

**Differences Between First-Generation Students and
Continuous-Generation Students in the Transition into Work: A
Diary Study Evaluating the Role of Confidence and Negative
Experiences During Their Internship**

Master Thesis Psychology

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Abstract

First-Generation Students (FGS) are people without parents who attained a degree in tertiary education, whereas parents of Continuous-Generation Students (CGS) have a degree of higher education. Previous research has shown that the two groups experience their university life differently resulting from cultural mismatches, which result in more significant challenges for FGS. This harms their confidence levels and leads to an increase in negative experiences during university. The current study examined whether these inequalities persist when transitioning into work life. The study asked psychology students aged 19 to 38 to report their first work experiences during a compulsory clinical internship. They described a meaningful experience during their internship once a week, rated to what extent the experience was negative or positive, and how confident they felt during the week on a scale from 0-100. A theoretical mediation model was proposed to investigate whether the relation between generational status (FGS vs. CGS) and confidence was mediated by stability and level of negative experiences. Further, two Linear Mixed Models (LMM) were created to test whether negative experiences have a linear effect on confidence levels and vice versa to test whether a reciprocal effect exists. Contrary to previous research, there was no difference between FGS and CGS confidence and level and stability of negative experiences. The LMMs showed significant effects over time. Meaning a potential vicious cycle was detected. This means low confidence levels lead to more negative experiences, negatively affecting confidence levels. The results show the differences during university that make up for the inequalities of FGS and CGS, were absent during their internship. Further, negative experiences and confidence played an impactful role for both groups. The results indicate all students need the same support during their transition into work-life. Further research should aim to identify factors that influence workplace transition and why the gap between FGS and CGS lessens after university.

Keywords: First-Generation Students, Internship Experiences, Negative Experiences, Confidence, University Inequalities

Introduction

Worldwide, there are between 100 and 196 million students in tertiary education. The numbers are expected to grow further within the next years (Hazelkorn, 2015; Behle & Atfield, 2013). In the United States, approximately 50% of these students are first-generation students (FGS), meaning they are the first in their families to attend tertiary education (Tate et al., 2013; Glass et al., 2017). FGS face greater challenges compared to continuous-generation students (CGS), who have at least one parent with a higher education degree and generally more advantageous preconditions during their study period. While these differences are influential during university life it is yet to be studied whether the inequalities persist during the transition into work life. This study aims to fill this research gap.

There is a disparity in experiences between FGS and CGS when they transition into university after their high school degree. Literature suggests more challenges for FGS, which starts with having fewer study resources (Finny et al., 2022). These include financial resources, struggling to cover living expenses or tuition costs and being stressed to juggle work and school obligations (Sprung & Rogers, 2020). These additional stressors may lead to higher levels of anxiety and stress and might result in depression (Finny et al., 2022; Sprung & Rogers, 2020). Furthermore, the two groups differ in social support, which is expected to be higher for CGS (Sanyal et al., 2017). FGS often experience the support of their parents so far that they want them to be successful (Mahan, 2010), but they cannot provide them with academic support (Miller, 2008). However, parents might not accept the decision to study since they perceive it as a high risk, as it may not be the safe way they took. This implies less support and harms the FGS' confidence and self-efficacy (Checchi et al., 2014). Meanwhile, CGS receive academic support that paves the way for a more promising career (Zulfiqar et al., 2023). Besides facing greater challenges in their studies, FGS are confronted with more external issues. For example, they have more problems to acquire cultural capital (Hirudayaraj, 2011). Cultural capital refers to the social assets that a person possesses in order to live and work in their social and work environment (Throsby & Shubik, 1999; Cochrane, 2006).

The results of the differences become evident when looking at the dropout rates. In the first year the distribution of FGS and CGS is 50/50 but drops to 34/66 in the fourth study year in the USA (Tate et al., 2013). This could be attributable to their success since FGS tend to be less successful in university and earn lower grades (Eveland, 2019; Stephens et al., 2014). Even though there is a contrast in their grades, they do not differ in their perception of their success, meaning both groups feel equally successful in their studies (Shields, 2002). The elevated stress levels of FGS can result in other factors that might impede their development. One of them is

that FGS tends to have fewer feelings of belonging and connection to their university and its connected lifestyle (Jensen & Jetten, 2015; Payne et al., 2023). FGS are also more prone to negative events and to experiencing setbacks during their studies (Jensen & Jetten, 2015) as they often have greater adverse effects with dealing with negative events and less confidence to ask for help (Jensen & Jetten, 2015; Payne et al., 2023). These negative events and setbacks can come in the form of difficult social or academic situations, such as having difficulties entering a social cycle or getting bad grades (Jensen & Jetten, 2015; Payne et al., 2023).

