Well-Being in Academia: The Importance of Acknowledging Pluralistic Experiences for

Possible Interventions in Universities

Jasper Hetmeier

S4810163

Department of Psychology, University of Groningen

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Mentors: Dr. Laura Ballato

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In collaboration with:

Koichi Hara, Malte Schilling, Darian Soobiah, Thomas de Vegt, Ula Ziobakaite

Abstract

This qualitative study aims at understanding the concept of well-being through the perspective of university students and specifically first-generation students whose parents do not have a university degree, based on the framework of Self-Determination Theory. Through semi-structured interviews with twelve students in Groningen (NL), we found conceptualizations that are consistent with Self-Determination Theory, namely relatedness, competence and autonomy as important factors towards well-being. Other needs preceding well-being mentioned were financial and social security, appropriate food and shelter as well as physical exercise and leisure time. Furthermore, students also held broader, holistic perspectives on general well-being and sought out for balance in life. Distinguishing endo- and exogeneous inputs in order to understand well-being as a multi-facetted but interconnected construct might be insightful. Additionally, merely studying well-being in academia without other domains of life did not appear to be useful. First-generation students reported challenges that can be described by the hidden curriculum. Future intervention might focus on supporting community building and individualized support to enhance the well-being of first-generation and also other students.

Keywords: well-being, higher education, self-determination theory (SDT), basic needs, holistic well-being, first-generation students, hidden curriculum

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After high school, many young people decide to enter university. In common

understanding, being a student is a time of excitement and exploration. However, students face

mental health issues disproportionately more often than the general population (Eisenberg et al.,

2013; Stallman, 2010). In a Dutch survey, more than half (53%) of the respondents indicated an

at least moderate impairment due to poor mental health in the past 12 months (Higher Education

Monitor, 2023). Most mentioned aspects were loneliness (62% felt somewhat to very lonely),

emotional exhaustion (59%) and elevated stress (56%) (Kiltz et al., 2020). Reasons for the poor

well-being of many students might be most of all stress due to full-time studying, followed by

financial stress and several other personal as well as societal stressors. However, well-being is

not only guided by one factor at a time is a rather complex concept (Brulé & Maggino, 2017)

Therefore, it is important to understand the composition of student's concept of well-being to be

able to develop effective interventions.

Our goal is to gain insight to the conceptualization of well-being of university students

through a qualitative approach. As our starting point, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by Ryan

and Deci (2000) will function as the main framework. However, we also aim to explore further

concepts of well-being, including a positive psychology approach (Seligman &

Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Furthermore, for a sensitive conceptualization of well-being it has to be acknowledged that

in university, there is no single prototype student but there are many different kinds of students

with different experiences of well-being. Therefore, it might also depend to on the individual

how well-being is conceptualized. Especially disadvantaged students might have a different

experience of well-being in academia. Hence, an additional focus of the study lies on the perspectives on well-being in academia from *first-generation students* (FGS), whose parents do not have a university degree. FGS are more likely to enter university without a thorough academic support system, and they might be even more susceptible to stress as well as they are probably experiencing less connectedness to academia (Gable, 2021). Additionally, some mental health problems are likely to be more prevalent in FGS compare to continuous-generation students (CGS) (Smith & McLellan, 2023).

Even though most university students are CGS (Radford et al., 2015), the insight of first-generation experiences could be helpful for the general population since it includes a diverse picture of values and struggles, that might not only be unique to FGS. With the words of Reay et al. (2009, p. 1116): "elite universities need non-traditional students just as much as the students need them". Including their experience, the university could become more aware about the factors that keep certain populations disadvantaged, which makes the academia less divers and more 'elite'.

Towards the Conceptualization of Well-Being

Well-being is not a pre-defined concept but has several interpretations through literature. Therefore, it is harder to study and leaves professionals more difficulties in designing interventions. In this background, it is relevant to make an attempt to understand well-being better and aim to add new insights into student's concept of well-being through an qualitative approach.

Self-Determination Theory

As a framework to investigate student well-being in detail and unravel the dynamics at hand, SDT by Ryan and Deci (2000) has been shown to be helpful (Kiltz et al., 2020). In SDT,

three psychological needs are identified for healthy psychological development as well as supporting factors for intrinsic motivation. Within the theory, *competence* refers to the perception of one's capability to successfully perform a task., and includes facing appropriate challenges or workload in order to be efficient and satisfied. The need for *relatedness* is associated with feeling connected, care and be cared for, and covers the social aspect of one's psychological development. *Autonomy* is related to personal agency and describes the perception of not being pushed around by others but be in charge of what happens to oneself.

In their original paper, Deci and Ryan (2000) explain that the three psychological needs, are predictors of well-being when fulfilled and are resulting in ill-being if not satisfied. They also add that a person needs all three needs to be met to a certain extent to thrive. Just feeling competent without the autonomy to use it in a meaningful way is not sufficient, just as having autonomy is not fulfilling without the relatedness to others.

Positive Psychology

Just like SDT conceptualizes healthy personal development in terms of positive needs instead of pathological definitions, positive psychology emphasizes those "features that make life worth living" (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p.1). Their notion goes beyond psychopathology and defines well-being not only in terms of absence of illness but as a result of meaningful experiences and relationships. Important concepts are experienced contentment and satisfaction in the past as well as optimism and hope for the future. For the present, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) suggest flow and happiness to be important values. Alas, these values can be interpreted quite differently. Two people would give you different answers to the questions "What is happiness?". Still, the notion that a person might need positive experiences for a satisfied life is important in conceptualizing well-being.

Student Well-Being

To understand what well-being means to university students, Kiltz et al. (2020) conducted a qualitative study within they aim to explore the conceptualization and perception of well-being. Overall, the conceptualization of well-being by students and teachers can be sorted into a positive psychology domain (including e.g. awareness of well-being), resilience (as well-being regulation) as well as other multi-faceted components. Also, the basic needs of SDT were found to be important in the perception of well-being. Kiltz et al. (2020) emphasize well-being as a multi-faceted concept with several factors and components (like eudaimonic, mental or social well-being) meaning that well-being is not merely defined by a few numbers of factors but depends on the context and perspective. Needs like stable housing or financial safety are not necessarily directly included in the SDT but do play a role. Additionally, the interaction between teachers and student might be crucial in their perception of well-being, and both are most likely intertwined (see also Baik, Larcombe, et al., 2019)

Experiences of First-Generation Students

As mentioned above, stress among students is often due to costs of daily living as well as due to study (Higher Education Monitor, 2023). Furthermore, financial stress might account for poorer mental health (Eisenberg et al., 2013; Mac-Ginty et al., 2024). Hence, FGS are probably more prone to this risk factor, since they are also more likely to have poor financial stability (Evans et al., 2020).

Regarding the university environment, for students whose parents did not have had an academic career, adjusting to the academic world can reveal difficulties that others might not have: In a qualitative study, FGS reported to feel less prepared for college (56%) than their continuous-generation peers (80%) (Gable, 2021). This is reflected in the idea of a hidden

curriculum (based on the work of Dreeben, 1968; Jackson, 1968; Vallance, 1973), a covert set of expectations or values that are not explicitly taught but gives an advantage to those who inherit the values, norms and beliefs of mainstream society, predominantly upper and middle-class (Kentli, 2009). For example, growing up in a house where there are books that people read and discuss, or being able to attend extracurricular activities prepares you for an academic career already. That leaves FGS often with lower academic experience (45% of students with low tertiary admission score were FGS, compared to 22% in high score) which consecutively leads to more difficulties as well as less enjoyment in the study (Baik et al., 2019) probably due to less perceived competence (see also Gos, 1995; Vang, 2006).

In that manner, higher education faces the problem of a hidden curriculum, for example when it fails to create an environment where FGS do not (perceive to) fit into the culture of the institution (Koutsouris et al., 2021; K. Rahman, 2013; Suhlmann et al., 2018). Koutsouris et al. (2021) identify a common image of an 'ideal student' (middle-upper class, non-disabled, white) that can evoke the feeling of non-belonging, especially for working class, BAME or other minority students. Additionally, FGS might feel less related to their peers when it comes to conversational topics, shared (or non-shared) experiences or other perceptions of class differences. To overcome a hidden curriculum, Koutsouris et al. (2021) suggest that reflection and entering an open conversation can help.

Combining the finding that some basic needs outside the SDT framework need to be considered, we seek to gain more insight about these factors and combine them with the existing SDT in a qualitative manner. With the results, the academic conceptualization of well-being could be broadened through the perspective of university students. Furthermore, hypotheses

about contributors of well-being and how they might be intertwined could be made. This study strives to answer the broad questions:

1a) How do students conceptualize and experience well-being in academia?

1b) How do first-generation students conceptualize and experience well-being in academia?

With an outlook on future possible intervention or structural change, we would like to find out

2a) How do students perceive and think about interventions to improve their well-being?

Method

Participants

A sample of twelve university students participated in this study. Following Guest et al.'s (2006) research on data saturation, the amount of twelve interviews in qualitative research is sufficient to create an extensive codebook and draw meaningful conclusions. Our sample consisted of four first-year, one second-year, six third-year, and one fourth-year student, with equal representation of male and female participants. All participants were aged between 18 and 24. Recruitment was done through a convenient sampling method. Each group member reached out to two peers that fitted the desired demographics. Among the twelve participants, four were FGS, and five were Honours College students. All participants, except one from Minerva Art Academy, studied at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, including the Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences (n = 4), the Faculty of Science and Engineering (n = 4), the Faculty of Arts (n = 1), University College Groningen (n = 1), and the Faculty of Economics and Business (n = 1). The sample comprised individuals of different nationalities, including four from the Netherlands, two from Germany, one from Bulgaria, one from Romania, one from

Slovenia, one from Slovakia, one Jordan-Palestinian participant, and one French-Mauritian

participant. Participation was voluntary, and participants did not receive any compensation. The

interviews were conducted in April 2024 as part of the bachelor thesis course.

Table 1

Demographic Information of Participants

Demographic characteristics		Nationality	
	n	Dutch	Other
Nationality			
Dutch	4		
Other	8		
Year of Studies			
First	4	1	3
Second	1	1	0
Third	6	1	5
Fourth	1	1	0
Honours College			
Yes	5	1	4
No	7	3	4
First-Generation Status			
FGS	4	1	3
CGS	8	3	5

Procedure

Participants and interviewers participated in individual, semi-structured interviews, to collect qualitative data on our research question. An original script was created to aid in the interview, inspired by similar studies (e.g. Ten Hoeve et al., 2018). The interview script contained questions about the conceptualization and experience of well-being, specific factors of the SDT as described by Ryan and Deci (2000), as well as other possibly related factors and ideas about well-being interventions within the university setting. Within the conceptualization of well-being, we attempted to find information regarding how individuals understood well-being, both in general and within academia. For the specific factors of the SDT (autonomy,

relatedness and competence), we investigated how participants experience these factors and how this relates to their perceptions of well-being. Furthermore, we explored other related factors such as resilience, stress, value attainment, and achievement, as well as their effects on our participant's experiences of well-being. Lastly, we asked our participants for ideas about potential changes and interventions within the university. Additionally, Honors College, first-generation and third-year students were asked specifically tailored questions to inspect the experiences within these distinct groups more closely.

Our research received approval from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences (research code: PSY-2324-S-0302), and all participants agreed to participate after receiving detailed information about the study. In addition, informed consent, and demographics forms were provided to and filled out by the participants before conducting the interviews (see appendix A).

The length of the interviews varied between 27 minutes and 90 minutes. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and subsequently anonymized to protect the identity of the participants. After the transcription process, all audio recordings were deleted. The participants were given semi-random pseudonyms, the names only reflect the gender and cultural origin.

