

THE INVISIBLE BARRIER: EXPLORING THE CONFIDENCE GAP AMONG  
UNDERGRADUATE COLLEGE STUDENTS

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# THE INVISIBLE BARRIER: EXPLORING THE CONFIDENCE GAP AMONG UNDERGRADUATE COLLEGE STUDENTS

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## **Abstract**

The confidence gap describes a phenomenon where women display and experience lower confidence compared to men. This study sought to understand: To what extent does a confidence gap exist between undergraduate college students at Colorado College who exclusively identify as male or female? The results of the study found that a moderate to large confidence gap exists between female and male students at Colorado College, with females reporting less confidence than males in five out of six content domains. The research showed that male undergraduate students were more confident than females in the categories of general self-perception, investing and financial topics, self-promotion, leadership skills, and negotiation – aligning with previous research on the confidence gap. The only content domain that did not report statistical significance was “starting a project or initiative,” which differs from other research pertaining to confidence in entrepreneurial activity. Since this confidence gap exists at the undergraduate level at Colorado College, college could be the environment to potentially address and help close the confidence gap before students step out into the workforce. If left unaddressed, this underlying confidence gap has wide-reaching negative effects on women’s careers and economic positions in society.

**KEYWORDS:** (Confidence, Confidence Gap, Gender, College)

**JEL CODES:** (J16, J24, D91)

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To my Girls Who Invest family – you have taught me to step outside of my comfort zone, dream bigger, and live authentically. Thank you for helping me embrace my confidence and believe in my ability to achieve anything I set my mind to.

To my parents and sister, thank you for always being in my corner. With your unwavering support, I get to dream bigger, pursue my passions, and step into every challenge with confidence.

## Introduction

“I joined G.E. in 1992, and four years later they offered me a managerial position. I actually turned down the offer because I didn’t think for a moment I could do a manager’s role. I was completely under-confident. I just didn’t think I was equipped” (Kolesnikov-Jessop, 2015, Question 2). This statement from Inga Beale, the former chief executive of Lloyd’s of London, reflects a reality that is all too common: women often struggle with self-doubt even when they possess the qualifications and skills necessary to succeed. Beale’s under confidence led her to enroll in a course entitled “Assertiveness for Women,” which helped her understand the root causes of her initial “no” (Kolesnikov-Jessop, 2015). A lack of confidence momentarily stopped Beale from moving up in her career. She is not the only one.

*The Atlantic’s* 2014 cover story declared “a particular crisis for women – a vast confidence gap that separates the sexes” (Kay & Shipman, 2014, para. 12). The confidence gap describes a phenomenon where women, independent of competence, display lower levels of confidence and self-assurance compared to men (Heath et al., 2022). Confidence is a feeling or belief in one’s abilities to succeed, stimulating action (Britannica Dictionary, n.d.; Kay & Shipman, 2014). Studies have shown that wide gender differences exist in reported self-esteem and confidence, particularly in the workforce, with women reporting less confidence than men (Biasi & Sarsons, 2021; Bleidorn et al., 2016; Carlin et al., 2018; Exley & Nielsen, 2024; Kay & Shipman, 2014). This lack of confidence stops women from moving up in their careers and affects their economic position and well-being, as women are less likely to negotiate, self-promote, seek leadership positions, invest, and start businesses (Biasi & Sarsons, 2021; Carlin et al., 2018; Cupák et al., 2020; Dickerson & Taylor

2000; Exley & Kessler 2022; Gupta et al., 2009; Herbst, 2020; Kray & Kennedy, 2017; Rudman, 1998; Thébaud, 2010; Wade, 2001).

This vast confidence gap is a major issue, not only for how women perceive themselves but also for how others perceive displays of confidence in women. The confidence gap is fueled by perception, shaped by gender socialization and stereotypes (Gupta et al., 2009; Jouini et al., 2018; Kay & Shipman, 2014; Kray & Kennedy, 2017; Leaper & Friedman, 2007; Seitchik, 2020; Thébaud, 2010; Wade, 2001). Perceptions of confidence are associated with stereotypical male character traits, particularly assertiveness (Kay & Shipman, 2014; Kray & Kennedy, 2017). As a result, gendered expectations influence displays and perceptions of confidence. Success, especially in the workplace, is driven by how one is perceived (JCI Foundation, 2016). Although confidence does not equal competence, studies have found that individuals who display high levels of self-confidence are perceived as more competent, leading to higher status and power in organizations (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009; Anderson et al., 2012). If women are perceived as less confident and, therefore, less competent, this inhibits their career progression. Just like Inga Baele, women, if not confident, can prevent themselves from moving up and moving forward. “Perception is the co-pilot to reality” (JCI Foundation, 2016, 0:20). The “no” can become a “yes.”

The vast majority of literature on the confidence gap has focused on the confidence gap between men and women in the workforce. However, the potential existence of the confidence gap has not been extensively studied at the undergraduate college level. This study seeks to understand: To what extent does a confidence gap exist between undergraduate college students at Colorado College who exclusively identify as male or female?