A reason for the different experiences of the two groups could be the cultural mismatch FGS are experiencing. People adopt the cultural norms they grew up in which is for CGS more likely to be independence, autonomy and self-reliance, whereas FGS are more likely to identify with more interdependent norms (Phillips et al., 2020, Yeager et al., 2016). The cultural norms of universities typically align with those of CGS' (Phillips et al., 2020). FGS often face a cultural mismatch between university's norms and the ones prevalent in their familial working-class norms. This mismatch in values has been observed to persist throughout college and is anticipated to continue in professional environments, as these settings often reflect the same middle-class values (Phillips et al., 2020). This cultural disparity can have negative effects on the academic and professional development (Yeager et al., 2016). Worries about belonging and capacities are often reported by FGS and since they negatively affect motivation and academic results, they might lead to a chain reaction that harms academic performance in FGS (Phillips et al., 2020). Moreover, FGS are often reduced to negative stereotypes that indicates economic lower class and a smaller professional network (Yeager et al., 2016). For many FGS these stereotypes might be true and reflect their actual situation, since they have fewer resources (Finny et al., 2022; Sprung & Rogers, 2020).

FGS and CGS tend to have different experiences at university, but the aim of education is the same, to prepare young people for their working lives. However, whether this transition into working life is experienced differently for FGS and CGS is yet to be examined since little research has been done on this topic. It is important to address this gap in research since the transition to work can shape the professional career (Jensen & Jetten, 2015). The current study investigated these differences by looking at the effect of being an FGS on confidence levels and the interplay with the occurrence of negative experiences during the first work experiences of Dutch students. These first work experiences were measured through a weekly diary study during a mandatory clinical internship during the student's Master psychology studies.

In many degree programs, the transition into work life is represented by a compulsory internship during the study period. For many students, this is their first time being in practical contact with their respective fields, and they continue to strengthen their professional identity (Jensen & Jetten, 2015). Professional identity can be described as the internalisation, affinity for, and acculturation of the various aspects of a profession. More specifically, thinking and acting as part of the profession and attaining confidence and self-efficacy to enact in that profession (Bloom, 2022; Feen-Calligan, 2015; Iserson, 2018). The development of such is an essential step in the transition into work-life since it aids in a positive self-perception, confidence and the appropriate adaptation to new roles and responsibilities (Goltz & Smith, 2014). Not developing a professional identity can have negative consequences and lead to lower work ethic, moral distress and have negative effects on stress and confidence levels (Fitzgerald, 2020). If an appropriate professional identity is developed it can increase resilience, benefit confidence and lead to more success in the career (Fitzgerald, 2020). Therefore, it is an important part of the professional development.

One facet that can greatly influence the transition into work is confidence (Santisi et al., 2018). Confidence can be described as believing in one's positive achievements, being certain about one's own performances, and self-awareness, which leads to more autonomous practice (White, 2009). This goes hand in hand with the concept of professional confidence, which refers to the same factors combined with awareness of the significance of their profession as well as belief in their respective professional role (Holland et al., 2011). Confidence can be a crucial, positive factor in work performance (Donia et al., 2018) and the influence someone can exert at work (Guillén et al., 2017). Confidence at work is closely related to the concept of professional identity and can predict a person's capabilities to exert a good job as well as feel good at work (Goltz & Smith, 2014). In general, a self-reported study by Hertel (2002) showed higher confidence levels for CGS compared to FGS. The difference was evaluated using the self-esteem scale by Rosenberg. The participants evaluated their self-esteem through self-reporting on the ten-question scale. The scale asks for concepts such as positive attitude, respect or feelings of worthlessness towards oneself (Rosenberg, 1965).

A variable that can exert significant adverse effects on confidence levels is experience or, respectively, negative experiences (Bénabou & Tirole, 2002). The effects can result in self-deception, which ultimately leads to a decrease in motivation in the context in which the negative experience occurred (Bénabou & Tirole, 2002). On the other hand, positive experience can have an enhancing effect on a person, leading to increased performance and motivation to exert a task, especially related to the work context (Bénabou & Tirole, 2002). A study

conducted with athletes examined the power of negative experiences and found an effect on thoughts, feelings and behaviours, which ultimately negatively influenced the athlete's performance (Hays et al., 2009). Besides the level of negative emotions, variability can also have an influence on people. The variability of emotions can negatively affect performance at work (Li et al., 2021). There is little research on the variability of negative emotions. However, a study by Gruber et al. (2013) with US and French adults examined the effect of variability in positive emotions over a two-week span and a daily experience method. The findings suggested that variability in positive emotions is associated with lower levels of well-being and little life satisfaction and might result in depression and anxiety. Therefore, they concluded that too much variability in emotions might be maladaptive, and one should strive for stability in positive emotions.