Data Analysis

Our analysis integrated both deductive and inductive approaches, as our aim was twofold: to assess the reflection of our theoretical framework, particularly SDT, and explore other factors such as basic needs and resilience in our participants' responses, while also advancing these theoretical understandings. We employed some predefined codes deductively from the codebook of (Kunnen & Krom, 2017) study, and grounded in the theoretical foundations outlined above. Furthermore, we implemented Braun and Clarke's (2006) inductive thematic analysis approach

fin order to add new codes, which prioritizes uncovering underlying patterns of meaning over emphasizing frequency measures. This approach enabled our analysis to remain receptive to responses and patterns not anticipated by our study's theoretical framework, potentially enriching our understanding and providing deeper insights into our participants' experiences. The coding process was conducted using Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software.

Coding process

To ensure the analysis maintains consistent coding and internal validity, we followed the intercoder reliability approach outlined by O'Connor and Joffe (2020).This involved a systematic cycle of code generation, code application to the data, and evaluation of coding until saturation was achieved (Williams & Moser, 2019). We alternated between individual and group work throughout these steps to enhance reliability.

Following the coding scheme developed by Kunnen and Krom (2017), we initiated the coding process by systematically applying existing codes deductively to six transcripts, assigning one to each researcher. Simultaneously, we engaged in inductive coding to identify and create new codes for aspects not covered by our existing framework. After finalising the initial coding phase, the research team jointly coded two interviews. This collaborative effort aimed to review and consolidate the existing codes into coherent categories and themes, laying the groundwork for a preliminary codebook to direct subsequent coding. During this phase, we also integrated theoretical concepts guiding our research, such as self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Using the preliminary codebook as a reference, all interviews underwent a second round of coding. To ensure reliability, two group members independently analyzed the same four interviews each, ensuring that every interview was coded according to the preliminary codebook. Subsequently, the group convened to discuss the codebook again, further refining and

elaborating on the emerging themes. This iterative approach continued until saturation was achieved for all significant aspects of participants' responses. This process was repeated two times, adhering to the concept of a non-linear coding process (Williams & Moser, 2019) until the group reached a consensus on a finalized codebook. The finalized codebook (see appendix B) was subsequently employed to code each interview independently by two researchers, thereby reinforcing inter-coder reliability (Cheung & Tai, 2023).

Results

In the following, I will first summarize the responses of all participants towards the conceptualization of well-being. Next, I am going to provide a description of the perspectives of FGS. The section ends with answers on how students perceive and deliberate on well-being interventions.[1]

Conceptualization of Well-Being

Overall, most participants conceptualized well-being as being in line with SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Out of all the factors that constitute the SDT, the majority of students mentioned relatedness first, having a good social connection, feeling connected, or having a sense of belonging.

Manaia: […] I need a lot of community and a lot of people around me.

Mai: To feel like I fit in and I belong to this group of students […] that really contributes to how I feel (Mai)

Furthermore, seeing oneself as competent enough to manage the studies was important to the participants. This was often reported in a negative framing, i.e. that they would feel bad if they would not be able to trust in their competencies. Also, some statements about negative well-being (mostly in terms of distress) were associated with high university workload.

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[1] For extensive quotes of first-generation experiences and responses on interventions, see Appendix C

David: [My well-being is] Not that good at the moment […] especially if there's a high workload.

Autonomy played an important role for many as well, and is even connected to the feeling of competence, as expressed through self-esteem and self-confidence. Some participants understood autonomy in university also as being organized and structured, managing one's own time and having the opportunity to choose their courses. Some said that independence was important to them.

Manaia: I guess I like to be autonomous. I like to be independent. I don't like thinking that I was pushed into a situation.

Further Conceptualizations of Well-Being

Other aspects of the concept of well-being that the Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) does not necessarily cover, were mental well-being and physical health, physical activity and leisure time. Many participants valued physical activity and leisure time often simply because it is enjoyable or gives satisfaction and often includes a social element (see also Fontane, 1996). On the other hand, especially students who experienced episodes of mental illness, value their positive mental health.

Nina: Big part of [well-being] is my mental health, because I'm sometimes struggling with it.

Furthermore, basic needs as defined by Maslow (1958) were included in the conceptualization of well-being by some students. Though the dialectical hierarchical structure as suggested by Maslow (1958) might not be valid (Frame, 1996), some of the identified needs such as sufficient food and sleep are still reasonable. Additionally, students were seeking out safety and security in their housing, relationships, as well as financial situation.

Mai: I need to have a good place where I live, where I feel comfortable, enough money to buy food and drinks, social contacts, other things to do outside of university and some feeling of belonging and security

Finally, participants elaborated largely on how stress affects their well-being. Distress was a common factor for diminished well-being, sometimes using 'feeling stressed' interchangeably with 'not being well', but stress was also reported to enhance motivation. Many students went through phases of stress and could report strategies to cope with it and some said they gain confidence after managing a stressful time. On theoretical level, the way students talked about dealing with stress was interconnected with the ideation of a certain balance in their lives. Having time to study as well as for recreation. This was often referred to as 'work-life balance' but also included more nuanced descriptions of 'life' in this balance. Participants did not just want to have time besides their work for university but filled it with either solitude, physical activity or meaningful relationships, or other personal needs. In that sense, students had holistic ideas of their well-being, which was reflected by statements that described unspecific feelings, like "being comfortable in the present situation" (Manaia) or feeling "content about who I am" (Lisa).

Manaia: Well-being would mean being comfortable in the present situation I'm in. Just feeling like I can manage all the parts of my life equally and that nothing's being left out or that I'm not feeling particularly fulfilled.

Lisa: Well-being, I would define as a balance between physiological and kind of mental states that I feel content about who I am kind of feel like having an autonomous kind of authentic life and like that I am happy with my life and live for myself.

Experiences of First-Generation Students

Generally speaking, FGS have similar conceptualizations of well-being at the university, compared to participants who are continuous-generation students. How FGS experience entering the university context depended heavily on their individual context, such as financial situation or country of origin. Therefore, attention to every unique experience of the first-generation participants will be given. However, common themes that the participants discussed were the degree of financial and emotional support as well as one's position in society, social environment and among peers.

Three out of the four first-generation participants indicated a relatively smooth transition into the university environment, though the resources they were using to manage the start of their studies were different. Some had financial support and were able to choose their workload freely, while others did not have financial security, which resulted in dissatisfaction with a side job or general pressure to perform well in the studies.

Manaia

Manaia said she profited from an older brother who had already gone to university before her and could, therefore, compensate for potential lack of knowledge. Also, attitudes towards university within the family already have been tested and "the whole family was changing" (Manaia) before it was her turn to go to university. She felt very supported by her family but also by the community of her faculty, which puts explicit focus on good and close relationships.

Manaia: They're very close with the students, so it's a really nice environment to be in, honestly. […] you can feel supported by anyone there.

Lisa

Lisa said she did not felt understood by her mother, having different perspectives on the work of studying.

Lisa: Well, the entry to academia was, of course, supported my mom in a way that she felt happy that I'm coming here […] but I feel like she doesn't really understand what university life is about. […] So sometimes I feel like she downplays the responsibilities that I have. When I come home, I cannot focus too much on my work, because she doesn't take it that seriously. So that's sometimes not as good. But yeah, she also supports me financially.

Lisa's perception of competence and belongingness is complex, depending on context and is supported by interesting reflections. On the one hand, she said studying in her program (media studies) was very easy, so she entered honours college not to "feel lazy". On the other hand, she saw herself as less competent than others, referring to this as a form of impostor syndrome, a psychological process in which people think they are less intelligent or competent than others and, therefore, believe they are deceiving when being successful (Hawley, 2019). Lisa connected this to cultural and socioeconomic differences between her, being Eastern European and a FGS, and Dutch, upper-class students.

Lisa: Yeah, also definitely, I think I had like that impostor syndrome saying, thinking everybody's better than me and then especially in honours though, because I'm from (inaudible) […] here I felt like I'm not belonging here. Just people are way smarter, like I don't know. […] I saw the Dutch students being super assertive. And […] because of their assertiveness […] they kind of felt that it was ingrained in them that they can just do this and that I felt like, I could never pull this off.

The notion of the impostor syndrome can be seen as a dynamic that influences the perception of competence in SDT. While comparing to peers, the environment might play a role how competent one perceives themselves to be. In this case, the mere fact that Lisa grew up in a

poorer, not so prestigious country, impacted her feeling of competence, even to the point where she says " you can see they're intelligent. Because they have it in their genes." (Lisa)

Mai

Mai's struggles with entering the academic world started already with the enrolment procedure.

> Mai: So first of all, it was not really easy to get to university and enroll because I didn't have the support. My parents didn't even know what a bachelor's or master's degree was.

Furthermore, finding affordable housing caused distress and she was missing practical guidance to support her autonomy in university. Further topics Mai elaborated in details were social expectations from her family and alienation towards peers in university because of differences in upbringing and life experience. Generally, she said that she does not feel the same flexibility in choosing her own path. While others whose parents studied could "quit or change degrees", she thinks "that's really not an option for me". Growing up in a relatively poor environment, having a daughter who studies is "a thing", which, in her perspective, eventually put "a lot of pressure" on her.

> Mai: I think those expectations and outer circumstances really pushed me to do it in three years and not need any longer.

> Mai: I think if I didn't have my parents, or had more financial resources or whatever, I think I might use some more time or do some other things in between.

Mai described these experiences as different from many other peers, which resulted in dissent about certain topics like perspective on having and spending money, valuing financial safety in one's career

Mai: I mean, I think I have a very good friend group, they're the best friends I could ask for, and I feel really connected to them. But […] I can really, really notice or feel the differences […] And I think we also have different opinions about certain things. And I think some things that they would take for granted, for example, that they're getting money every month, I would never, and I think they also have a different way of looking at work. I think from how I grew up, work is necessary to survive. And for them, they view career and work a bit differently, because I think they have more freedom to choose and more support in a way.

Bart

Bart experienced his entrance into university to be "pretty good" and attributes this to encouragement from his parents and choice of study. While he depicts the support of his parents as very positive, he mentioned feeling pressure rather by societies' expectations to follow a university degree.

Bart: I do think that there's just a bit more of a social pressure on studying. […] If you don't have a degree, then you're fucked up kind of.

Having no financial security through his family, Bart describes the perspective on having a debt because of a huge student loan and the need to have a side job as very negative.

Bart: [My side job] still very practical, which is, which I do also really enjoy. Um, but yeah, honestly, it fucking sucks. Like just working my ass off for minimum wage just so I can, 'cause I'm also getting my driver's license now.

First-Generation Experience and Well-Being

In regards to the research question of how FGS experience well-being in academia, we could argue that the experiences of the first-generation participants provided some detail about

how their unique situation has influenced their well-being through the factors of SDT. While not everyone mentioned the same disadvantages, all three psychological factors contributing to individual well-being as identified by SDT were influenced by the first-generation status to some extent. For example, the necessity to work and the pressure to perform well might negatively influence the perception of autonomy, which in turn contributes to well-being negatively. Moreover, alienation from peers (for example because of different attitudes towards money) might weaken the perceived relatedness. The sense of belongness might also be undermined by the perception of class differences as Lisa described them. Additionally, aspects of the hidden curriculum (Kentli, 2009) like the lack of knowledge on how to enroll seems to negatively impact the perception of competence as well. These findings support the validity of SDT and give a meaningful background on what influences the perception of the psychological needs in FGS.