College is a formative and exploratory period that prepares students for both their careers and lives after college. If the confidence gap is evident in undergraduate college students, it could impact a student's willingness to apply to leadership positions, participate in class, self-advocate, and choose certain career paths. This could have negative effects on their educational experience. Studies have shown that the confidence gap exists in the workforce, so if it is present at the undergraduate level, addressing it early can prevent the widening gap that appears in the workforce. Since the confidence gap impacts the career trajectory of women and their economic outcomes, an area of interest in the study is understanding whether colleges should address the confidence gap in their curriculum. If left unaddressed, this underlying confidence gap has wide-reaching negative effects on women's careers and economic positions in society. The confidence gap is more than just a psychological and social issue – it's also an economic blockade.

The rest of the thesis is structured as follows: a literature review on the confidence gap, the methodology for this study, the results of this study, a discussion of the results, and a conclusion. The literature review discusses the causes of the confidence gap and touches on the negative economic impact of the confidence gap. The methodology outlines the research design of the study, which uses a Likert scale survey to understand confidence levels among undergraduate students. The results and the discussion of those results consider the implications and findings from the survey. The thesis concludes with a summary of the key findings and suggestions for further research. Confidence is a powerful tool that influences both personal and professional success. Understanding the confidence gap can help drive change and foster a more equitable future.

## Literature Review

The confidence gap has been extensively studied in the workplace context. The following literature review begins with an overview of the popularization and definition of the term “confidence gap,” following a look at how confidence and perceptions of confidence impact perceptions of competence. Then, the causes of the confidence gap will be discussed, including the association of masculine character traits, stereotypes, and the backlash effect. These factors also serve to perpetuate and reinforce the confidence gap. Afterward, the negative economic and financial effects of the confidence gap will be explored, particularly in regard to negotiation, self-promotion, leadership, entrepreneurship, and investments. The confidence gap further exacerbates existing gender disparities, limiting women’s opportunities for career advancement and impacting financial outcomes.

### What is the Confidence Gap?

The term “confidence gap” became widespread following *The Atlantic*’s May 2014 cover story, which starkly declared “a particular crisis for women – a vast confidence gap that separates the sexes” (Kay & Shipman, 2014, para. 12). The gap refers to the vast difference in confidence between men and women, with women displaying and reporting significantly lower levels of confidence in comparison to men. Confidence stimulates action, stemming from a belief in one’s abilities, skills, and potential (Kay & Shipman, 2014). A lack of confidence, therefore, leads to inaction and results in hesitation and stagnation. This lower confidence is marked by a general underestimation of ability and performance, contributing to a negative perception of the self. With this lack of confidence, studies have shown that women, more often than men, internalize their failures by attributing their failures to personal shortcomings (Alnamlah & Gravert, 2020; Kay & Shipman, 2014). When women are

successful, they tend to downplay their success and credit external factors for their success (Kay & Shipman, 2014). The lack of confidence is also linked to less risk-taking behavior, which can hinder both personal and professional growth (Sekścińska et al., 2021; Kay & Shipman, 2014). This cycle of self-doubt and lower confidence is not only an issue of internal beliefs. External manifestations of confidence, or a lack of confidence, also affect how individuals perceive displays of confidence.

### **Confidence = Competence**

A lack of confidence could widely influence how others perceive an individual. Displays of confidence and perceptions of confidence play a vital role in shaping outcomes and success in one's professional life. Displaying confidence does not necessarily mean that an individual is competent. However, success correlates with confidence due to perceptions individuals hold of seemingly confident people. Anderson and Kilduff (2009) found that dominant individuals, who are assertive and motivated to lead, achieve influence because they appear competent to others along both task and social dimensions. These "dominant individuals tend to display competence-related cues," by exhibiting self-confidence (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009, p. 492). These competence-related cues include using more direct eye contact (Mehrabian & Williams, 1969) and speaking in an assertive, more certain, and fluid manner (Reynolds & Gifford, 2001). This self-confidence informs the perceptions of others, leading to higher levels of influence by the dominant individuals (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009). This achieved higher influence within a group is a direct result of external confidence cues displayed by the individual, creating an illusion of greater competence. The dominant individual, by exhibiting self-confidence, leads others to perceive them as competent, thereby achieving greater influence. External cues of confidence, therefore, are extremely significant when it comes to the perception of the

individual. While a person may not feel confident or competent, their displays of confidence and how they show up in the world matters greatly. Confidence, therefore, helps individuals attain higher social statuses and influence, which can help with career advancement, opportunities, and success outcomes.

Self-perceptions of confidence can guide and influence external confidence cues. If a person is overconfident in their abilities, even if they lack competence, they will typically display more competence cues (Anderson et al., 2012). In turn, others will perceive this individual as competent, resulting in higher social status (Anderson et al., 2012). “In fact, overconfident individuals more convincingly displayed competence cues than did individuals who were actually competent” (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 728). More external displays of confidence, therefore, result in a greater perceived competence. Individuals who lack self-confidence are less likely to exhibit external confidence cues. This lack of self-confidence negatively impacts their social status, resulting in lower respect, prominence, and influence (Anderson et al., 2012).

### **Causes of the Confidence Gap**

The confidence gap is perpetuated by systemic structures and norms embedded within society. Some studies have looked into the biological differences between the sexes to unpack differences in behavior (Kay & Shipman, 2014). However, more literature has focused on the socialization of gender, stereotyping, and societal expectations to explain the vast gap in confidence between men and women (Anderson et al., 2012; Dickerson & Taylor, 2000; Jouini et al., 2018; Kay & Shipman, 2014; Leaper & Friedman, 2007; Seitchik, 2020; Wade, 2001).