The Current Research

The current study aims to examine the work experiences of FGS and CGS and detect whether the previously outlined differences during university persist. In order to evaluate the experience of the students over time, the study is set up as an Experience Sampling Method (ESM) study. ESM studies provide real-time data on behaviours, thoughts and feelings and gives the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of participant's emotions and behaviours (Bolger et al., 2003). This method provides the possibility to assess the variability of emotions during a broader period. Further, with real-time data gathered, it is possible to recognise fluctuations, changes, and differences in variables and participants. Additionally, it is possible to inspect the contingencies of variables in ESM studies (Scollon et al., 2003). Since the data is inspected at various time points, it provides greater ecological validity and gives better opportunities to draw conclusions about the data (Hektner et al., 2007; Uy et al., 2009).

As described above, confidence can be a great predictor of professional success and later achievements in life (Santisi et al., 2018). The current aim is to investigate whether the generational status (Being FGS or CGS) affects confidence levels. Additionally, since negative experiences have shown to interplay with confidence levels, it is expected that level and stability of negative experiences influence the relationship (see Figure 1). Moreover, the stability of the variables confidence and negative experiences will be evaluated and since people's confidence levels can have a strong adverse effect on work performance as well as a reciprocal effect, the current study investigated this relationship over time. Based on the previously discussed literature, the following hypotheses were formulated.

H1a: *FGS, compared to CGS, are more likely to have negative experiences throughout the internship. (a1)*

H1b: FGS, compared to CGS, are more likely to have less stability in negative experiences throughout the internship. (a_2)

H1c: FGS, compared to CGS, are more likely to have lower levels of confidence at the end of the internship. (c')

H1d: The stability and level of negative experiences will mediate the relationship between generational students and confidence at the end of the internship. ($a_1 * b_1 / a_2 * b_2$)

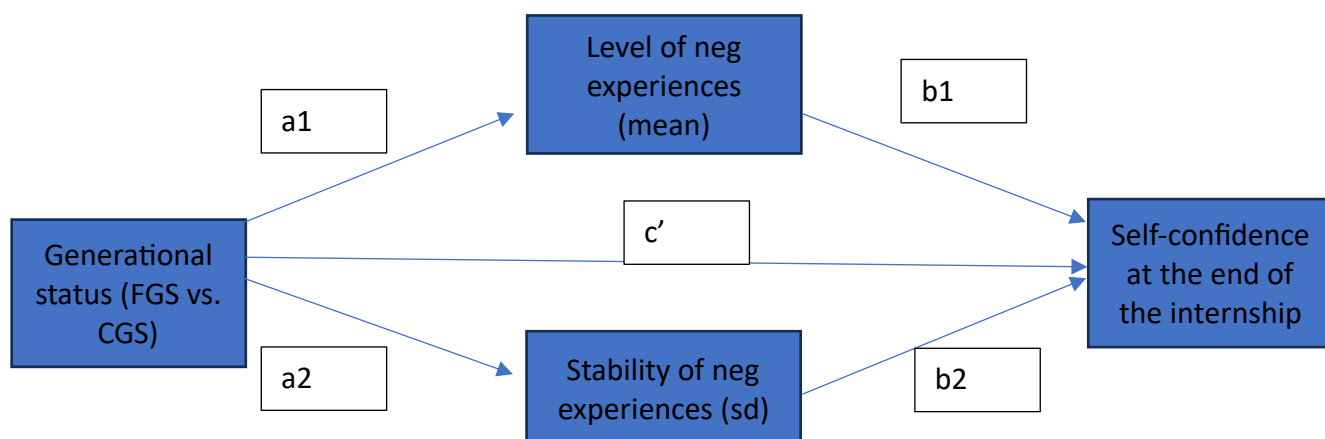
H2a: There is a significant within-person variance in negative experiences and self-confidence over time.

H2b: The occurrence of negative experiences predicts low confidence levels in the following week.

H2c: Low confidence levels predict the occurrence of negative experiences in the following week.

Figure 1

Visual Representation of the Proposed Theoretical Model on the Relation between Generational Status and Confidence Mediated by Level and Stability of Negative Experiences



Methods

Research Design

The current data was gathered over the course of several weeks between 2016 and 2018 and therefore regarded as an ESM study, which is an intensive longitudinal study design. This ensures the capturing of personal experiences as well as their change over time. It provides valuable, reliable data at the personal and group levels (Bolger et al., 2003). As several variables are inspected in the current study, it aids in the process of identifying correlating or, respectively, causing variables (Bolger et al., 2003). All the data was gathered through structured questions to ensure comparability between subjects. As the study makes use of ESM, the advantages involve high ecological validity through the gathering of data at different time

points (Uy et al., 2009). Further, recall bias can be minimised, and the investigation of fluctuations in single subjects is possible (Hektner et al., 2007). The diary data was gathered digitally and consisted of two parts; the first part consisted of an initial questionnaire about the demographics. After starting the internship, weekly questionnaires about the last week followed.

