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Title: Attributing Academic Struggle to a Lack of Privilege

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Students’ self-evaluations are based in part on how they interpret their successes and failures. Research suggests that, in some cases, students who attribute their poor performance to internal causes such as innate ability are more likely to form negative self-evaluations than those who attribute poor performance to external causes, such as task or classroom factors. However, there is reason to believe that the positive effects of attributing poor performance to an external cause depends in part on whether this cause is perceived to be controllable. Faculty and staff who tell students from underprivileged backgrounds that their struggle or poor performance in the classroom is due to their lack of academic resources growing up (an uncontrollable cause) may be doing more harm than good. It is possible that such explanations are not comforting and may leave students feeling helpless and unable to compensate for the accumulated negative effects of their upbringing. The main purpose of this study is to investigate whether first generation college students from low income families feel more negatively than students and faculty from middle and upper class backgrounds about attributing another student’s poor performance to his or her upbringing, particularly if that upbringing was underprivileged. Additionally, we seek to determine whether some faculty advisors tend to attribute poor performance to lack of academic resources when talking to low income, first generation advisees because they mistakenly believe that this feedback will be comforting.