**Confidence Associated with Masculine Character Traits.** The factors that define what we deem as confident have influenced our understanding of confidence. In multiple studies, confidence is often associated with and marked alongside the

character trait of assertiveness (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009; Carli, 1990; Kay & Shipman, 2014; Kray & Kennedy, 2017; Seitchik, 2020; Wade 2001). In fact, “both men and women who were rated lower than average on confidence” scored lowest in perceived assertiveness (Seitchik, 2020, p. 198). Individuals who are high in personality trait dominance behave in assertive ways, allowing them to achieve more influence within a group through their behavior (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009). Assertiveness, however, is a character trait that is stereotypically associated with and attributed to masculine attributes (Vial & Napier, 2018). As Wade (2001) points out, “In the United States, men have traditionally functioned in roles that are enhanced by assertiveness, whereas women have traditionally acted as advocates” (p. 66). The socialization of gender has shaped behaviors, expectations, and social norms that individuals learn and play out. Through a combination of factors – such as school, peers, family, and media – children develop preferences and learn the character traits that society informs and teaches them about (Leaper & Friedman, 2007). As Leaper and Friedman (2007) find, boys are encouraged in play activities that are masculine-stereotyped, allowing them to practice self-assertive behaviors (p. 568) – a core component of confidence. Men are conditioned, from childhood, to act in assertive ways, allowing them to learn, practice, and play out confidence and confidence cues at an early age. Women, on the other hand, are conditioned to value and act in ways that are nurturing and collaborative (Leaper & Friedman, 2007).

**Stereotypes.** Stereotypes perpetuate the different expectations and social norms that women and men are expected to perform. Jounin et. al., (2018) assume that the “presence of a stereotype, in the form of a biased/stereotyped attribution of success and failure in terms of ability, exposes boys and girls to different psychological risk” (p. 35). For example, their study looked at the stereotype that girls

have lower abilities in math – a stereotype that might be internalized, causing differences in self-esteem, self-confidence, and choice among girls (Jounin et al., 2018). They found that any stereotypes of lower ability led to gaps in confidence (Jounin et al., 2018). These gender stereotypes have the power to distort the views individuals have of both themselves and others (Gerdeman, 2019). Even if individuals are competent, their internalization of a stereotype might distort their views about their competency, causing gaps in confidence.

The acceptance and internalization of stereotypes have wide-reaching effects on people's perception of themselves and their abilities (Dickerson & Taylor, 2000). For example, the stereotype that women are ineffective self-advocates persists (Kray & Kennedy, 2017). Wade (2001) finds that gender stereotypes, like the perception of women as poor self-advocates, influence how women present themselves. These gender stereotypes also caused women to ask for fewer rewards for themselves, confirming the negative stereotype of ineffective self-advocacy (Wade, 2001). When studying the act of negotiation, Kray and Kennedy (2017) state, "Both genders accept the negative stereotypes of women as incompetent agents for themselves" (p. 72). Negative stereotypes of negotiation undermine women's performance at the bargaining table (Kray & Kennedy, 2017). Negotiation, typically, is associated with the masculine character trait of assertiveness, which is linked to confidence (Kray et al., 2002). When the study regenerated "what it means to be an effective negotiator...to include feminine traits," women gained in their negotiation outcomes (Kray & Kennedy, 2017, p. 73). Stereotypes, therefore, have the power to influence perceptions of competence. In line with negotiation, other stereotypically male-typed activities could impact women's level of participation, confidence, and performance in such activities.

**Backlash Effect.** Stereotypes confirm, perpetuate, and build on the perception that some activities and skills are associated with male character traits. When men act in line with these character traits, they meet expectations. When women act in line with the same agentic character traits, they subvert expectations and a double-bind emerges (Wade, 2001). For example, if women have the confidence to self-advocate or self-promote, they might face backlash for not acting in stereotypically modest ways. This is known as the backlash effect. When women do behave assertively – a core characteristic of confidence – they may suffer consequences, “ones that men don’t typically experience” (Kay & Shipman, 2014). Individuals may perceive women as bossy or mean instead of confident and competent when they do behave assertively (Kay & Shipman, 2014). Seitchik (2020) finds “that if a man or woman leader behaves in a manner that is incongruent with gender stereotypes connected with displaying confidence, they run the risk of being perceived as not highly confident” (p. 204). Women who were rated with high confidence were also high in stereotypically feminine traits, which may have offset the typical agentic male attributes they displayed (Seitchik, 2020). Therefore, women have to act in a way that makes their displays of confidence acceptable to society. Self-advocacy may be costly for women because when they act in confident and assertive ways, they run the risk of decreasing their likability and, in turn, their influence (Wade, 2001). In a study by Carli (1990), the researcher finds that “men were influenced to a greater degree by women who spoke tentatively than by those who spoke assertively” (p. 946). The main marker of confidence, assertiveness, harmed a woman’s ability to influence others. Strongly agentic female applicants were rated as less socially skilled than identically presenting men (Rudman & Glick, 1999). Women applying for high-status jobs must present themselves as agentic in order to appear competent, however, this

leads to social repercussions for female applicants and a decrease in hireability (Rudman & Glick, 1999). Displaying confidence, which is linked to more masculine attributes, may hurt women as stereotypes drive expectations. This may be another factor in driving the confidence gap further. The backlash effect shows the negative repercussions women may face when they do behave in line with the traditional definition of confidence. Women recognize that they might lose more than they gain in the displays of confidence.