Participants

The study is based on a sample of 88 Master psychology students. Due to a cut-off score and missing values, only 63 participants are eligible for the analysis. Of the participants, 55 (87.3%) are female, and 8 (12,7%) are male. Most participants are CGS with 49 (77.78%), while 14 subjects are FGS (22.22%). Most participants are from Europe, and only three (5%) participants are classified as an ethnic minority. Of these three, two participants are FGS, and the other one is a CGS. The age range of the participants is between 19 and 38 and was represented in categories. 34 (54%) are between 19 and 23, 14 (22%) participants are aged 24, and there are 15 (24%) subjects between the ages 25 and 38. An overview of the participants' demographics can be found in Table 1. Participants were recruited at the university in the introduction session about the internship. When they were interested to be part of the study they were supposed to send an email.

The study is part of a larger project investigating internship experiences, involving students who did a clinical internship in neuropsychology, developmental psychology, clinical psychology, or forensic psychology at the University of Groningen. Participants completed their internship in four cohorts around Groningen between 2016 and 2018. The internships last between 14 and 25 weeks, depending on working days per week (3-5). These first working experiences serve to prepare the students for their respective future careers and is executed in the last semester of their Master studies. Tasks during the internship included observing their supervisors during intake interviews, assessments and treatments. Responsibility increased gradually and the participants took over tasks independently. The study was approved by the Ethical Committee of Psychology of the University of Groningen.

Table 1

Demographics of Participants (n=63)

Characteristics	N	Percentage
FGS	14	22.22%
CGS	49	77.78%
Sex		

Female	55	87.3%
Male	8	12.7
Origin		
Netherlands or Europe	61	95.24%
Ethnic minority	3	4.76%
Age in Categories		
19-23	34	54%
24	14	22%
25-38	15	24%

Note. FGS = First-Generation Students, CGS = Continuous-Generation Students

Procedure

Before starting their internships, the students filled in a questionnaire about their demographics, characteristics, and expectations for their upcoming internship. This included age, gender, ethnic origin and their parent's highest education to determine whether they are FGS or CGS. The survey included more questions that are not relevant for the current study.

During the following weeks of their internship, they received a short weekly questionnaire throughout their entire internship period. Firstly, the participants were asked to describe the most relevant experience during their internship of the past week. Then, eleven closed questions followed, six were related to the situation itself, and the other five questions about self-confidence, belonging and job fit. The questionnaires were sent via email with a Qualtrics link. If there was no response from a participant, they received a follow-up mail questioning their well-being and indicating that they missed to respond. After the internship, there was a follow-up questionnaire. When participants completed the diary questions throughout the internship, they received 40€, after completing the follow-up questionnaire they received an additional 20€. Every participant gave online informed consent in the starting survey of the first part. The consent form can be found in Appendix A.

Measures

For the present study, three constructs were used: generational status, confidence and negative experiences.

Generational status was calculated based on two items measuring the education level of the father and the mother. Then, they were grouped by having at least one parental part having a diploma in higher education, indicating whether they were considered as CGS or FGS. The variable was encoded as a dummy variable with 0 and 1 indicating whether a participant was an FGS or a CGS, respectively.

Confidence was measured with a single question: “Do you have confidence in yourself?” The confidence values ranged from 0 to 100. Four other questions were asked whether the participants thought the job was fitting for them, whether they felt they belonged at work, whether the type of work was right for them, and whether they identified as psychologists. These questions referred in how far the participant experienced these feelings during the past week. This item is part of five questions that measure commitment strengths, they stem from definitions about commitment and two widely used identity questionnaires, the U-MICS (Crocetti et al., 2007) and the GIDS (Bosma, 1992). All five questions are answered on a scale from 0-100 and the average score serves as the commitment score (Kunnen, 2021).

Level and stability of Negative Experiences were also assessed with a single question and indicated by a value between 0 and 100. After asking the participants to evaluate one meaningful situation from the past week, they were asked whether they had negative feelings about that specific situation. They should also imply whether they had positive feelings about the situation. The mean level was accumulated by taking all gathered values and dividing them by the number of weeks the respective student worked at the clinic. The standard deviation of the levels of negative experiences represents the stability.

Data Analysis

The gathered data was collected using Qualtrics (Qualtrics XM // The Leading Experience Management Software, 2022). The data was then converted to numeric values and exported into Microsoft Excel. Afterwards, unnecessary data, such as belonging, positive experiences, and feeling of pressure, were removed. Then, the data was imported into RStudio (v4.0.2, R Core Team, 2022) for further analysis.

To clean the data, all participants with fewer than 75% answer rates were excluded. Since the average internship lasted 22 weeks, the cut-off score was set at 16 responses. Before testing the hypothesis, descriptive statistics were calculated to get an overview of the participants and the data.