To extent this line of thought, also in regards to future interventions and organizational change, we could ask what other factors influence the perception of relatedness, competence and autonomy. Being a FGS is probably one variable among others that contributes to individual experiences and there is no distinct, homogeneous group of *the* FGS's. This can be understood in terms of intersectionality (Scheurich & Mason, 2024), that claims that people can be discriminated against in many intersected ways that influence each other and build up to unique, pluralistic realities (Crenshaw, 1989). For example, being FGS and from a eastern European country forms a different set of experiences than a Dutch FGS might inherit. Intersectionality theory can be extended with multiple forms of discrimination like sexism, racism, islamophobia, ableism, etc. (Cherney, 2023; Collins & Bilge, 2020; M. Rahman, 2017). In our case, negative impacts on well-being through the first-generation status can be seen as a form of classism, i.e.

discrimination concerning class differences, often described by socioeconomic status (SES) (Carter & Vavrus, 2018). In prospect, examining these variables might be helpful to understand systemic differences in people's fulfilment possibilities of their psychological needs and therefore their well-being.

Interventions

To the question of what the university currently does to facilitate students' well-being most answers were rather vague. Many participants mentioned some specific offers like the student psychologist (n=5), study advisor (n=4) and Study associations (n=3). However, five participants initially or later on said, they did not really know and general uncertainty was in most answers. Three students could make an elaborate list of offers, two others said that the university pays attention to students' well-being but did not went into great detail. Overall, students have an idea that the university offers support but could only name a few specific ones in the interview.

Interestingly, the participants reflected their lack of knowledge about interventions in their ideas about possible future interventions. Five students explicitly mentioned that the university should raise more awareness about its offers, e.g. publishing an extensive list of offers and information, as well as educating about the topic of well-being in general.

Mai: I mean there's probably a lot of people I could contact if I wanted to, but it's not really obvious to me what I could be doing. So I think addressing that more and raising more awareness.

Especially for internationals but also locals, students should be more clued up about their rights, a participant responded. Also, some students wished for more practical guidance either through learning from Alumni experiences or better student-mentor relationships.

Regarding basic needs of shelter and food, as defined by Maslow (1958), some participants envisioned specific changes that would improve their well-being. Making studying more affordable or even for free was one aspect. Alternatively, the funding or loan system should be so that students should not have to work besides their studies. One student said that Dutch eating culture does not involve proper lunch breaks, so that there is too little designated time to eat. Affordable and balanced meals in canteens after the German concept (Mensa) was specifically wished for by one participant. The need for such an offer was also reflected by other responses to the experience of well-being.

> Andrey: I used to have the problem of during, like, exam season, I didn't, like, I didn't, like, take any breaks, or, or I didn't eat enough, or stuff like that.

On a closing note, even though participants could mention some interventions they heard of, the results show a lack of specific knowledge about well-being interventions in university and how to access them. Some had specific ideas on what could change to improve their well-being but most did not have elaborate visions of improvement.

Discussion

With this study, we aimed at broadening the understanding of well-being academia through university students. Via an qualitative approach the study followed the question how students conceptualize and experience well-being in academia, and furthermore, how FGS conceptualize and experience well-being specifically. As mentioned above, SDT still seems like a solid model to conceptualize well-being in the university context. At the same time, the mere psychological approach towards well-being that SDT follows is not extensive enough to cover all aspects mentioned by the participants. Pincus et al. (2023) attempt to include also non-psychological factors into a psychological theory. Therefore they suggest that subjective well-being is a purely

psychological construct, influenced by psychological inputs on the one hand as well as physical, environmental, financial and occupational inputs on the other, naming them endogenous and exogenous. Through this distinction, diverging characteristics of different factors can be acknowledged. For example, labelling financial stress as an exogeneous input makes it a visible contributor towards subjective well-being, where SDT only credits endogenous contributors. Therefore, we can understand the subjective well-being as the sum of subjective evaluations of exogeneous and endogenous inputs. In regards to our study, the SDT-factors competence, relatedness, autonomy could be seen as endogenous inputs because they are psychological and emerge from the self. On the other hand, exogeneous inputs that participants mentioned were physical activity and health, leisure time, as well as sufficient food and sleep.

Subjective experiences of stress fall a bit out of this categories since they are the product of environmental factors and individual attitudes towards stress. That means, the subjective experience of stress like subjective well-being consists of the evaluation of exogenous and endogenous inputs. This might also be the reason why it is used almost interchangeably with well-being by some of the participants.

Furthermore, some students spoke about their well-being in holistic ways, paying attention to 'the greater picture'. Instead of thinking well-being as the sum of variables in an equation, it might be more about feeling good in general.

Among scholars, there is no common definition of holistic well-being, which also differs between scientific and philosophical contexts (Freeman, 2005; Noda, 2000). The statements on general or work-life balance as well as an unspecific feeling towards wellness are in line with subjective well-being in the theory of Pincus et al. (2023) as it contains a broader consideration of contributing factors. The approach to understand well-being as a holistic experience can also

be seen in the light of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). While pathological understanding certainly is part of well-being, participants strived for more than just absence of illness but rather contentment and general satisfaction of their life as a whole.

Pincus et al. (2023) also mention that the evaluation of one's well-being is always the product of not only one but several domains of life and that research so far failed to predict well-being by summing up the perceived well-being from distinct domains. They argue that well-being is more than the sum of, for example, well-being at work and well-being at home (Pincus et al., 2023). Therefore, it may not be substantially useful to separate well-being in academia from general well-being. Participants' responses support this notion, since we could not find specific distinctions between academic well-being and general well-being.

Entering Academia: An Intersectional Struggle

Whilst investigating well-being for future students, one particular focus of this study lies on the experience of FGS. Overall, as mentioned in the results, FGS did not necessarily differ in their conceptualizations of well-being, though the experiences were unique to the individuals. We assume that the needs that have to be fulfilled in order to feel well in academia and life are the same for all students, they just might differ in urgency and degree of fulfilment.

With our qualitative approach we could identify experiences that are in line with the literature. Even though it was not mentioned specifically, the hidden curriculum (Kentli, 2009) formed barriers to overcome. This was exemplarily characterized by a lack of knowledge about the enrollment procedure.

Furthermore, students without financial security often have to rely on government funding (Montalto et al., 2019). We found that being in high debt because of a tuition fee loan can be

unappealing and not as a safe choice. In turn, pressure to perform and lower flexibility (and therefore less autonomy), as well as elevated workload in wage labor can be the results.

Interestingly, most FGS (and other) were able to identify the hidden curriculum in terms of accessibility of interventions. Many participants did not know sufficiently what offers they could use to increase their well-being and were able to reflect on this. Educating and advertising about these offers could be a way towards increasing well-being for all students.

Additionally, interventions that focus on providing food and shelter are promising to enhance student well-being for all kinds of students. Jack (2019) posits food and shelter as two fundamental pillars of social justice. He argues about how underprivileged students face major struggles when campus close during summer break in the U.S., leaving them with food and housing insecurity (TEDx Talks, 2019). But in comparison, Dutch universities often leave both to the individual in the first place. Finding accommodation is shaped by discrimination and structural disadvantage, leaving underprivileged students preoccupied with housing issues (Fang & van Liempt, 2021). In regards to food provision, at least in the University of Groningen, catering is outsourced to a private company, that charge regular professional catering prices (University of Groningen, 2018). The result is an offer that is expensive and does not fit the needs of the students, as the student newspaper Ukrant discussed (Coba, 2018). These are already factors that keep university for those who have the resources to maintain their ability to study. Therefore, when investigating well-being and discussing interventions in university, we should keep in mind that disadvantaged students may disproportionately suffer from a lack of support for basic needs like food and shelter, leaving them especially prone to low well-being.

Acknowledging a broader understanding of well-being, taking the experience of a side job into account might gain insight on subjective well-being as a balance of life domains. In regards

to wage labor, Radford et al. (2015) found out that FGS worked more full-time (29.5% of FGS worked fulltime in comparison to 20.9% of CGS). Connecting this to the ideation of work in our participants, how a student approach and evaluate work might depend on the necessity. CGS in our sample often saw a side job as an opportunity for experience, while some FGS said they do not like to have to do it, even if the content of the job is enjoyable. Therefore, we could conclude that if a student needs the job for money, they might also be more likely to also work full-time (Radford et al., 2015) and might hold negative attitudes towards their job, probably due to low perceived autonomy, as suggested by our results. On the other hand, if one can choose their job as a nice addition, they are more autonomous, are able to work part-time and are probably more satisfied with their work-life balance. Future research could investigate in the connection between autonomy and perceived satisfaction as well as ideation of a side job next to the study and connecting this to demographic characteristics like SES.

Future Directions: Towards a Culture of Acknowledgement and Individualized Interventions

Regarding the differences of experiences students had, I suggest to view the struggles of the individuals as unique but predictable, meaning that there are certain demographics that can create common sets of experiences. Universities could make an effort to distinguish the common reasons to why students struggle in order to design individualized interventions.

With regards to future well-being interventions, I argue in the following that both acknowledging intersectional experiences and social groups as well as attacking specific struggles may be crucial.

Enhancing Well-being Through Identification

First, research emphasizes the importance of identification and communities for well-being. In the background of intersectionality theory, Settles and Buchanan (2014) investigated how social-group membership and multiple social identities shape the experience of the individual. They conclude that identification with the own marginalized social group can add positively to psychological well-being (Settles & Buchanan, 2014). Connecting this to the reported alienation that Mai described in her friendships she made through the academic context, it might be helpful to make the existence of FGS more visible, raising awareness about inequalities and strengthening the identities of FGS. Knowing people who had similar experiences may be empowering and awareness about first-generation realities may work against the alienation and misunderstanding.

Enhancing Well-being Through Shared Experience

Additionally, some of the participants had the idea of learning more through Alumni's experience. This idea could be also used to build a network of marginalized students that can guide and support each other and prospective students. As Collins et al. (2021) suggest, participatory and democratic communities with different experience, resources and expertise are great foundations for innovation and therefore likely to enhance well-being for the student body.

Enhancing Well-being Through Individualized Support

If common challenges among students of marginalized communities are identified, individual offers to support could be installed in the university. This could take form as a counsellor or student advisor who is explicitly open and trained to support FGS. The same concept could work for other marginalized students (e.g. Non-EU or People of Color). Offering specific support might also raise awareness and the perception of being seen as a minority.

Opening up these offers to prospective students might even go a step further in deconstructing the hidden curriculum.

Since our sample only consisted of people who already followed a study program, future research might investigate the experiences of those who failed to enter academia to understand the dynamics of the hidden curriculum prior to studying. For example, Bathmaker et al. (2016) point out that entering academia is significantly more difficult for people with a low SES.

Strengths and Limitations

Our study aimed at understanding the conceptualization of well-being through a qualitative approach, therefore no conclusions on hypotheses can be drawn. Though, it may help to create new hypotheses in order to investigate the nature of well-being. Even though, the study consists of only twelve participants, this amount should be sufficient to create an extensive overview (Guest et al., 2006). Additionally, the sample was very diverse, including students from across eight different countries, and five different faculties within Groningen. Within the interviews, some questions in the script were explicitly mentioning the psychological needs within SDT. Therefore, the results on these factors were rather confirmatory then exploratory. Since we only had four participants whose parents do not have a university degree, our results cannot be seen as representative for the body of FGS.

<div align="center">

Conclusion

</div>

For the conceptualization of well-being, it may help to distinct between exogenous and endogenous inputs that contribute towards a subjective well-being, which, in turn, can be seen as a psychological result. Under this conceptualization, we could understand competence, autonomy and relatedness as endogenous inputs and basic needs, such as food and shelter as exogenous. Connecting this to the holistic approach some participants hold towards well-being,

hard distinctions between well-being in academia and general well-being might not be very useful. Future research might help in order to understand the interconnectedness of different domains of life for well-being.

Experiences of FGS in academia are pluralistic, depending on the combination of demographic characteristics and experiences throughout life, though our sample is too small to draw huge conclusions on the social group of FGS. Still, the variety of individual perspectives could already make up for interesting findings on accessibility and suitability of interventions. In light of intersectionality, a strong identity with one's social group as well as awareness about discrimination can be beneficial for well-being among student. Through supporting the founding and visibility of communities, interventions could address positive well-being in terms of identification with the social group and fostering mutual exchange.