### **Economic Impact of the Confidence Gap**

The vast majority of literature on the confidence gap has centered around women and men in the workforce. The confidence gap greatly impacts women's advancement in their careers and their economic positions.

**Negotiation.** There is a biased understanding of what it means to be an effective negotiator, impacting the ways women are perceived at the bargaining table (Kray & Kennedy, 2017). Negotiation is often tied to agentic character traits and masculine stereotypes, which undermine perceptions of performance in women (Kray & Kennedy, 2017). Kray and Kennedy (2017) find that “society values negotiation prowess in ways that favor decidedly masculine traits, such as assertiveness, a focus on self-interest, and the ability to think and act rationally” (p. 76). Negotiation requires persuading and influencing those in power, requiring assertion. The lack of confidence in negotiations and the ability to negotiate effectively holds women back from taking risks and self-advocating for what they deserve. Biasi and Sarsons (2021) find that “women are less likely than men to have negotiated at every step of their careers” (p. 175). Not only are they less likely to have negotiated, but they are also “13% less likely than men to claim that they are confident talking to people that they do not know, a dimension of confidence that could impact their bargaining behavior

and negotiation outcomes” (Biasi & Sarsons, 2021, p.175).

A lack of confidence leads to hesitation and inaction, and at the bargaining table, this has wide-reaching effects on women’s economic positions. Wade (2001) argues that “women are not likely to start the negotiation process because of the social psychological factors that make self-advocacy costly for women” (p. 73). This inaction and lack of confidence around negotiation stops women from asking for higher pay, contributing to the gender gap in pay (Wade, 2001). A study researched MBA students and their bargaining behavior after graduation and found that payoff in bargaining varied by gender, with women receiving less than men (Gerhart & Rynes, 1991). Even when men and women use similar tactics in negotiation, women are evaluated differently because of the underlying stereotypes and expectations that exist about acceptable gendered behavior (Kray & Kennedy, 2017). This variation in success outcomes can result in a lifetime difference of more than half a million dollars (DeMarr & Janasz, 2014). Women who negotiated still received more than they were initially given but still received less than men who negotiated (Gerhart & Rynes, 1991). The interplay of confidence, stereotypes, and perceptions impacts success outcomes in negotiation, widening the gender pay gap and putting women at a financial disadvantage.

**Self-promotion and Leadership.** The confidence gap severely impacts women’s career advancement. Lower self-esteem and confidence can result in lower aspirations in the workforce (Carlin et al., 2018). With this lack of confidence in their abilities, women often decline to apply for a job or promotion if they feel they lack the qualifications needed to succeed (Dickerson & Taylor, 2000). Men, on the other hand, typically take the risk and self-promote to move ahead in their careers (Dickerson & Taylor, 2000). This furthers the gender gap in pay and leadership

promotions. Promotions are often linked to higher salaries, so if women are not confident to take on those promotions and move up in their careers, they lag behind men who typically take on the challenge. The confidence gap is contagious, which also causes “the expected performance gap in which evaluators have overly pessimistic beliefs about women relative to men” (Exley & Nielsen, 2024, p. 854). With this pessimism, the negative perception of performance hinders women’s chances of promotions in their careers. At the same time, women tend to underrate and underestimate their performance, resulting in lower confidence and, in turn, a lower perception of competence (Herbst, 2020). Even when women were perceived as equally effective leaders, women, in comparison to men, still underestimated themselves in their abilities (Herbst, 2020). This underestimation stops women from pursuing certain tasks, which can impact their career trajectory. Dickerson and Taylor (2000) find that:

As anticipated, those women who believed they had the abilities needed to perform the leadership task (high TSSE) were more likely to choose this task and expressed more interest in performing it, whereas those who were less confident in their abilities were more likely to self-select out of the leader task and choose the subordinate task. (p. 202)

This furthers the cycle of men being favored for leadership positions since women self-select out of self-promotion (Herbst, 2020). This self-promotion is key to job promotions and negotiation, but there is a large “gender gap in self-promotion among equally performing men and women” (Exley & Kessler, 2021, p. 13). Women were found to describe their performance less favorably to potential employers, which can impact their hireability and promotion status (Exley & Kessler, 2021). This lack of confidence results in a perceived lack of competence, impacting upward movement

in career advancement and, in turn, widening the gap in pay and promotion.

**Entrepreneurship.** Entrepreneurship is typically perceived as a masculine field by both men and women (Gupta et al., 2009). A stereotype exists that entrepreneurs are risk-takers and assertive, factors that make up core components of confidence (BMO, 2020, para. 1). In fact, individuals who perceive themselves as similar to males are more likely to hold entrepreneurial intentions (Gupta et al., 2009). Entrepreneurship empowers individuals and can create wealth and improve living standards (Ewing Marion, 2009, para. 8). However, only about 39% of businesses in the United States are women-owned (Wells Fargo, 2024, para.1). These low numbers can be attributed to the structural disadvantages women face in acquiring funding and resources to start a business (Hebert et al., 2024). Besides structural disadvantages, Thébaud (2010) finds that cultural beliefs about gender also influence entrepreneurial activity. Entrepreneurship is associated with risk-taking and stereotypically male characteristics, which may impact women's cues for general expectations of competence in the area (Thébaud, 2010). Women, despite having equal amounts of social and financial capital, are "significantly less likely than men to believe that they have entrepreneurial ability" (Thébaud, 2010, p. 296). With this lack of confidence in their competence, women are less likely to start businesses. In fact, women feel that they require a higher level of education in order to consider themselves confident and competent enough to start a new venture (Thébaud, 2010, p. 298). The confidence gap further discourages women from pursuing entrepreneurship, limiting women's economic potential.