For the first hypothesis a Mediation analysis was conducted. The data was analysed using the PROCESS macro for RStudio. This Macro was created by Andrew F. Hayes and simplifies complex mediation analysis since it combines complex analysis in one prompt. More information can be found on his website (<http://www.afhayes.com>). Generational status served as the predictor variable (IV) and the average confidence levels during the last four weeks of the internship as the dependent variable (DV). This ensures that the variable time could be accounted for even though a single value per participant was included. Average and variability of negative experiences served as the mediators whereas the used value was the average score

over the entire internship. Firstly, the main effects of the independent variable and the mediators on the dependent variable were assessed where a significant effect is resembled by a p-value of below .05. Further, the interaction effect of the mediators on the dependent variable while controlling for the effect of the independent variable were tested. Here, as well, a p-value of below .05 means the effect is significant.

For the second set of hypotheses, the data was first transformed into long format and a column for the identification of subjects was added. To test the first part of the second hypothesis, examining how much variance is in confidence and negative experience, the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) was calculated. For this purpose, a multilevel model was used to account for the nested data structure. The ICC indicates how large the proportion of the total variance between the participants is compared to the variance within the participants. If the ICC value is low, it means there is variability in measurements within each participant over time whereas a high ICC means that measurements within each participant are relatively consistent. In order to have significant support for the chosen hypothesis, the ICC value needs to be greater than 0.1 (10%). The second part of the hypothesis was examined with two Linear Mixed Models (LMM). Generational status served as the independent variable (IV), while confidence levels acted as the dependent variable (DV). Time served as a random intercept. Furthermore, in order to ensure testing whether negative experiences follow low levels of confidence from the week before, the variable confidence was moved one row. The second LMM will be conducted with the IV and DV changed. Therefore, in this model the values of the variable negative experiences were moved by one row, so they correspond to the values of confidence in the week after.

Results

Descriptive statistics

We did not find significant differences between FGS and CGS on confidence, level and stability of negative experiences (see Table 2).

Furthermore, the variables of interest were inspected for their correlations with each other, an overview of the correlation matrix can be found in Table 3. We found significant correlations between level and stability of negative experiences. Indicating that high levels of negative experiences also imply high stability in negative experiences. Further, confidence is negatively related to level of negative experiences, meaning low levels of confidence correspond with higher levels of negative experiences. Generational status is negatively correlated with level of negative experiences, meaning being a FGS corresponds with lower levels of negative experiences.

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations, and One-Way Analyses of Variance in Confidence, Level and Stability of Negative Experiences and Average Number of Weeks Worked

Measure	FGS		CGS		F(1,62)
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Confidence	67.7	15.83	69.68	12.77	.93
Neg. Exp. (Level)	25.93	8.02	29.1	12.22	.03
Neg. Exp (Stability)	26.48	6.33	25.56	7.59	.24
Average nr of weeks data	21	2.63	21.74	3.15	.63

Note. Confidence and Negative Experience was Measured on a Scale from 0-100

Table 3

Correlation Matrix of Generational Status, Confidence, and Level and Stability of Negative Experiences

	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. Generational Status	-			
2. Confidence Level	-.06	-		
3. Negative Experiences Mean	-.12	-.39**	-	
4. Negative Experiences Variability	.05	-.09	.52***	-

*Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .05$, Generational Status was coded as FGS = 1, CGS = 0*

Theoretical Model

The results were not supportive of H1a, H1b, H1c and H1d as they indicated non-significant effects on all paths. No support was found for H1a, H1b and H1c, as no effect from generational status on level and stability of negative experiences and confidence levels were found. In addition, we did not find support for h1d since there was no significant mediation

effect from level and stability of negative experiences for the relationship of generational status and confidence. An overview of all effects can be seen in Table 4. Further, a visual representation of the theoretical model is illustrated in Figure 2.

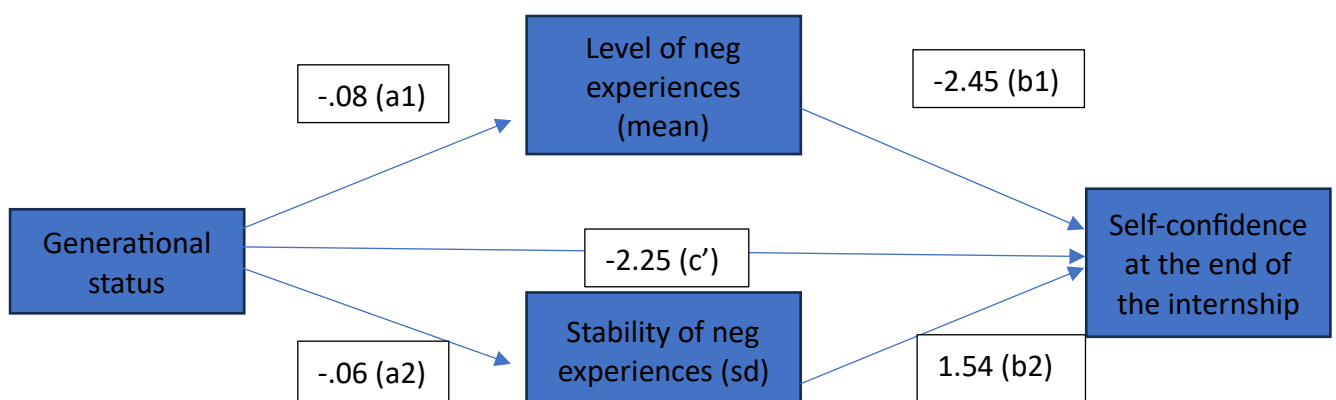
Table 4

Results of Mediation Analysis for Predicting Confidence at the End of the Internship