Since it might be difficult to generalize findings on multiple experiences onto solutions that fit everyone, individualized support may be a possible strategy. This could take form in terms of struggle-oriented offers like deliberate study advisors. That way, marginalized student might feel more seen as they recognize an offer that is tailored for someone like them.

Furthermore, the university should provide food and shelter for their student in order take the burden of being preoccupied with stressful housing and food preparation. Making it affordable also creates opportunities for prospective poor or otherwise disadvantaged students.

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Appendix

A: Sheets for the Participants

Information about the Research

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- INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESEARCH
  - VERSION FOR PARTICIPANTS

- *Understanding Well-being in Academia through Self-Determination Theory (SDT)*

- **Why do I receive this information?**
  - Dear student, With this form, we would like to provide you with some extra information about our research and its ethical requirements.
  - You have been invited to participate in the research because we believe your meaning is essential to gain an explicit picture of the state of the art of students' well-being at the University of Groningen. Participation in this study should help advance our understanding of how students effectively cope with their university studies and the role of the learning environment in this regard.
  - This research is conducted within the framework of the bachelor's thesis course. Dr Laura Ballato is the main responsible for the research, supervising the students following this course (Gr 2324_2a_22a EN Ballato and 2324_2a_22b EN Ballato).
  - The research project started on February 5 and ended on July 1st.

- **Do I have to participate in this research?**
  - Participation in the research is voluntary, but your consent is required. Therefore, please carefully read this information. Feel free to ask any questions you may have, especially if something is unclear. Only after you fully understand the details should you decide whether to participate. If you choose not to participate, there is no need to provide an explanation, and there will be no negative repercussions. You always retain this right, even after initially consenting to participate in the research.

- **Why this research?**
  - There is not yet a comprehensive definition of what well-being is, especially well-being in the academic context. Recently, it has become evident that Self-Determination Theory (SDT) can play a pivotal role in explaining well-being within academic settings. SDT posits that individuals possess psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When these needs are fulfilled, individuals are more likely to experience well-being and optimal functioning. However, there is limited knowledge about how these needs interact and function together across the various stages of university study.
  - This research investigates how students perceive well-being in the university environment and how these psychological needs change over time and interact to foster well-being. This project employs a qualitative approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews to collect data, which will be analyzed through multistage coding.

- **What do we ask of you during the research?**

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o Firstly, we will request that you carefully read and agree to an informed consent letter, which we will send to you before the interview. During the interview, you will be invited to discuss your personal experience of well-being at the University of Groningen, your experiences with autonomy, competence, and relatedness during your study, what you believe could enhance well-being, and potential actions the university could take to improve well-being beyond its current efforts.

o The interview is expected to last approximately 45-60 minutes. Upon completion of the study, the researcher will offer you the opportunity to reflect on the interview, providing further details about the research. To ensure accuracy, the interview will be audio recorded.

o Participants will have the chance to review a summary of the interview and indicate any parts they prefer not to include in the analysis.

o Additionally, you will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire regarding sociodemographic information beforehand.

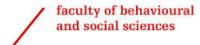o Please note that there is no compensation provided for participation in this research.

- **What are the consequences of participation?**

    o Your participation in the research might contribute to the increasing of the body of knowledge related to well-being, specifically well-being in the academia context.

    o We do not expect any negative effects in participating in the research. The interviewers will be trained in advance to ensure their communication skills are optimal at the time of the interview.

    o You will have the option to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty, and you also have the right to request that my responses will not be used.

- · **How will we treat your data?**

    o Data processing is conducted for educational/training purposes, specifically for writing a bachelor's thesis. Initially, the data will be collected and then analyzed using a qualitative analysis protocol procedure, including transcription, coding, categorization of initial codes, and thematic analysis with the program ATLAS.

    o To ensure a certain level of confidentiality, a pseudonyms and randomization procedure will take place as follows: participants will be assigned pseudonyms generated randomly using an AI tool before their data is shared with other interviewers. Recruited participants will receive a unique number and will be randomly allocated to one of the five other interviewers, excluding the recruiting interviewer. This process ensures that only the interviewer conducting the interview and the one who recruited the participant will have access to the participant's pseudonym and contact information, while the other four interviewers will not.

    o For data security and protection, it will be stored in the Y drive of the university. Only the primary researcher and designated students will have access to the data. Recordings will be deleted once all interviews are transcribed (by June 3 2024), and the data will also be deleted after the project has ended (July 2024).

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o   As previously mentioned, you will have the opportunity to review your interview summary and choose which parts, if any, should not be included in the analysis. Some data may be included in a report sent to university managers, providing suggestions for interventions aimed at enhancing well-being within the university context.

- · **What else do you need to know?**

  o   You may always ask questions about the research: now, during the research, and after the end of the research. You can do so by speaking with one of the researchers present right now or by emailing Laura Ballato(l.ballato@rug.nl) or phoning (06 135 28 515) one of the researchers involved.

  o   Do you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant or about the conduct of the research? You may also contact the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences of the University of Groningen: ec-bss@rug.nl.

  o   Do you have questions or concerns regarding the handling of your personal data? You may also contact the University of Groningen Data Protection Officer: privacy@rug.nl.

As a research participant, you have the right to a copy of this research information.

Informed Consent Form

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- **Informed Consent for Interview Study within the Project: Understanding Well-being in Academia through Self-Determination Theory (SDT)**

April 2024

I, [Participant's Name], hereby consent to participate in the current research conducted by [Researcher's Name], a student at the University of Groningen. Contact: [Researcher's Contact Information]

I have agreed to participate in the study "Understanding Well-being in Academia through Self-Determination Theory (SDT)," understanding that my participation is entirely voluntary. I acknowledge that my data will be kept confidential. I reserve the right to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty and to request that my responses not be used. The researcher is responsible for the secure storage of the data.

I will have the opportunity to review a summary of my interview and indicate whether I wish particular parts not to be considered in the analysis. The data will be only used for educational purpose and will not be published.

I read and understood the information form, which provides more detailed information about the research.

Date: [Participant's Date]

Signature Participant:

Date: [Researcher's Date]

Signature Researcher:

Contact: Dr Laura Ballato
l.ballato@rug.nl
University of Groningen

Demographics Sheet

Demographic Questionnaire Study: Understanding Well-being in Academia through Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Participant _____ (filled out by the researcher)

We kindly request some brief sociodemographic information from you as a participant. This information will assist us in understanding your responses within context.

1. I am   ☐ male   ☐ female

     ☐ prefer not to say

     Define it yourself: _____

2. Age   _____ years

3. Nationality   _____

4. Concerning my studies

     a. Faculty: _____

     b. Department: _____

     ☐ Bachelor   ☐ Master

     ☐ 1st year   ☐ 2nd year   ☐ 3rd year

5. Academic Background: Do your parents have a university degree?

     ☐ yes   ☐ no

6. Are you enrolled in the Honours College of the University of Groningen?

     ☐ yes   ☐ no

If you have any further questions concerning the interview study, do not hesitate to ask. Again, thank you very much for participating in our study and helping us get better insights into well-being at the university.

B: Codebook

Code	Definition	Sample Quotes
Basic Needs		
Housing	Participants described the need for shelter that provides safety and comfort	*"I need to have a good place where I live, where I feel comfortable." (Mai)*
Food	Participants emphasised the need for nutritious food to maintain energy and motivation	*"If I eat good food, then I am more likely to sit down and study." (Sophie)*
Sleep	Participants highlighted the need for adequate rest to ensure proper functioning	*"Sleep for me is very important. If you're not well rested, obviously you're not gonna recollect anything." (Sophie)*
Safety and Security		*"I need to have enough money to buy food and drinks." (Mai)*
Belonging/Relatedness	Participants emphasised the need for financial security and a safe environment	
Routine	Participants underscored the need for interpersonal relationships and being a part of the group	*"Outside academia, I need some friends to talk to, to hang out with." (Robert)*
Free/Leisure Time	Participants talked about the need for a structured schedule that provides consistency	*"My day-to-day can look very similar, I enjoy getting into a good routine." (Kiran)*
Conceptualization of Well-being	Participants emphasised the need for activities for relaxation and enjoyment	*"I need a little bit of outside life, hobbies, like doing sports." (Nina)*
Comfort		
Satisfaction	Participants spoke about finding oneself in a pleasant situation	*"I need to have a good place where I live, where I feel comfortable" (Manaia)*
Happiness	Participants talked about	*"I think it's to a large extent being satisfied with what you're doing" (Andrey)*

Code	Definition	Sample Quotes
Physical Well-Being	a general state of contentment with one's life	*"Well-being in general, I think it means that how you feel, like if you feel good, if you feel happy, its well-being" (Robert)*
Values and Well-Being	Participants named happiness as a positive mental state, often named in combination with well-being	*"I think it's important to stay active, I play football at a club and if for some reason I haven't been training (...) it does have an effect on my mood" (Kiran)*
General Balance	Participants described physical well-being a state in which one is free from disease and is getting adequate excercise	*"I feel like when I don't fulfill those (values), (...) I feel like it negatively influences me" (Mai)*
Holistic Well-Being	Participants described the importance of fulfilling their values to in order to feel well	*"If I take too much too much classes then I get really stressed and then I don't really have life outside of school anymore and then my mental health goes bad" (Nina)*
Perception/Experience of Well-being Positive Well-Being	Participants expressed the importance of having a proper balance between the challenges of academia and their personal lives	*"I would say well-being means to me that I feel physically and emotionally healthy, and I can do things that I want to do and that I'm not limited" (Mai)*
Negative Well-Being	Participants described well-being as a combination of many different factors, most often mental and physical well-being	
Satisfaction with Uni Positive		*"I think I'm a very content with my, with my life at the moment, and then I wouldn't say that there's a situation that can change that would make me feel better now" (David)*
Satisfaction with Uni Negative	Participants describe an experience of positive well-being	*"Especially if there's a high*

Code	Definition	Sample Quotes
Well-Being Development	Participants described an experience of negative well-being	workload. (....) then I don't have a lot of well being because I don't like what I'm doing." (David)
Autonomy		I could easily go to study advisor or something like that. It makes them very approachable. So that that's, that's the main thing to be "proud of" (David)
Autonomy Positive	Participants described being satisfied with a certain aspect of the university	
Autonomy Negative		"So, I honestly don't really feel like the university is doing that many things to enhance my well-being" (Mai)
Autonomy Development	Participants described being dissatisfied with a certain aspect of the university	"I think the first year was really the hardest emotionally, I studied a lot. The second year I started to be more chill about it" (Andrey)
Autonomy Support	Participants described how their well-being has developed during their studies	"If I feel like I have everything in control, I'm managing my deadlines on time, I feel like everything's going well." (Lisa)
Autonomy and Well-Being	Participants defined autonomy as having control over their workload	"In the second year, I always felt like I was not on top of my material, so as a result, I was never in control." (Sophie)
Competence		
Competence Positive		
Competence Negative	Participants defined it as a lack of control over their academic endeavours	"I think at the beginning I was really overwhelmed… Now I feel like I got the hang of it, and I know what I need to do and what's expected of me." (Mai)
Competence Development	Participants talked about progressively gaining more control over their academic journey progressively throughout their studies	"I have the autonomy to fill in quite a lot of things for myself. And it makes it very