**Investments.** Investing is a tool to build wealth, (Wells Fargo, n.d., para. 2) positioning an individual to strategically stay ahead of inflation and create streams of passive income (SmartAsset, 2024, para. 1). Women, however, do not invest in the

stock market at the same rate as men (Fox, 2023). This inaction results in women feeling less prepared to retire when they want (Fox, 2023). A research study by BNY (2022) finds 3 key barriers that stop women from investing – income, perception of risk, and confidence. Investing is often linked to risk-taking, a stereotypically male trait. Women’s perception of themselves and the internalization of stereotypes may result in women avoiding actions that do not fit societal expectations. “Globally, just 28% of women feel confident about investing some of their money (BNY, 2022, para. 5). This confidence marker is incredibly important when it comes to investing. Cupák et al., (2021) find that “one’s level of confidence in financial ability is the strongest or second strongest determinant of the gender gap in risky asset holdings” (p. 3). A lack of confidence stops women from navigating the stock market and, in turn, stops them from accumulating wealth at the same rate as men. This disparity and lack of confidence affects individual financial security and has broader economic implications.

## **Conclusion**

Confidence and perceptions of confidence drive perceptions of competence. The confidence gap has wide-reaching effects on a woman’s economic position and career advancement. The studies show that the confidence gap exists in the workforce, exacerbating the negative effects of structural and systemic forces. However, the potential existence of the confidence gap has not been extensively studied at the undergraduate college level. College prepares students for a career and life after college. If women are displaying a lack of confidence early in their academic careers, this needs to be addressed before they enter the workforce. This study aims to add and extend to the existing literature about the confidence gap, focusing on students at the

undergraduate college level. If a confidence gap is evident at this stage, colleges can play a role in addressing the confidence gap before students enter the workforce.

### **Methodology**

This study seeks to understand: To what extent does a confidence gap exist between undergraduate college students at Colorado College who exclusively identify as male or female? A 5-point Likert scale survey is used to measure whether or not a confidence gap exists at the undergraduate level. In previous studies, surveys were utilized to understand and measure self-confidence. For example, Sar et al., (2010) used a “self-confidence” questionnaire to collect data from 168 undergraduate students at Aksaray University (p.1206). Shrauger and Schohn (1995) developed a self-confidence measure called the Personal Evaluation Inventory (PEI), determining six content domains to test confidence levels among college students. These domains included “academic performance, physical appearance, athletics, romantic relationships, social interactions, and speaking before people” (Shrauger & Schohn, 1995, p. 259). The PEI, which asks questions on a 4-point scale, encompasses areas and domains that are outside the scope of this study. Stankov et al., (2015) reviewed other studies using self-confidence questionnaires. These studies often used the Likert scale and tailored questions to align with specific behaviors they aimed to investigate. The survey for this study also uses the Likert scale, which is in line with previous studies that investigate confidence levels (see Appendix A for the entire survey). This study is focused on the skills and behaviors, tailored to the undergraduate context, that have the potential to transfer over to the workplace context or post-college professional environment. The survey sections are broken down into six content domains, which include: general self-perception, investing and financial topics, self-promotion, leadership skills, starting a project or initiative, and negotiation questions.

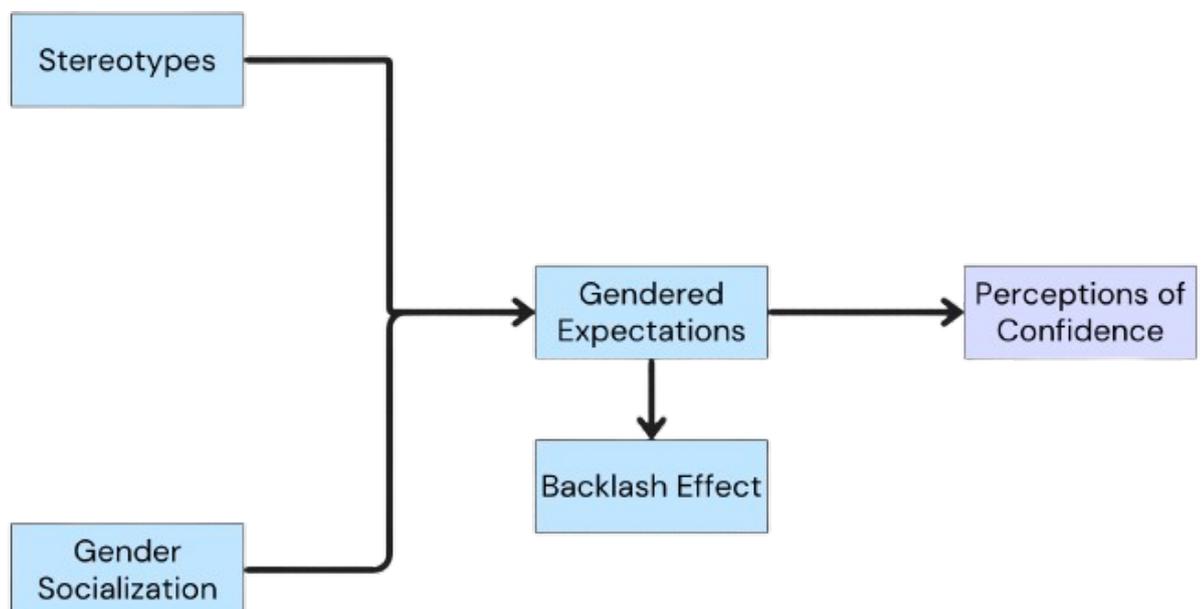
All six content domains stem from past studies, which identify the existence of the confidence gap in these areas (Biasi & Sarsons, 2021; Carlin et al., 2018; Cupák et al., 2020; Dickerson & Taylor 2000; Exley & Kessler 2022; Gupta et al., 2009; Herbst, 2020; Kray & Kennedy, 2017; Rudman, 1998; Thébaud, 2010; Wade, 2001). If the confidence gap exists in these exact areas at the undergraduate context, addressing the confidence gap early may prevent the widening confidence gap that appears in the workforce or post-college professional environment.