Effect	Path	Coefficient	Standard Error	p-value	95% Confidence Interval
Total Effect	c	-1.97	4.09	.63	[-10.14; 6.2]
<i>Direct effects</i>					
Generational status on confidence	c'	-2.25	4.07	.58	[-10.4; 5.9]
Generational status on level NE	a1	-.08	.29	.79	[-.67; .52]
Generational status on stability of NE	a2	-.06	.13	.65	[-.31; .2]
Effect of level of NE on confidence	b1	-2.45	4.07	.24	[-6.6; 1.69]
Effect of stability of NE on confidence	b2	1.54	4.79	.75	[-11.13; 8.05]
<i>Indirect effects</i>					
...via level of NE	a1*b1	.19	.89	-	[-1.67; 2.1]
...via stability of NE	a2*b2	.09	.71	-	[-1.34; 1.73]

Figure 2

Visual Representation of the Standardized Mediation Model Predicting Confidence at the End of the Internship



Relation Between Confidence Levels and Negative Experiences

The ICC was calculated to examine whether there is significant variation in confidence and negative experiences over time. The ICC for confidence equalled .47 indicating that approximately 47% of the total variance in confidence was due to difference between participants, meaning 53% of the variance can be attributed to within-participant differences. The marginal and conditional r squared were calculated as well. For the first model the marginal r squared was .02, meaning that the fixed effects alone accounted for 2% of the variation. The conditional r squared was .47, indicating that the combined fixed and random effects account for 47% of the variance. Regarding negative experiences, the ICC was estimated to be .12, implying that 12% of the variance is due to between participant differences whereas 88% are ascribable to within person differences. The values give evidence to accept hypothesis H2a, as there is significant within-person variance. The marginal r squared could be estimated at .01 indicating that the fixed effects are for 1% of the variation responsible. The conditional r squared was .41, meaning the fixed and random effects combined account for 41% of variation.

The data analysis regarding hypothesis H2b and H2c were significant. The LMM that was created for H2a indicated a significant effect of confidence levels in the week before a negative experience ($\beta = -.93$ $SE = .299$, 95% CI [-1.51, -.34], $p = .002$). The effect is negative, meaning, low levels of confidence imply the occurrence of negative experiences. Therefore, the hypothesis can be accepted. The second LMM resulted in a significant effect as well and is therefore supportive for H2b ($\beta = -.01$ $SE = .003$, 95% CI [-.01, -.001], $p = .005$). This implies that problems in the week before have a negative effect on the confidence levels of participants. An overview of the values can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5

Results of the Linear Mixed Models with Confidence and Negative Experiences

Relation	Effect	Standard Error	p-value	Confidence Interval
Confidence →	-.93	.29	.002	[-1.51, -.34]
NE				
NE →	-.01	.01	.005	[-.01, -.001]
Confidence				

Note. NE = Negative Experiences; → = effect on

Discussion

The main aim of the current study was to evaluate how FGS and CGS perceive their transition from university into work life. The data was aggregated with an ESM weekly diary study over a span of five months. We did not find significant differences between FGS and CGS in terms of their level and stability of negative experiences and confidence levels. Further, we could detect a significant reciprocal effect between negative experiences and confidence levels over time.

Previous research has shown that FGS tend to experience more problems during their university life (Yeager et al., 2016) and were expected to do so in the transition into the workplace (Terry & Fobia, 2019). Moreover, previous research indicated that FGS have less confidence in general than CGS (Hertel, 2002). The current study did not confirm these findings. This could be due to the greater challenges that FGS have to encounter and, therefore, a higher level of resilience which fosters confidence levels. As FGS tend to be confronted with various obstacles during their university life, they may have built a higher level of resilience and learned how to adapt to their challenges and built higher levels of confidence. Studies show that being exposed to stressors helps students to be more resilient (Crane & Searle, 2016), and this can help students to develop self-efficacy and higher levels of confidence. Learning how to cope with difficulties and potential obstacles helps to navigate through challenges such as studies or work. Thus, building resilience and gaining confidence in one's own abilities may have aided FGS and CGS in navigating through the challenges that may arise at work, leading to both groups being equally capable of withstanding potential setbacks and difficulties. Another reason may be that both groups received equal comprehensive career preparation, which generated realistic expectations of workplace challenges. This would be in line with the work of Yeager et al. (2016), which indicates that teaching a lay theory before a challenge creates equal opportunities. It may be that the current sample experienced appropriate preparation during their study programme and that both groups knew what to expect from work-life as well as what is expected from them. Another reason for the similar experiences of FGS and CGS during their internships in this study may be the shift from theoretical knowledge to practical application. Internships are focused on practical experiences and shift from academically challenging to a rather skill-based environment. In this new environment the interns can explore new ways and psychological techniques and tools in a new learning space. The shift is from learning theory to bringing theory and personal qualities into practice (Kuhn, 2005). Both groups may be equally trained and qualified for practical work, even though CGS may have an academic advantage, they do not have an advantage in work life.

