perceptions of their relationship partner’s behaviors and attitudes towards them in general, items include the word “usually”. This word was removed to better fit the current context, because presumably not all described conversations involved familiar others.

The content analysis of Study 1 suggested that perceiving effort on the side of the listener might be a defining feature of feeling heard. This essentially came down to the accomplishment of conversation goals, e.g., getting things done, receiving answers. As we could not find a suitable and validated measure of conversational goal accomplishment, we designed a reliable three-item scale to assess this.

Lastly, feeling heard might be closely connected to communication anxiety. People that do not feel heard might simply feel uncomfortable in conversation. We only included the dyad subscale of the communication apprehension scale (McCroskey, 1982), since the other subscales are not applicable to all conversation contexts that participants could potentially come up with.

3.1 Questionnaire Study 3²⁰

Please have a conversation about *your/the other person's holidays/hobbies/favorite TV shows*.

In the following conversation you and the other person can talk and listen to each other by using the headsets you are provided with./

In the following conversation you can communicate with the other person by typing on the keyboard. You will hear your communication partner via the headset./

In the following conversation you can communicate with the other person by typing on the keyboard. You will hear your communication partner via the headset. Moreover, you are equipped with a device that can make vocalization sounds as you would use them during a common personal conversation. To understand what the device does, you will get a minute to test it out./

In the following conversation you can talk to the other person through the headset. You can read your communication partner's input to the conversation on your screen./

In the following conversation you can talk to the other person through the headset. You can read your communication partner's input to the conversation on your screen. Further your conversation partner can make interjecting sounds with help of an additional keyboard./

Please signal to the researcher when you are ready to start by opening your door. You will be given further instructions.

You just had a talk about *your/the other person's holidays/hobbies/favorite TV shows*. The following questions are about your personal impression and feelings about this conversation. Please answer them truthfully.

Please select for each statement how strong you agree or disagree with it.

This conversation was...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
...good.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...smooth.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...difficult.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...pleasant.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...harmonious.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

During this conversation...

²⁰ Participants saw only one of the italicized phrases, depending on conditions.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
...I liked the other person.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...I felt a sense of belonging with the other person.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...I experienced a sense of unity with the other person.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...I identified with the other person.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...we misunderstood each other.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...we were on the same wavelength.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

During this conversation...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
...I felt the other person likes me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...I felt accepted by the other person.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...I felt heard by the other person.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...I felt confident about myself.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

...I experienced a sense of failure.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Right now, I feel good about myself.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

During this conversation...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
...I could express myself freely.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...I felt like my messages 'came across' to the other person.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...the other person took my message into account.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...the other person valued my input to the conversation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...the other person took me seriously.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...the other person respected what I said/ wrote.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...I envisioned my communication partner when talking to him/ her.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...I felt like I dealt with a	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

very real person.					
...I felt like talking to an abstract anonymous person.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

During this conversation, the other person...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
...was considerate.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...expressed him/herself clearly.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...expressed him/herself vaguely.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...thought carefully about how he/she expressed him/herself.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...expressed him/herself politely.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
...considered the consequences of what he/she was saying.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Now we want to ask you some general questions to gain insight into the demographics of our participants.

Please indicate your age. _____

Please indicate your gender.

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other

Are you a first year Psychology student?

- ☐ Yes, English bachelor
- ☐ Yes, Dutch bachelor
- ☐ No

What do you do in daily life?

Studying, namely: _____

Working, namely: _____

Please indicate how comfortable you are in speaking English?

- ☐ Very comfortable
- ☐ A bit comfortable
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ A bit uncomfortable
- ☐ Very uncomfortable

What is your mother tongue? _____

Please indicate how well you knew the other participant before the experiment started.

- ☐ Very well
- ☐ A bit
- ☐ Barely
- ☐ Not at all

What differences did you notice between the three conversations you just had?

What did you think about the 'VocBox' (the button box that made vocalization sounds)?

Please indicate below briefly what you think the manipulation and aim of this study was.

Did you alter your behavior in any way to achieve a certain outcome regarding this aim. If yes, please indicate below how.

4 The Feeling Heard Scale User Manual

The Feeling Heard Scale (FHS) was developed to measure feeling heard in everyday conversations. It is a concise eight-item scale with good psychometric properties. The FHS explains conversational experiences of consequence for social relationships and is a distinct and powerful predictor of future conversation intentions across different contexts and relationships.

We recommend using the following instructions for participants: “The following statements are about your experiences of [conversation]. Please rate your agreement with each of these statements.” The phrase [conversation] can be changed so it refers to a specific conversation or meeting that fits your research context.

The full version of the Feeling Heard Scale includes the following items (in fixed order):

In this conversation, ...

...I felt heard by the other person.

...I could say what I really wanted to say.

...the other person was more concerned with him/herself than with what I said.

...the other person listened to what I said.

...the other person tried to put him/herself in my shoes.

...the other person was insensitive to my thoughts and feelings.

...the other person treated me with respect.

...we understood each other.

We recommend recording agreement with these items on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*. Other scales or a binary format (yes/no) have not been tested.

The items above are phrased in singular form but can easily be translated to plural form when meant to refer to multiple interaction partners by replacing “the other person” by “the other people” and conjugate verbs accordingly.

All items should be preceded by the phrase: “In this conversation” or “In this meeting”. We suggest doing this in the format as presented above.

To calculate the final feeling heard score, items 3 and 6 need to be reverse coded. After recoding, the individual item scores can be averaged. All items can be given the same weight.

The single item alternative to the full scale is: “In this conversation, I felt heard by the other person.” Using this single item implies losing predictive and explanatory power (see accompanying paper for the details). This loss of precision should be reported when using the single item. We recommend using it only in large samples of and/or when little precision is required and/or when space does not permit the use of the full scale.

Anyone is free to use this scale as long as it is properly referenced (MASKED FOR REVIEW).

Please be aware that the FHS is still awaiting validation and standardization in clinical and other applied contexts. Nor is it validated for use with children or people with a non-western cultural background.

Items in Dutch:

In dit gesprek...

...voelde ik mij gehoord.

...heb ik kunnen zeggen wat ik graag wilde zeggen.

...was de ander meer met zichzelf bezig dan met wat ik zei.

...luisterde de ander naar wat ik zei.

...probeerde de ander zich in mij te verplaatsen.

...was de ander ongevoelig voor mijn gedachten en gevoelens.

...behandelde de ander mij met respect.

...begrepen we elkaar.