Code	Definition	Sample Quotes
Competence and Well-Being		*enjoyable, very motivating to do". (David)*
Self-Esteem	Participants about the impact of autonomy-supporting university structures on their sense of autonomy	*"If I feel like I am in control and I can manage everything myself, I think that does positively influence my well-being." (Mai)*
Self-Confidence	Participants talked about the impact that a sense of control and agency had on their well-being	*"This year, I'm trying to do 75 points in one year and for now I'm on track, so that makes me feel really competent". (Nina)*
Impostor Syndrome	Participants defined competence as being able to succeed in theirs tasks and goals	*"I'm not really good at managing the stuff for university". (Robert)*
Relatedness Relatedness Negative		
	Participants defined it as struggling to succeed in their tasks	*"I did become a lot more secure in my own ability to study, to effectively tackle problems in comparison to the first year." (Sophie)*
	Participants defined it as progressively becoming more self-efficient and confident in their abilities	
Relatedness Positive		*"I see myself as able to do the things that I have to do. It contributes to my well-being." (David)*
	Participants talked about the impact of perceived competence on their well-being	*"And this way, I can be more my authentic self, be more assertive as well, because I respect my needs." (Lisa)*
Relatedness Development	Participants talked about having a positive sense of self-worth	*"I know that if I would try something completely different, I kind of feel like I would still get a good grade in the end." (Bart)*
	Participants defined it as a belief in their abilities	
		"I think I felt like it's so hard to pass anything and am I

Code	Definition	Sample Quotes
		even smart enough to do this? Is it where I belong?" (Mai)
Relatedness and Well-Being	Participants talked about feeling inadequate and uncertain about their abilities compared to their peers	
		"I'm not very connected to my peers in my studies to be honest, like since I changed my bachelor there's yeah a couple of guys there that I do some projects with but I don't talk to anyone there outside of school." (Kiran)
Family/Partner Support	Participants experience a lack of connection to their peers, family and/or studies	
		"Some friends here, yeah. But I mostly talk to my friends back home, that I have for life. And also my parents are really helping me with situations like this because they also went through kind of the same thing" (Robert)
Peer support	Participants describe a fulfilling and meaningful interpersonal relationship with their friends and/or family	
		"First and second year, we were spending like, every day, the whole day together, like, and now it's really, maybe on the weekends, or if we have time then or like in between classes or something… especially this year, I have, like some of my friends I haven't seen at all, but nowhere near as much as compared to the previous years" (Andrey)
Teacher support	Participants describe how their relationships have developed over the years within their bachelor studies	
Teacher Relatedness Positive		*"It's positive for me. We hang every week and it just helped me because then we can talk about things and just relax together" (Nina)*
Teacher Relatedness	Participants experience how connections with people influence their	*"I also have like, my partner is also, uh, finishing up their*

Code	Definition	Sample Quotes
Negative	perceived well-being	*degree right now. So that's also, that's also really helpful. Like when I'm feeling stuck, then I talk to her and then she kind of gets me out of it again"* (Bart)
Community	Participants talk about their experiences of support from their family or life partners.	*"Like I said, the UCG, so my faculties, the community, the community is very tight-knit and they're very supportive of each other and the teachers as well. They're very close with the students, so it's a really nice environment to be in honestly. (Manaia)*
Dealing with stress Communication/Relatedness	Participants talk about the importance of a trustworthy and reliable peer support network	*"A very important factor is that I, at least for me, is that I can go at the end of the lecture and ask the professor questions that I have, and then they answer"* (Sophie)
Art Solitude	Participants' perception of the teacher's willingness to aid students in their academic journey.	*"With the teachers? Well, compared to what I've had before, they're super,super engaging. They're very calm, but that also might be because we're in uni, so I guess they treat us more like adults here or something"* (Manaia)
Stress avoidance	Participants recall positive experiences with teachers in which they could relate to them	*"I feel like we didn't have that much close contact with teachers, and I can, I don't know, reflect on it, because I think a lot of times it was also just other students that taught practicals"* (Mai)
Mindfulness/Meditation Solution-Focused coping	Participants recall unpleasant or alienating experiences with teachers	*"Well, we all live in the same building, actually. So we're*

Code	Definition	Sample Quotes
Reframing	in which they could not relate to their teachers	*very, very close, I would say. They're very easy people to talk to. Obviously, there's groups here and there, but usually they're really easy to enter, like the groups and friends of different people across the years as well"* (Manaia)
Physical activity	Participants stress the importance of a sense of community. A network of people one can rely on and seek emotional support from if needed.	*"Now it's more communicating with people, because, like I said, people here are a lot more open-minded and more willing to talk about, like, issues and problems"* (Manaia)
Being outside	Participants reported talking with peers or family as a method of dealing with stress	*"I also like to use my poetry a lot."* (Manaia)
Time management		*"And also spend time just by myself or just go for a walk by myself. Or just have a day where I'm alone. I think that's very helpful"* (Lisa)
	Participants reported creating art as a method of dealing with stress	*"I was just like, I don't have time for this. I don't have time to stress over it."* (Sophie)
Stress Others		
Positive/functional stress	Participants reported spending time alone as a method of dealing with stress	*"I like mindfulness. I don't know, I meditate a lot"* (Julia)
Negative effects of stress		
	Participants described avoiding stress as way to cope with stress	*"So going to the library and then having stress is OK and just working through it and then when I get home then I'll just relax again"* (Nina)
Stress and well-being	Participants reported the us of meditation or a focus on mindfulness with as a method of dealing with stress	*"I can see it in in the in the*

Code	Definition	Sample Quotes
Resilience	Participants reported taking action against stressors as a method of dealing with stress	*context, and I can see okay, well, I'm feeling shit now. But you feel horrible every once in a while. That's also what makes you able to feel good. So and yeah, I've been able to deal with it more" (David)*
Uni Workload Positive	Participants reported taking a new stance on stressors as a method of dealing with stress	*"I did go sometimes on some walks throughout the city at night, uh, for like one hour, two hours with just my headphones and my thoughts alone and that was rather nice, rather refreshing" (Sophie)*
Uni Workload negative		*"Uh lately (...) or going on a walk." (Andrey)*
Pressure to perform/Fear of failure	Participants reported being physically active as a method of dealing with stress	*"I definitely manage organizing myself, especially during exam season. I have a schedule which I follow like example coming up so I can manage my time effectively" (Najeeb)*
Absence of Stress	Participants reported spending time outside or in nature as a method of dealing with stress	
Time pressure	Participants report preventing stressful situations by making use of effective time management	*"if I'm not stressed at all, I feel like I'm not doing the right thing. I feel like I'm not doing that much." (Najeeb)*
		"I'm really overwhelmed by the stress, and I really don't know what to do. I oftentimes can't really do any more work after that for the rest of the day, or for a couple of hours." (David)
Conceptualising Achievement	Participants describe a stressor as functional or positive.	*"I was so like mentally drained, like under stress that I didn't, couldn't even*

Code	Definition	Sample Quotes
		study." (Sophie)
	Participants speak about the negative impact of stress	*"then just communicated (the stressor) with some of my friends here. There's really nothing hard to get rid of." (Manaia)*
	Participants describe the relationship between the experience of stress and feeling well in academia	*"Yeah, only positively because the workload was not quite a lot extra. But I did get the advantages." (David)*
	Participants describe their ability to withstand stressors	*"I had my quantum physics exam on Thursday and then an exam next Wednesday. And then I only had four days to study" (Sophie)*
	Participants experience the university workload as managable or realistic	*"In my second year, I just always felt like I'm underperforming. Although, like on paper I really wasn't. But I had this state of mind that everything is going bad" (Sophie)*
	Participants experience the university workload as unmanagable or unrealistic	*"Everyone knows that I don't stress as much because I know that I'm going to study, do my best and hope for the best" (Najeeb)*
	Participants experience stress to achieve certain results within their studies	*"I would say right now I'm probably like the most stressed that I've been in my stuies so far, because a lot of really important, stuff is coming up" (Bart)*
	Participants report to experience no stress at all	

Code	Definition	Sample Quotes
	Participants report feelings of stress because of deadlines or upcoming exams	
Importance of Grades	Participants highlighted the importance of grades, discussing their impact on academic goals, self-esteem, and future opportunities.	*"I think talking about high achievement would be for me to pass everything without having any resits, and ideally passing with a good grade." (Mai)*
Comparison with Others	Participants compared themselves with others, reflecting on their relative academic performance and achievements.	*"I'd say that it's all about (...) grades relative to peers." (David)*
Fulfilling Expectations	Participants described their experiences with fulfilling expectations, including academic, personal, and external standards.	*"I just automatically expect that I can get everything done."* (Julia)
Recognition	Participants discussed the recognition they received for their achievements, including praise from peers, family, and faculty.	*"The words of my teachers. Their 'words, those they make me very happy. Vividly sometimes I remember their feedback." (Lisa)*
Achievement as a Tool	Participants viewed achievement as a tool for advancing future goals and gaining novel opportunities.	*"For me, grades don't have an inherent value. It's just a tool to get to where I want to get." (Julia)*
Effort	Participants emphasized the role of effort in achieving success, highlighting the importance of hard work, perseverance, and dedication.	*"You can get a good grade without working hard (...) but like high achieving actually working on what you're doing and even if you don't get a good grade, at least you know what you did is your best so you would be happy about it." (Najeeb)*

Code	Definition	Sample Quotes
Understanding	Participants emphasized the importance of understanding concepts deeply, rather than merely passing or getting high grades.	*"Really understanding everything is probably the most important thing in academia" (Andrey)*
Achievement (Other)		
Importance of Achievement	Participants underscored the significance of achievement as an indication of personal progress, academic success, and future opportunities.	*"For me are important because if I don't have these achievements, if I don't pass all the courses, then I will not be able to continue next year here." (Robert)*
Importance of Achievement Negative	Participants indicated that achievement was not very important to them.	*"High achievement isn't really that important for me." (Nina)*
Achievement Expectations	Participants discussed their perceptions and experiences regarding achievement expectations, including internal and external pressures .	*"I feel like if I don't fulfil those things then I feel like I'm not as capable or competent or I'm not doing those things that I should be doing." (Mai)*
Honours College (HC)		
HC Content	Participants discussed the content of the honours college program, such as coursework and learning experiences.	*"Maybe in honors, I think there are some courses that have very strict structure." (Lisa)*
HC Relatedness	Participants described a sense of relatedness and connection within the honours college.	*"I think we can comfort each other a lot because we're going though similar things. Especially in honors because the sense of pressure is really there" (Lisa)*
HC Perceived Advantages	Participants identified perceived advantages of the honours college program, such as	*"We also get extra classes" (Sophie)*

Code	Definition	Sample Quotes
	enhanced academic opportunities and personal growth.	
HC Satisfaction Positive	Participants expressed positive satisfaction with their experiences in the honours college program.	*"It was a bumpy road but I'm glad I did it. That's what I tell everyone when they ask me about honors." (Lisa)*
HC Satisfaction Negative	Participants expressed a lack of satisfaction with their experiences in the honours college program.	*"Overall, I wouldn't say it's very useful personally." (Andrey)*
Values and Well-Being		
Autonomy (value)	Participants emphasized the importance of autonomy as a value, used to guide them through university	*"For me to be able to, uh, be confident and like the university experience, I really, really need to be in control" (Sophie)*
Conscientiousness	Participants explain the importance of being responsible, careful, and diligent	*"Being organised, beginning on time, learning throughout the block as well." (Nina)*
Discipline	Participants describe discipline as the way to do what needs to be done	*"But yeah, just be determined to complete what I started, and then get on the path that I wanted to get on eventually, and just stick to that, basically." (Manaia)*
Drive/ambition	Participants see drive/ambition as motivation to achieve greater things	*"So I think also like keep taking that kind of risk, like of potential failure or potential success is, uh, for me also a big, pretty big one to like, keep it a bit more interesting for me." (Bart)*