Furthermore, it could be that students who do not possess enough resilience and confidence have already dropped out of their studies. Since it is a Master programme, only students who already finished a bachelor's degree and potentially managed an application phase, reach this programme. Thus, they already acquired the necessary skills during their bachelor studies. This aligns with previous research indicating higher drop-out rates for FGS (Tate et al., 2013). It may be the case that CGS generally have higher levels of resilience and, therefore, do not drop out before the final stages of the studies. In contrast, for FGS, only the ones with significantly higher resilience levels remain in the studies. Moreover, it might be that during work, there are better support structures that help both groups equally. Research suggests that social support from friends and family, as well as academic support, can be crucial for professional development (Payne et al., 2023). It might be that the FGS that endured until the Master programme, already experienced these support structures during their studies.

Even though the data implies equal experiences for FGS and CGS once they enter their work life, the results should be handled with care as it is a specific sample. Future studies should focus on whether the findings can be replicated with different samples and include qualitative data about university time that provides data on why the two groups do not differ in their transition into work life. The results show that for students from the University of Groningen, there are no differences in their preparation for the work life, but this may not be the case for other samples.

Previous research outlined a close reciprocal relationship between confidence and negative experiences (Bénabou & Tirole, 2002; Demiralp et al., 2012; Roberts et al., 1999), which is in line with the current research. The findings suggest a relationship between confidence and negative experiences. This might imply a potential vicious cycle where negative experiences have an effect on confidence levels, which might increase the likelihood of negative experiences. This reciprocal effect is in line with the social cognitive theory by Bandura (1986), which proposes that personal factors, such as confidence and external events, such as negative experiences, interact dynamically and, therefore, may create a cycle that potentially impacts an individual's adaptation and success at a workplace. It might be because when one experiences low levels of confidence, they are less prone to withstand negative emotions (Xu et al., 2024). Possibly leading to evaluating situations as more negative and, therefore, creates more negative experiences. Thus, it might have a negative effect on resilience and self-efficacy. In order to investigate whether this relationship is causal and there is a vicious cycle, future research should further inspect the two variables. An auto-regressive model could be used to inspect whether they influence each other. This would give more insight for future

Further, the detected variability in confidence and negative experiences is in line with the previous literature (Li et al., 2021). The correlation analysis indicated that more negative experiences lead to more fluctuations of negative experiences. This is contrary to the work of Gruber et al. (2013) which implies that more positive experiences lead to stable positive emotions, and therefore, the frequency determines the stability. Thus, the stability of emotions may be attributable to whether it is negative or positive rather than its frequency. The significant in-person fluctuations regarding confidence could be attributed to the dynamic nature of goal setting. According to the self-regulation theory by Carver & Scheier (1981), people continuously adjust their goals. Since usually the tasks in an internship become more and more challenging and the interns receive more responsibility (McQuaid & Spirito, 2012), it might be that after accomplishing one goal, the interns set new goals. When struggling to achieve them, their confidence is harmed. Our findings support this dynamic, as we observed significant fluctuations in confidence that were closely linked to negative experiences. Since a potential vicious cycle was detected, this then might increase the likelihood of negative experiences. Another explanation for the fluctuation in negative experiences might be that there are changes in the work environment. There could be fluctuations in staff, clients or other external factors that influence how the workplace is perceived. An article by Xanthopoulou et al. (2012) about within-person fluctuations at work highlights the importance of stable, favourable working conditions such as co-workers, the existence of humour and generally a good balance between skills and achievements. Fluctuations in these can lead to fewer employee satisfaction and more negative experiences at work. This underlines the importance of stable, supportive structures at work. This aligns with a study by Siedlecki et al. (2013), which showed that social support can foster stable emotional well-being by creating a better work environment.

These findings underline the necessity to break this cycle at work to provide the best possible preconditions for beginners at work. Programs that aim to boost confidence, such as mentorship or even cognitive and skills training, can be of great advantage if applied in the work environment. Additionally, creating a workplace that has a big support network and providing all workers with the social and professional support they need can be of great advantage in aiding people in talking about issues, which reduces negative experiences and boosts confidence. The results show that there may not be a need for specialised support for FGS but for everyone who is new in the working environment. Research should investigate the main work stressors that boost the occurrence of negative experiences and harm the confidence of professionals-to-be.