### Hypotheses

H1a = There is no difference in confidence levels between male and female undergraduate students at Colorado College.

H1b = Male undergraduate students at Colorado College exhibit higher levels of confidence than female students.

### Perceptions of Confidence Framework



This framework stems from the previous studies and concepts discussed in the literature review. Stereotypes and gender socialization, particularly the association of masculine character traits, drive gendered expectations. When women act outside of

those expectations, they experience the backlash effect, which negatively affects their likeability. These gendered expectations drive perceptions of confidence, both of ourselves and others. This study aims to explore whether a confidence gap exists between men and women at the undergraduate level, given the research about gendered expectations. Confidence is typically associated with masculine traits. Therefore, the survey focuses on questions related to areas, behaviors, or skills that are typically perceived as masculine, to understand how these gendered expectations may or may not influence perceptions of self-confidence. In this study, confidence refers to “people’s sense of their competence and skill,” a definition proposed and used by Shrauger & Schohn (1995, p. 256).

### **Equation**

To analyze the Likert scale responses, the study conducts an independent samples t-test to compare confidence levels between men and women. Independent sample t-tests are used to “compare two sample means from unrelated groups” to understand “if the samples are different from each other” (National University, 2024b, para. 1). The two independent groups, in this case, are males and females. This test helps us understand if the difference between the two groups is statistically significant.

The equation to conduct an independent samples t-test is:

$$t = \frac{\underline{X}_{men} - \underline{X}_{women}}{\sqrt{\frac{S^2_{men}}{n_{men}} + \frac{S^2_{women}}{n_{women}}}}$$

Variables used in the model:

$\underline{X}_{men}$  = mean confidence score for men

$\underline{X}_{women}$  = mean confidence score for women

$S^2_{men}$  = variance in confidence scores for men

$S^2_{women}$  = variance in confidence scores for women

$n_{men}$  = number of men in the survey

$n_{women}$  = number of women in the survey

The mean confidence score is an average score across all Likert scale questions. The research uses descriptive statistics to calculate general trends and distributions of confidence levels across different demographics.

To test for the reliability of the survey, Cronbach's alpha is calculated, which measures internal consistency and ensures that the questions measure the same underlying concept – confidence (UCLA, n.d.). To measure effect size, Cohen's D is calculated to understand how large the potential difference is between men and women regarding confidence levels (National University, 2024a, para. 1).

### **Research Collection**

The sample for this study consists of student responses from Colorado College. The survey was conducted on the platform, Qualtrics. In total, 142 students answered the survey. The survey was sent out through text messages, group chats, and mass emails. A handful of academic departments sent the survey out to their respective listservs. Students were also encouraged to share the survey with others. Respondents were asked for information about their gender, graduation year, and major(s). The data was collected from December 28, 2024, to January 27, 2025.

### **Analyzing Data**

The data will be analyzed using Excel in order to run the t-tests and visualize data. Excel will also be used to calculate the Cronbach's Alpha and Cohen's D.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There are several limitations to the study. First, the study only looks at individuals who exclusively identify as male or female. The study takes on a gender binary assumption, overlooking individuals who identify outside of the binary. In addition, the model relies on self-reported data. Respondents may feel that they need to answer questions in a particular way to appear more or less confident. Finally, the survey respondents come from the same institution – Colorado College. Colorado College is a liberal arts college that operates on a unique “block plan” schedule. The confidence levels of students from one undergraduate college may not represent the experiences of students from other colleges.