Code	Definition	Sample Quotes
Effort/hard work	Participants emphasize the extent of work one is putting in	*"Yeah, just like trying your best or doing it even if you don't like it. You know, I think that's part of well-being in this context." (Andrey)*
Independence	Participants express the need for freedom from the control, influence, or like of others	*"You see what you can do better and, sort of taking charge in your life like that. Not try to let I don't know outside factors or other people influence you too much. You take charge of what you want to do how you want to do is, you know." (Kiran)*
Self-Awareness	Participants understand self-awareness as the ability to understand your one's own thoughts, strengths, weaknesses, and beliefs	*"And this way I can be more my authentic self and maybe yeah, be more assertive as well, because I respect my needs. And then I feel like the cooperation with other people is also great on the professional level or personal" (Lisa)*
Being perceived as a person	Participants believe that there should be an appreciation of people seeing them as who they are	*""(...) when I would feel that people who are around me, or, or maybe my supervisors, or bosses kind of care about my mental state, or well being apart from my academic performance. So they kind of acknowledged me as (...) a human who can have breakdowns or personal failures or feel pressured, or overwhelmed. " (Lisa)*
Career		*"I think I'm what I want to get out of the study is to get a job that I really like. And a*

Code	Definition	Sample Quotes
Caring for others	Participants view career as a value in terms of components that define their professional career	*job that really doesn't stress me and that i love for years and years. So I think that's the goal." (Nina)*
Relatedness (values)	Participants believe that one should have the ability to be empathetic and be able to connect to others	*"Second of all, a very important thing for me is if somebody asks me for help, I help them because I feel like if I wanted to know something and I went to ask somebody, I would very much like if they would answer me rather than ignore me. So I feel like it's a very important thing that when somebody asks me, I answer the question. So I put a lot of value on that." (Sophie)*
Contribution	Participants value and believe that one needs to belong	
	Participants understand contribution as the belief that one is able to help and develop a sense of purpose in life	*"The most important part for me was finding a group of people and then like, you know, them help you helping each other out Yeah. Rather than university really stepping up. So that's how I experienced my studies*

Code	Definition	Sample Quotes
		study so far.” (Sophie)
		“Teaching just really, really makes me happy. Mm-Hmm. So, uh, answering any questions, lovely stuff. Mm-Hmm. um, especially when, like, for example, in the past two months, uh, now that we're at the end, and also now that we really sort of know each other in our cohort.” (Sophie)
Self-care	Participants understand the importance of taking time to do things that help and improve both your physical and mental health	*“Having time to keep everything clean, like not necessarily clean or anything like ordered and everything in my house, like making sure everything's you know how it's supposed to be” (Andrey)*
Positivity	Participants view positivity as the belief that one should hold a positive attitude to cope with adverse situations	*“I think you need to be positive in every situation. You don't need to... If you, if you hear bad news, you don't need to feel like the world is ending for you. And you don't need to you, don't have to do it. You just need to ... I don't know how to say. You just need to” (Robert)*
Personal growth		

Code	Definition	Sample Quotes
Purpose/meaning in life	Participants define personal growth as being involved in becoming more aware of ourselves, and having the will to grow into the person we want to be	*"Because even like, even if some stuff is difficult, if not too many things, like if a limited number of things are difficult, then then once you are able to do them, at the end of the day, you feel better than if everything was very, very easy. Right? So I think having some difficult stuff that makes you feel incompetent, is also good"* (Andrey)
Knowledge	The participants belief that one should have a sense of meaning and direction in life	*"I wanted to be able to contribute to society, I'd say If that makes it it's not necessarily making a lot of money or anything. That's that's that's. That's a little less interesting to me."* (David)
Interventions Satisfaction with Uni Positive	The belief that educating oneself sufficiently is important in order to make correct decisions in life	*"Obviously that's not gonna be that much beneficial in the long run. Mm-Hmm. Uh, when you go into PhD, professorships, whatever you do specialize in one topic. But I think if you want to still specialize in one topic, it's very important that you have a background in a lot of different things"* (Sophie)
Satisfaction with Uni Negative	Participants describe their pleasant experiences within the university environment	*"Diversity, especially for this course. For me, academia is not really about just studying and then passing your exams. I really like to learn what I'm learning, and that's why I like the diversity of my course, specifically"* (Manaia)

Code	Definition	Sample Quotes
Accessibility of Support Negative	Participants give a negative evaluation and show general discontent towards the university	*"Yeah, I feel like I have no relationship with the university. I just go to just go back home and not think about university at all. Yeah, like it's completely different than when I was in school where I actually had a good relationship with my school"* (Najeeb)
Accessibility of Support Negative	Participants talk about multiple services provided by the university to aid students in fostering and maintaining their well-being	*Over the years I kind of learned how academia works and what are the roles and the functions. The teachers, the study advisors. I also, along the way, I learned how to ask for help, or support. I also did the student service psychologist session."* (Lisa)
Respect for Student's Opinion	Participants describe negative experiences with support services provided by the university	*"I don't think it's really that accessible because I've heard of a friend of mine who also applied for the student psychologist and they had like a wait time of two to three months at that time."* (Nina)
Positive Learning Environment	Participants feeling of their voice/opinions being heard and considered by university staff	*"And even after like multiple complaints, and when we have like the second level of this course, in the second year, they didn't take our complaints into account and they just copy pasted the same three pages of the mental health"* (Sophie)
Interventions Relatedness	Participants' idea of a safe and nurturing learning environment	*"I need a safe environment to be who I want to be. In a sense that I can share my ideas, share my critique, share my passion about things without feeling that it's frowned upon or not*

Code	Definition	Sample Quotes
		wanted." (David)
Interventions Autonomy	Participants talk about how the university could foster a more supportive environment fulfilling the need for relatedness	*"I think like in the first year you have a student mentor and faculty mentor, I think if that's a bit in a background as well for the second year, I think that will help, because in the first year I had a great student menor and she really helped me with managing expectations and that like type of stuff. I think it would be great if something like that would be accessible for the second and third years if you wanted." (Nina)*
Interventions Competence	Participants talk about how the university could foster a more supportive environment fulfilling the need for autonomy	*"I think I can't think of something specific apart from what we're doing now. I guess just the individual approach of teachers. That they can like recommend and maybe teach us guidelines from the organizational perspective. Where they give lessons and teachings." (Lisa)*
Awareness of Interventions by Uni	Participants talk about how the university could foster a more supportive environment fulfilling the need for competence	*"At the start of the year, the courses that we got weren't like run mainly by the teachers. They were by the TAs, which are students. So the students like us first years, they couldn't manage to understand what's happening because the teacher isn't actually the one lecturing us… So yeah, teachers should have a more role in our courses I believe." (Najeeb)*
No Perceived Need for Interventions		
	Participants awareness	*"The only thing that I know*

Code	Definition	Sample Quotes
	regarding interventions provided by the university to improve students' mental well-being	*of is the student psychologist, but further I don't really know that the university does anything. Maybe it's because I don't know." (Nina)*
	Participants' opinions on whether interventions by the university are necessary or not	*"But I think in my life at least that's the furthest that the university goes to do anything, you know. I think for well-being and things like that. You don't go to your university, right? You talk to your friends. You talk to your parents, you do something like that. So, yeah, I also don't really think it's the universities role to take care of students too much outside of class." (Kiran)*
First-Generation Experience		
Family/Partner Support	Participants' perception on support by their family or partner	*Well, yeah, I received a lot of support from my mother. Definitely. Well, of course, my grandparents as well, because it is a prestige thing. I guess. (David)*
Financial Situation	Participants mention or talk about their financial situation, implicitly or explicitly	*And now, I mean, my parents are there to talk and they support me emotionally, but they cannot support me financially, so I don't get any money from them (Mai)*
Hidden Curriculum	The hidden curriculum in academia describes a covert set of expectations or values that are not explicitly taught but gives an advantage to those	*A lot of them are like children of lawyers or this very kind of high institutional. High class...There you can see*

Code	Definition	Sample Quotes
	who inherit the values, norms and beliefs of mainstream society, predominantly upper and middle-class (Kentli, 2009). The code was applied whenever participants mentioned aspects that fitted in the concept.	*their childhood has been very educated and they've been kind of brought up for that knowledge. So you can see they're intelligent. Because they have it in their genes. (Lisa)*
Alienation/Perceived Differences	Suited for FGS, when they mention alienation or differences because of their first-generation status	*I do feel connected to them, but I also definitely see differences. And I think we also have different opinions about certain things. (Mai)*
Society's Expectations	FGS talk about how they perceive expectations of society influence their experience	*I think I do think that there's just a bit more of a social pressure on studying. (Bart)*
Wage Labour		
Job yes	Applied if participant reports having a job	*I work as a teaching assistant. (Sophie)*
Job no	Applied if participant reports not having a job	*No, I don't [work], unfortunately. (Manaia)*
Job Experience Positive	Participants experience their job positively	*Yes, I do not really have to work besides my studies. But I do because I like it. And it gets a little extra money, of course, nice. (David)*
Study/Work Balance Positive	Participants evaluate positively how studying and working in a job goes together	*So how I manage it... I have it really packed but I have like the physical cleaning job is like regular. And then I have those other jobs which are kind of freelance or I can plan and randomly or put*

Code	Definition	Sample Quotes
		it in the free spot that I have in my day. So it's quite flexible. (Lisa)
Study/Work Balance Negative	Participants evaluate negatively how studying and working in a job goes together	*It's just annoying 'cause you just got, uh, especially now in like writing the thesis and like making the end work, it just takes up so much time. (Bart)*
Job Ideation Positive	Wether participants had a job or not, the code refers to participants' positive attitudes towards a job and how they ideate it.	*I do want to work. I think it's an important experience to have to be able to be independent and manage everything. I don't think it would add that much to my workload, honestly. (Manaia)*
Job Ideation Negative	Whether participants had a job or not, the code refers to participants' negative attitudes towards a job and how they ideate it.	*If you know for people who who actually really need the money and who are working a lot and you know probably overworking then I think at that point negative (Kiran)*

C: First-Generation Experiences: Full-Length Quotes

Manaia

Well, my parents didn't get a degree but my brother is. in the US so I got my first, I guess,

experience of it through him because he also left prior to uni. So I was already like in the

mindset of, you know, getting used to being away from family because he was going and

then the whole family was changing.

Oh well, my parents for sure have been super supportive about what I wanted to do and the path I want to take and just anything academic related. They're just proud parents in general which is very nice to have and yeah, like I said, the UCG, so my faculties, the community, the community is very tight-knit and they're very supportive of each other and the teachers as well. They're very close with the students, so it's a really nice environment to be in, honestly.

I feel supported by, you can feel supported by anyone there, like anyone's really free to talk.

Lisa

Well, the entry to academia was, of course, supported my mom in a way that she felt happy that I'm coming here that I am going to a university that I picked by myself because I wanted to study here, but I feel like she doesn't really understand what university life is about. Yeah. So she can kind of support me to an extent or on an emotional level. Also in there to an extent, because she can't really feel empathy for me to put herself in my shoes. So sometimes I feel like she downplays the responsibilities that I have. When I come home, I cannot focus too much on my work, because she doesn't take it that seriously. So that's sometimes not as good. But yeah, she also supports me financially.

Well, I came here and I was kind of I came from a system or society, which is a more conservative way where people kind of tell me what to do. And you have to be quiet do as others tell you

And now, as opposed to poor socialist country. So coming here, I also thought that like, for first year, I cannot, I don't know, ask for extensions, or just stand up and talk. Even those professors were like, yeah, this is an open space, we can argue we can talk about anything

or you don't have to agree with everything. I felt like, No, this is like an authority I have to listen to them. And just yeah, see them as a god. I think that living here in such a progressive country where yeah, people are used to speaking up and saying their stance, and that has changed me a lot. And I, I kind of started to take all my professors as equals or kind of don't see them as a god.

