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SELF EFFICACY AND RETENTION
AMONG FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The American education system is often regarded as an engine of social mobility (Bowen, Kurzweil, Tobin, & Pichler, 2005). However, research shows that the higher education system can instead play a major role in perpetuating social inequalities (Radunzel, 2018; Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012; Covarrubias et al., 2018). First-generation college students often lack the social and cultural capital of their peers, and graduate at much lower rates than those whose parents have obtained a bachelor's degree. This study uses an experimental research design to evaluate an intervention strategy (summer bridge program), grounded in self-efficacy, designed to reduce the gap in college success between first-generation students and their peers. Differences in self-efficacy development among males and females are examined and explored in greater depth through a second qualitative study, using semi-structured focus group interviews. Imposter Phenomenon and Stereotype Threat are incorporated to highlight gender differences in self-efficacy. Contributions will inform retention strategies in higher education, specifically designed to support first-generation college students.