## **Results and Discussion**

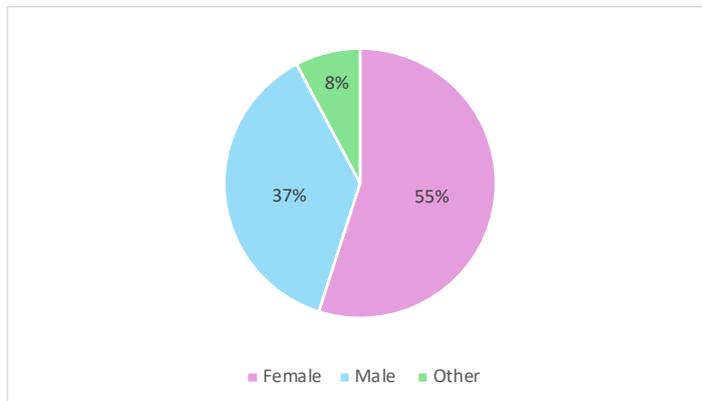
The data for this study consists of student responses from Colorado College. Each respondent was asked a total of 24 questions on a 5-point Likert scale on the platform Qualtrics. Each question asked about personal confidence levels pertaining to six content domains: general self-perception, investing and financial topics, self-promotion, leadership skills, starting a project or initiative, and negotiation questions. At the end of the 5-point Likert scale questions, respondents had a choice to answer an optional open-ended question: *Can you describe a time where you experienced a lack of confidence?* At the end of the survey, respondents answered personal demographic questions relating to their gender identity, major, and graduation year. The data was collected from December 28, 2024, to January 27, 2025.

### **Data Overview**

In total, there were 142 survey respondents. Seventy-eight respondents were female-identifying students, fifty-three respondents were male-identifying students, and eleven students identified outside of the gender binary. Figure 1 shows the distribution of survey responses by gender.

## Figure 1

### *Survey Responses by Gender*



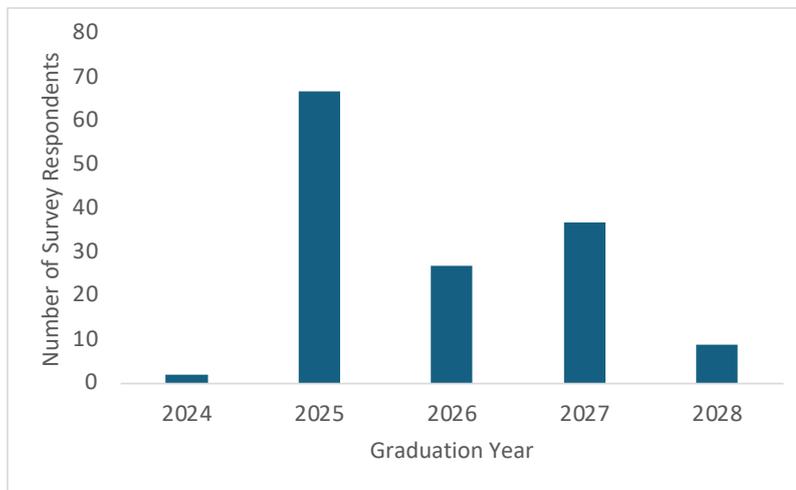
The difference in the number of survey responses from female and male-identifying students can be attributed to the role of demographics and personality in student survey engagement (Porter & Whitcomb, 2005). In fact, Porter and Whitcomb (2005) find that survey respondents are more likely to be female (p. 143). Since there are fewer data points from male students, individual male responses carry greater weight, making the sample more sensitive to variability.

Participation in the survey itself, however, could also be linked to confidence. Participants could have avoided taking the survey if they did not feel comfortable answering questions related to their confidence levels. Students with extremely low confidence levels may have been less inclined to reflect on their experiences and participate in the survey, resulting in potential underrepresentation of low confidence scores. This self-selection bias could also impact students with high confidence, who may have been more inclined or comfortable answering questions about their self-perception.

Respondents were also asked about their graduation year. Figure 2 shows the distribution of survey responses by graduation year.

**Figure 2**

*Survey Responses by Graduation Year*



A large number of responses came from the class of 2025. The researcher is a student at the college and is part of the class of 2025. Respondents from the class may have been more inclined to answer the survey if they recognized or knew the researcher personally. On the other hand, members from the class of 2028 had one of the lowest response rates. The survey was distributed to many department listservs, which may not have targeted many students from the class of 2028 who most likely have not declared their major and have not been added to particular department emails.

While this study primarily examines gender differences in confidence, class year could be a factor that influences confidence levels, as older students closer to graduation could have had more experiences and opportunities that impact confidence levels.

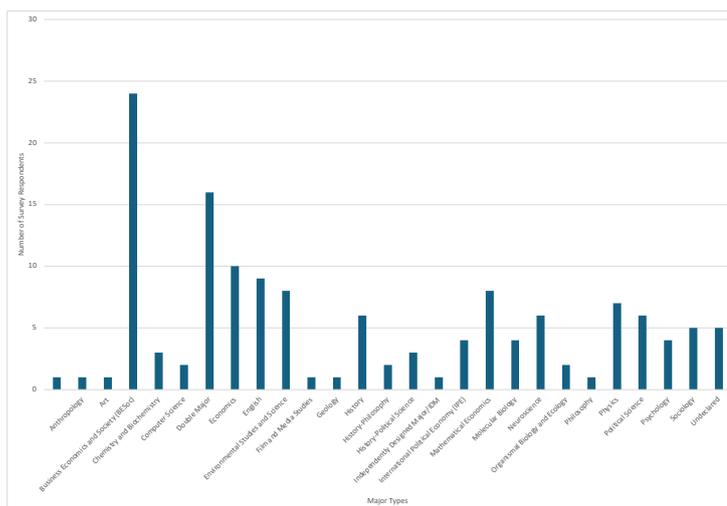
Finally, respondents were asked about their major(s) in college. The majority of respondents were Business, Economics, and Society (BESoc) majors. The researcher's major is also BESoc, so students who belong in the major most likely have taken classes with the researcher, recognize the researcher, or are more willing

to support someone in the same major or department. The Economics and Business department is also one of the largest departments at Colorado College, resulting in a higher chance that a student in the department would answer the survey.