And I feel that has helped me to kind of find more self respect. Also, also speaking my mind, I think, which has opened a lot of opportunities for me, too.

Interviewer: Okay, would you say it's also because you were a bit more shy coming into studies, and not knowing how exactly things worked and might have contributed to you not, you know, speaking up and always expressing your thoughts

Yeah, also definitely, I think I had like that impostor syndrome saying, thinking everybody's better than me and then especially in honors though, because I'm from (inaudible) which is..

There I felt like I'm not belonging here. Just people are way smarter, like I don't know. I had no clue sometimes what was going on in the lesson and I still don't but I kind of learned or like, yeah, to accept that, or don't take it as a personal failure. And also, I think, why I felt shy and stuff like that is because I saw the Dutch students being super assertive. And their presentational skills, although they weren't saying much or like meaningful things, they could sell it or, because of their assertiveness, and maybe self respect, and all of these autonomous values, they kind of felt that it was ingrained in them that they can just do this and that I felt like, I could never pull this off.

because there's still the division felt between Dutch students and internationals. I feel like these are two worlds that you cannot connect.

So the division is also felt in class. And teachers notice it too. There's that fraternity label of the Dutch people. Even teachers address if I talk to them. So yeah this is very much felt. Or when they start speaking to the teacher in Dutch because the teacher is Dutch. There's always this kind of sense of disrespect. They make the division clear.

[about students in honors] A lot of them are like children of lawyers or this very kind of high institutional. High class...There you can see their childhood has been very educated and they've been kind of brought up for that knowledge. So you can see they're intelligent. Because they have it in their genes.

Yeah, if I was only taking media studies I would feel lazy. Because I feel like the expectations are lower for passing. I think I could give 10 hours a week to school and I would pass everything in media studies. Probably all 7's or so, yeah. This is why I picked up honors because it felt too easy but also interesting, but easy.

Mai

So first of all, it was not really easy to get to university and enrol because I didn't have the support. My parents didn't even know what a bachelor's or master's degree was.

there have been moments, as I said before, where I just felt stressed or I didn't know how to manage or I felt overwhelmed or where I needed to find housing and couldn't find housing or where I had financial problems

I think, compared to someone who might come from a background where the parents studied, I think it wouldn't be as much of an issue to quit or change degrees and stuff. And I think that's really not an option for me.

I mean, I think I have a very good friend group, they're the best friends I could ask for, and I feel really connected to them. But I mean if I go back to the point of my parents not studying

and coming from a different background, I think I can really, really notice or feel the differences. I think they take me for who I am, but I'm the only personin my friend group who's not financially supported for example, or whose parents didn't study. So a lot of times I do feel connected to them

I do feel connected to them, but I also definitely see differences. And I think we also have different opinions about certain things. And I think some things that they would take for granted, for example, that they're getting money every month, I would never, and I think they also have a different way of looking at work. I think from how I grew up, work is necessary to survive. And for them, they view career and work a bit differently, because I think they have more freedom to choose and more support in a way. So I think sometimes it's also a bit interesting trying to find my own perspective and opinion coming from a super different background and then socializing with people who are also very different, and then figuring out my own opinion and my own perspective on things. So I think that doesn't really influence my connectedness to them, but there are for sure a lot of differences.

I think mostly my parents, because I think now that I started studying, I mean no one in family studied and also in the surrounding where I grew up, it's relatively poor and people don't study. I think it's really a thing for them that they're like oh, our daughter studies. And I think that also kind of puts me under a lot of pressure because I feel like it's generally known that their daughter is studying now, gets them out of this situation, and is going to do this and this, and goes to this and this university. And I think that really guides my actions, and I think also makes me study harder or want to please people and show that I'm the one who can do it a bit. And I think it's also my own motivation, my intrinsic

motivation that I feel that I really like this degree and I want to finish it. But I think those expectations and outer circumstances really pushed me to do it in three years and not need any longer, and to not do things that don't really... You know what I mean. So I think, yeah, my own motivation pushes me to study, but I think if I didn't have my parents, or had more financial resources or whatever, I think I might use some more time or do some other things in between. And I think that really keeps me from not considering those options too much.

I think, if I reflect on times where I didn't feel in control, was maybe sometimes where I felt like I didn't understand certain procedures at uni, or how to enrol, or what I do when certain things happen. And I think there could be maybe a program or a certain person that I could always contact that could always help me so that I feel more in control. But I guess that is probably also the study advisor that I would contact then. But yeah, I think just more guidance on how to do certain things, how I enrol, what's expected of me. I think just a bit more explanation. I think a lot of times, looking back, we needed to figure out a lot of things by ourselves and I think a bit more support or maybe another lecture about how to enrol or do certain things would've really helped.

Bart

Um, I felt pretty good. Must say, uh, <laugh>. Yeah. I think also like, um, I think also because my parents never followed a university degree, um, they were always quite like, uh, not, they were definitely not pushing on it, but they were always quite encouraging it like, please, please just study. It was just like, please do your best in school. Like, you know, kind of how every parent would do it. Like every parent wants their child to do well in school. Um, but I wasn't, I mean, I wasn't the greatest high school student. Uh, I just have,

I, I think I also have like, I don't know, like, just difficulty with learning. Like, I can't really like, learn stuff out of a book or anything. That's also why I'm not in, um, like a super theoretical degree, but more on a practical degree. Um, so that's very nice that I did still find my way through it.

Um, and my parents have just always been very supportive with it. They've always been, yeah. Just telling me that they're proud of me <laugh>. So that was nice. Like, I never, and I also never felt any pressure of them like, uh, doing it or not doing it. I think I do think that there's just a bit more of a social pressure on studying.

If you don't have a degree, then you're fuck up kind of. But that's, so yeah

Interviewer: Is it very, um, pronounced like here in the Netherlands? Is it a big thing or?

Yeah, I would say so. But maybe that's also, maybe also within like the circle circles in which I surround myself. where like, now I am a student, so like most of my friends are also students or have studied. Um, I do also have some friends that have not studied and are super happy. Uh, people with really fun jobs they really enjoyed doing and they've really found their, um, their thing already and their path. And that's, that's really great. And they don't have a giant student student loan, so that's a giant plus.

But I do think that it is like a big thing. Like when we, especially in a city like here, which is such like a heavy student city, like almost all the people here, like almost all the young people here are students. Um, and like, it's kind of the first thing you say as well, right? When you meet someone new, like, oh, what's your name? Okay, cool. What do you study? And then you're like, like if you, if you wouldn't study, then you're like, oh, I don't study. It's like a really weird thing.

I did do the whole student loan thing. Um, and I work a side job of two days next to it.

Then part-time job duo and duo. Yeah. Fucking duo

Interviewer: How does working next to your studies influence you?

Um, yeah, honestly, it really sucks. Like <laugh> it, like it, it's really annoying.

I think [I work] like between 16 and 18 hours a week. Okay. Um, um, yeah. And I work as a bike mechanic. So it's a very different, it's in a way like a very different thing. It is still very practical, which is, which I do also really enjoy. Um, but yeah, honestly, it fucking sucks. Like just working my ass off for minimum wage just so I can, 'cause I'm also getting my driver's license now. Yeah. And like, all the money that I, uh, that I earned in my job goes now it goes directly into, into that. But besides that, yeah. It, it's just, it's just annoying 'cause you just got, uh, especially now in like writing the thesis and like Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> making the end work, it just takes up so much time. Uh, and before, like in the previous years it was all right 'cause then like you, 'cause at my school you can really like, sort of choose your own hours and you don't really have a lot of lectures. And like, if you want to, you can just work all night and create a lot of stuff. Um, like you can, yeah. You can just make your own hours and then it's really fine. But now it's really annoying all the time. So now it's really annoying and stressful.

Awareness of Interventions: All Quotes

This is an extensive list of all answers toward the question "*what does the university currently do to facilitate students' well-being?*"

Andrey: Uh I don't know. Uh, I know that I know that you have those free sessions at the psychologist. I know that. So that's one thing. Um, other things. I don't know. I wouldn't say so. No, I don't. I don't think there's anything else they do.

Bart: Ooh. Um, I have no idea. To be honest. I think there is, uh, I think there is like a school

psychologist as well. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, I'm also not sure. Don't quote me on that. I

think so <laugh>. Um, I think also, I think, I think that because I don't, because I don't

really actively look for it. Um, 'cause I don't feel like I need it. I also really, I therefore, I

don't know, and maybe that is a questionable thing that like, you only know when you

really need it. That might also be a bit wonky, a bit weird. Um, so yeah, to be honest, I

don't know actually. Okay. I mean, I got sent this, uh, this, this, this like an email. Yeah. I

got sent an email with like, um, what do you call it, a survey? Like how are you feeling?

And I feel like that's like, that's what I got kind of <laugh>.

David: They have quite a lot of attention to students well being I think. Not sure how that's how

it is in psychology, but for sociology, specifically, all kinds of help and all. First contact

persons are quite easy to reach the threat and low threshold I was looking for, I could

easily go to study advisor or something like that. It makes them very approachable. So that

that's, that's the main thing to be proud of. More important.

Julia: Well, we have the, what are they called? Study advisors, I guess that's nice. I dunno if

they're helpful. I haven't been to one, my friend has been a week ago, and she thought it

was pointless, but maybe that was just one negative experience.

Kiran: Okay, okay I know for other people they do quite a bit, you know, you have Student

associations things like that and all this but I Think to my extent I just take the university's

input sort of at face value, right? There's there are the lecturers who go there and give the

lectures Yeah, and there's tutorials organized by the university on the exams and then the

university gives you a degree

Lisa: Well, they offer those therapy session but also group courses on I think procrastination, self- doubt, ADHD and ADD. I think I've seen on Brightspace this one. Especially the ADHD one. How to manage their work and how to structure their study. People who have this kind of condition. And those honors courses about well-being were helpful. Or at least they were there. And I think associations as well. If you could connect them as well to university fostering that social life. Which sometimes, I had the need for. Or there are a lot of parties or social going on. Where you can even as a first year. I went to as much as possible and learned to not feel stressed. Environments with new people or just strangers.

Najeeb: OK. Like as a Palestinian, so half Jordan, half Palestinian, They didn't do anything much, but yeah, it's all right, so... And other than that, I don't see like any contribution from the university on our well-being and that's it, yeah.

Mai: Honestly, I feel like, not a lot... I mean there are probably things that I could do to improve my well-being that are offered by the university, but honestly, I feel like everything that kind of enhances my well-being at university right now is kind of done by me or my friends. I feel like... yeah, nothing I can really think of. I think If I really had issues, I could talk to a study advisor or get some support or help, but I think if I was not feeling good, I would maybe not necessarily go there but talk to a friend. So, I honestly don't really feel like the university is doing that many things to enhance my well-being.

Manaia: So we have a study association called Kairos, which is led by students of the second year, first and second years. Actually, I think it's a year, really. And they organize events where all of us hang out together, stuff like that. We have, like, the Sway community as well. [...] It's the, like, sexual awareness, well-being something something. And basically during our events, they're kind of present there, like, as a trust person, which is, I guess, a

lot more comfortable because, obviously, there are a lot of cases of sexual harassment everywhere, and it's just nice to have that community. Yeah, it's very close-knit, everyone, the community, the association kind of pinpoints people that you can talk to about different things, is it academia, is it personal things? Like, you don't have to, obviously, but it's just, like, making the environment a lot more comfortable. But I wouldn't say that's particularly what the university is doing. […] I think it's that, it's that they give the students that amount of independence to run things the way they think they should. Like, they're very trusting of the students that they have, which is very respectable, in my opinion. And they know that at the end of the day, like, we're the ones that are going to be spending time here, we're the ones that are having this completely new experience. So how could they tell us what we need, like, so they just let us lead how we want to lead. And then, like I said, they're always available for support.