Strengths and Limitations

The current study needs to be evaluated in the scope of its strengths and limitations in order to provide guidance for future research in the respective field. One of the strengths of the study was the amount of data gathered. Since studies have shown that a participant amount of 10-25 is already enough to provide valid and reliable results for in-person comparison (Hektner et al., 2007), the current study is statistically powerful, with more than 80 participants. Nuances in emotions and behaviour over time could be evaluated precisely since there were, on average, approximately 21 data points per participant. But in order to get further insights into between-person differences, a larger sample size would be needed. To gather reliable data for between-person comparison, a sample size of 100 or greater is advised (Brybaert, 2019), but this is only a rule of thumb. Therefore, it might be beneficial to do a sample size calculation, to find out what a fitting sample size could be. The current study could serve as a template for such a calculation. This would ensure that future studies could adequately detect meaningful effects. Even though the variety of participants is skewed since there are significantly more CGS and women as well as very few minorities, the data provides enough participants from the respective groups to conduct an appropriate statistical analysis. Further, it is representative of the actual distribution of FGS to CGS in the population (Tate et al., 2013). Since the ratio is not equal to the population and the proportion of FGS is even smaller it might lead to decreased statistical power and less reliable results.

On the other hand, some aspects may have limited the statistical power and general meaningfulness of the study. Firstly, the recollection bias that ESM studies usually tackle might not be addressed properly in the current study. Since the data is not real-time data as it was gathered from the previous week, the recollection bias might have had an influence as well, causing inaccurate data (Scollon et al., 2003). Since the study asks to p reflect on the situation the data may be accurate but since the emotions cannot be fully replicated, we cannot be sure. Additionally, the study lacks generalizability as there are only students from the University of Groningen and the study field of psychology included. Further, all of them were engaged in a mandatory internship during their master's programme, which specifies the sample even more and decreases the ecological validity (Fiedler, 2000). Moreover, the frequency of measurements could be reconsidered. Usually, ESM studies measure data several times a day (Larson & Csikszentmihalyi, 2016). This provides more insights about fluctuations within a day and could provide insights into how FGS and CGS feel immediately after experiencing something negative at work.

Another point of improvement for future research could be to split the variable confidence into two different questions. One concerning general confidence and one solely

regarding confidence at work. Some students may have to change their homes for their internship; others still live at home, and there may be changes in the environment that affect general confidence levels. The main aim of the study was to investigate the professional development and not personal. Therefore, it could be beneficial to separate the two concepts to have a distinguished look at the concepts and focus on the work confidence which mainly influences the professional identity.

Future research should replicate the current work in different samples to see whether the findings can be replicated. Further, it would be advisable to measure more frequently in order to get further insights into the vicious cycle of negative experiences and confidence levels.

Conclusion

To conclude, the study produced unexpected results in terms of the difference between FGS and CGS when they transition into work life. They experienced equal values in terms of, confidence and level and stability of negative events. Furthermore, there is no effect found for the proposed model which assumed a mediation effect of negative experiences on the relation between generation status and confidence levels. On the other hand, there was a reciprocal effect from negative experiences and confidence levels over time. Therefore, future steps should be to further investigate the difference and similarities of FGS and CGS and whether the current findings are representative for other samples as well. Further, there should be a focus to create a supportive work environment for FGS and CGS at work in order to boost confidence levels and diminish negative experiences.

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Appendix A

Consent form

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Thank you for your interest in our research. On the next page you will find information about the study and you can indicate that you agree to participate.

permission With this research we want to investigate how students develop during their internship, what they experience, and which experiences are important to them. This research will help to better understand the development process during the internship and, based on this, to provide more appropriate help to students before or during their internship. Your participation in this research consists of several elements: - In this first questionnaire we ask about your background and your expectations about the stage. This questionnaire takes approximately 30 minutes. - During your internship we will ask you to complete a logbook every week for five months (15 minutes each time). - After the internship there will be a 30-minute questionnaire a number of times. (immediately afterwards, after 3 months, after 6 months and after 9 months). In total it will cost you 2.5 hours for questionnaires and five hours for completing the logbooks. What do you get for it? If you participate in the full study, you will receive 60 euros for your participation. If you wish, you will receive a file with your details afterwards and the logbooks you completed. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can assist with any discontinuation and have the data tracked removed from this study. The data collected from this research will be processed anonymously and therefore cannot be disclosed in an individually identifiable manner. In this first part of the study questions we look at your student number. You do not have to provide this, but we will use the student number to combine your answers with your study results at the end of the year. On one of the following pages you can indicate whether you give permission for this. For questions about this research, please contact Sascha Krom (s.t.krom@student.rug.nl) or Saskia KEN (e.s.kunnen@rug.nl).

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I agree to participate in this study (1)