Nina: The only thing that I know of is the student psychologist, but further I don't really know that the university does anything. Maybe it's because I don't know, or maybe it's because they don't really involve with that.

Robert: I think the most important thing that they do that I found the most important thing is that they are always encouraging you to talk to an academic advisor.

Sophie: So, uh, I mean, first of all, there's a few things. First of all, on paper they do put those, for those labs, they do put like numbers you can call, which great for them. But I mean, okay. Second of all, there's this five meetings that you can have with the university psychologists, which I think is a pretty cool thing. Also to have it for free and everything else. I did use it once. It was nice. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, uh, also to just have somebody to talk to about like your life situation and then like them not remembering it for

the rest of your life. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. So that was cool. Um, I think otherwise, yeah, I don't know if Dutch universities are really very big on wellbeing.

Ideas of Interventions: All Quotes

Andrey: I mean, just kind of publicize those specific things, because if, I mean, again, it exists, it doesn't matter if nobody knows. I think, yeah, something just making sure everybody knows. I don't know how, but I would say that's the main thing. Making sure that more people are aware of what's being offered.

Andrey: Um, and in terms of, uh, the control part. Um, I mean, obviously having the choice to do courses is nice, but that's not always available. So I would say, um, I will, actually, I'm not sure about that last part, the control part, what they could do. Because, I mean, the stuff that, Like you have, like for example, the course, like choosing your own stuff, like they can't allow everything to be chosen, you know, to choose your own courses all the time. So I don't know. Uh, for that last part, I'm not sure.

Bart: I think I'm, yeah, I think like a lot of like technical organization stuff with <my art school> is like oftentimes quite badly organized. Like they don't like... you have a lecture and you don't know where to go. 'cause like <laugh> even the lecturer doesn't know where to go, kind of, you know, like that kind of stuff. Interviewer: What we always like months in advance. We know once you enrol and everything's already scheduled. Bart: Exactly. Yeah, that's really not the case in me. So like that's stuff is just annoying, but it's not like, um, I feel like it doesn't affect the study. Uh, maybe it does affect the study. It's actually, 'cause I mean like, it, it is annoying so therefore you get annoyed at the institution as well. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Um, which is not a very good thing. So I think like, just like a

lot of like organizational stuff, I mean, can definitely be improved. Um, and therefore like making students like the university a bit better as well.

Bart: Uh, I think, um, I think definitely like <laugh> either make studying for free <laugh>, like make it not, uh, not cost any money or, um, get more like financial aid from the government in that regard. 'cause like, even though working next to your study is possible, it, it's just really, really not beneficial for, uh, students' mental health I would say. 'cause it just takes up so much. Like it takes up a lot of time that you need for studying or it takes up all the time that you have your free time kind of. So you're like, then you just get into this circle where you're never, you never actually get to relax kind of. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Um, because you have to work to pay for your studies or you have to work to live because you already, yeah. Um, so I feel like that would be, that would be definitely a very big thing to me. If I would just, I don't know, to just go to do the Sweden, Sweden thing where like studying is just for free.

Bart: Um, also, also the, the, the mensa you have in, in Germany, right? Like you have the cantine Interviewer: Super cheap food, yes. Bart: Yeah. Where you get like where and also where everybody can walk in. It's not only students that are allowed in there. I think. Right. Interviewer: Cheaper for students though. Bart: But still, I think, I don't know. I really, really find that also a really cool thing also for community building where Interviewer: Yeah, we don't have it here at all. I was very surprised. I mean, I think its ridiculously overpriced. Like some cafeteria's where you pay 7, 8, 9 euros for a meal. Bart: Yeah. For a small meal that like, that also like oftentimes doesn't even feel that amazing. Uh, so I feel like that's also like such a big thing that could really be improved. Um, like having something like that. Interviewer: That's interesting actually. That's a good point. But I don't

think they're gonna change it anytime soon. Bart: I also don't think so. I think they're just going to plop another Albert Heijn to go.

Bart: And but I do feel like that would also be, if it sounds quite hard, of course I would like, when you're a professor, you have like 300 students Yeah. That you're lecturing, uh, like obviously you're not gonna remember all their names and it's very fair. <laugh>, it's like, yeah, that was quite impossible. But yeah, I, uh, like somehow, somehow kind of dissolving that line I feel like would be very beneficial. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

David: Well, giving students more autonomy is only good. I think if the students also want that I know plenty of students who definitely would not need any more autonomy to fill in their own education. Yeah, and all the electives are also not necessarily I think, not necessarily better for well being or something that that's not incompetence. Yeah, I'd say if into because for me, personally, autonomy is definitely the biggest supplier of wellbeing and that sounds are definitely the biggest enhancer of well be well being. I'd say give the option maker make a low threshold option to get autonomy. So don't don't oblige it. Don't don't make it obligatory to fill in your own education, because there are enough students who definitely don't need that. But if you give the option to and make the low threshold, because now I had to do the, to do a previous I didn't know I had to do a double degree, do the honours college, I had to be very proactive. And now I can kind of fill in my own education. If you make the threshold a little lower. I think lots of people will. Lots of students could benefit from that.

Julia: So I suppose they could, I dunno if that exists because I haven't looked it up. But if they had a list of therapists or specific things you could go to outside of university, because obviously their resources are limited and that's also fair. But maybe that would help. And

what I really like is the workshops and things they do. I dunno if that's university or if that's individual professors though. For example, the Buddhism professor, he has a workshop on meditation and bodily movement, and things like that. And that's super nice, and I think it's a good combination of even just being in the university building, but doing something else. So you can mentally just kind of connect the space to not just studying and doing boring things, but also something nice for you, you know.

Julia: Well, I would say the control thing. Try to give students more choice. For example, even in the second year, I don't quite see why we couldn't choose the courses in the second year, because also for some people that want to go into clinical or something, I think they're all super stressed out now because they have to take all the clinical courses. And obviously, it would've been so much more sensible to even offer them that in the second year. And then definitely things like what I said about going abroad. I mean maybe it's like some crazy chemical engineering program that they're doing here, but I really think they shouldn't tell anyone that they can't go abroad, especially not if they're in an international university.

Julia: Maybe, I dunno if they do that again, but maybe just provide the space and the time. Not even necessarily guide it or anything, just provide a room where people can go and talk or do something together. With UNICEF, for example, we organized a well-being art night the other day, and we were just all there painting, and I didn't know any of the people, but still, we did it in the faculty. So they gave us the room, and it was super nice. We were all just there painting, and we were talking about quite private things, because it was a very small group, and it felt like a super safe space. And that was just so refreshing. I know I've said 50 million times that talking to my friends is super valuable for me because I trust them and I really know them super well and things like that. But I also think sometimes

talking to strangers can also be as nice if you aren't ashamed or anything like that. If you're open to that, then I definitely think that's cool. So maybe that's something they could do.

Kiran: But I think In my life at least that's the furthest that the university goes to do anything, you know I think for for well-being and things like that. You don't go to your university, right? You talk to your friends. You talk to your parents you do something like that, but So, yeah, I also don't really think it's the university's role to take care of students too much outside of class University is there to teach you things and you know, you should Yeah, one of the parts of coming to university and living on your own is learning how to manage your well-being But that should be you know, you should learn that and should be connected outside of school. And I I know the school does have several things counselors and things like this and I'm sure they're trying to help but Yeah, I I think that's not really a university's job, you know, you should kind of figure that out yourself or you know with peers and people you trust things like that

Lisa: Maybe acknowledge more the international backgrounds that people come from. When I said like yeah maybe making people aware of like their rights are as a students. For example like asking for extensions is not considered as a failure or there's no deductions of points. Saying what your rights are without repercussions or something because I think of an extension as a failure coming from my home country. There's such a strict hierarchical system. If I ask for an extension its going to come back to me. Even treatment from the teacher... they would think less of me or something like that. They would remember it somehow. There are these underlying things, societal norms in my country that take place

Lisa: I think I can't think of something specific apart from what we're doing now. I guess just the individual approach of teachers. That they can like recommend and maybe teach us guidelines from the organizational perspective. Where they give lessons and teachings.

Lisa: I think like, not require but like recommend to teachers or lecturers or whoever from the staff to talk about our well-being. Or just to show that they care, like in their lectures or seminars, just to say this. I think that could make a big difference. Cause then there's that attempt to improve it just from the formal side. But it's not really being acknowledged in the lectures or the physical space. I think just speaking changed a lot for me. Or just that one sentence that the teacher said in that seminar, if you have anything in your personal life or work, come to me, we can have a chat.

Mai: I'm not really familiar with what they offer to support student well-being, but I think, yeah, maybe talking about it more, or addressing student well-being more, and also offering programs or support more so that people also hear about it. And as I said, I mean there's probably a lot of people I could contact if I wanted to, but it's not really obvious to me what I could be doing. So I think addressing that more and raising more awareness mayb

e, and supporting students with whatever problems they would have.

Mai: And I think there could be maybe a program or a certain person that I could always contact that could always help me so that I feel more in control.

Manaia: I guess it would be a lot more helpful to hear from students from the past years about their course choices and their interactions with the teacher, like, stuff like that. It's all very vague for now, but I think it's also because my faculty is pretty new, so we haven't had that many students. […] The general, like, complexity of the courses, like, how interesting it is,

how bulky it is, how much time management you need, like, just personal insights about how to manage the whole course in general.

Manaia: I would like to have had a lot more courses at different faculties, like, because we have such a diverse choice of courses, I think it would be easier for us to meet new people in different faculties, and I wish that was more of an option for our first and second years. I think it is an option for third year, but it's super far away. And I don't know, I think it would be nice to be in a new environment, to be in an environment dedicated to learning a specific thing, if that makes sense.

Najeeb: And being closer to teachers I think would be much better like, maybe remove the TAs [teaching assistants] and put the teachers instead would do much better.

Nina: I think maybe they can like advertise more doing sports or be more involved in the well-being in general, I think.

Nina: now they're not really trying to say.. like do it on your own terms or make sure that you get enough free time for yourself. They're not really advertising that. They're just saying like, this is what we have to offer you on the academic level and you can choose how to deal with it. OK. Yeah. I don't really think they're involved in the well-being. And I think they could be doing that a little bit more.

Nina: I think like in the first year you have a student, mentor and faculty mentor, I think if that's a bit in a background as well for the second year, I think that will help, because in first year I had a great student mentor and she really helped me with managing expectations and that like type of stuff. I think it would be great if something like that would be accessible for the second or third years if you wanted.

Sophie: I feel like the schedules that sometimes they put out are a bit like harsh because Dutch universities just don't have like the concept of lunch. Yeah. They don't have a concept of break, which I think would be a lot more beneficial. For example, in my first year, like first year first block we had a day where we had courses from nine to 19. There was no break whatsoever in between lunches were eaten. Like, you know, you had your box, you, you ate whatever at whatever time you could during like lectures, during tutorials. So I think that just creation of this idea of a break would be great, but I think that, uh, Dutch culture is just against it, which fair enough.

Sophie: I feel like a lot of changes that could be implemented would have to also be like students at the end of the day, like wanting to do like something along the way of, you know, them being well. So like university can't just really come and force them to do something. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Uh, but yeah, I think that just creating, you know, this space in the form of the breaks or in the form of whatever would be great.

Sophie: At least in our faculty, like, uh, in the science faculty, nobody really knows about those like five meetings with the psychologists. So I feel like if there would just be like a platform where University of Groningen could be like a lot more explicit about like all of the services, it's like providing, uh, that would be great. 'cause like I've heard it through like a friend who studies psychology that this is a possibility. Right. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, uh, for us, we just don't know about anything about that because obviously we're also Zernike and all of this is happening here in the city center. So I think just, yeah, also potentially having a platform where this is well expressed, um, to the whole student body would be great