While this study primarily examines gender differences in confidence, major type could be a factor that influences confidence levels. For example, students in the Economics and Business department may be more exposed to more group work, presentations, and other opportunities to develop their leadership skills and communication. This exposure could influence their levels of confidence and knowledge in certain domains, such as investing, self-promotion, and leadership skills. However, female-identifying students studying in more male-dominated fields, or vice-versa, may experience adverse effects on their confidence levels due to gender stereotypes and biases. Figure 3 shows the distribution of survey responses by major type.

**Figure 3**

*Survey Responses by Major Type*



*Note.* One survey respondent opted out of choosing a major from the list. All respondents who chose two majors were grouped into one category labeled “Double Major.”

## **Descriptive Statistics**

The survey, using the 5-point Likert scale, produces an overall confidence score per participant. If the respondent answered “Strongly Disagree” to all 24 Likert-scale questions, they would receive a minimum score of 24.00. On the other hand, if a respondent answered “Strongly Agree” to all 24 Likert-scale questions, they would receive a maximum score of 120.00. The higher the score, the higher the confidence level. Given that this study is only interested in female and male-identifying students, the respondents who identified themselves outside of the gender binary were removed from all calculations. The number of respondents outside of the gender binary were also very minimal, which would not produce statistically significant results for the group.

Overall, female respondents had an average confidence score of 82.71, whereas male respondents had an average confidence score of 91.02. This marks an 8.31 difference in the average scores, with female respondents trailing behind male respondents in confidence. The minimum confidence score was 28.00 for female respondents, which was significantly less than the minimum 51.00 for male respondents. The maximum confidence score was 115.00 for female respondents and 117.00 for male respondents. The standard deviation for female respondents was slightly higher than male respondents, 14.91 versus 13.88 for males, showing that female respondents had slightly greater variability in their responses.

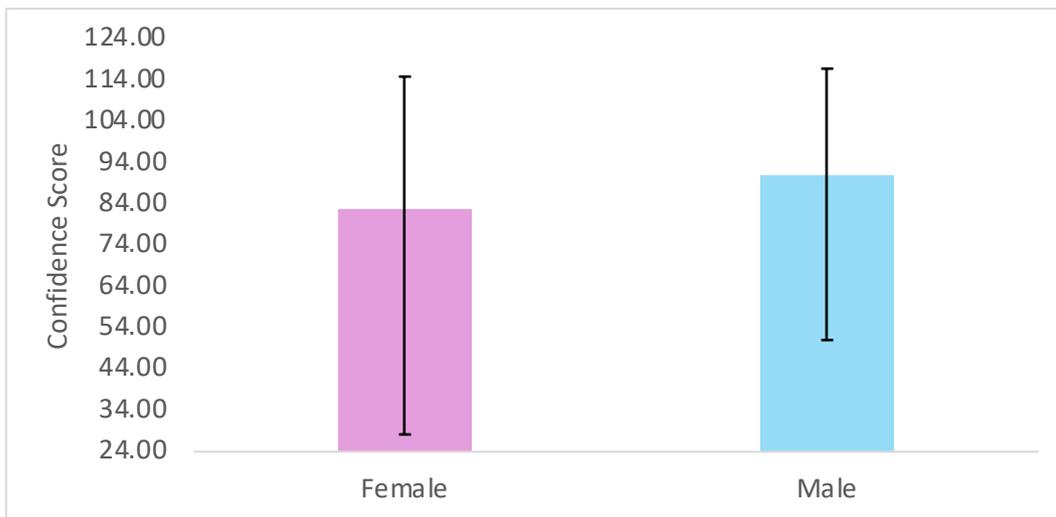
When examining the data by content domain, male respondents reported higher mean confidence scores across all domains, with the largest differences in the categories of “Self-Perception” and “Investing.” While females and males had similar maximum scores per content domain, females had lower minimum scores compared to males across all categories. Table 1 summarizes the findings below.

**Table 1***Descriptive Statistics for Confidence Levels by Gender*

Topic	Female (n=78)				Male (n=53)			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max
Self-Perception	27.55	5.91	11.00	39.00	29.85	5.17	18.00	40.00
Investing	8.77	2.93	4.00	15.00	11.06	2.76	5.00	15.00
Self-Promotion	13.62	3.25	4.00	20.00	15.13	3.08	8.00	20.00
Leadership Skills	14.99	3.56	4.00	20.00	16.11	3.64	6.00	20.00
Initiative	7.69	1.56	2.00	10.00	7.98	1.55	4.00	10.00
Negotiation	10.09	2.55	3.00	15.00	10.89	2.12	6.00	15.00
<b>Overall</b>	<b>82.71</b>	<b>14.91</b>	<b>28.00</b>	<b>115.00</b>	<b>91.02</b>	<b>13.88</b>	<b>51.00</b>	<b>117.00</b>

*Note.* There are varying amounts of questions in each sub-topic.

The statistics show that males are scoring, on average, higher in confidence with lower variability in their responses compared to females. Figure 4 depicts these findings.

**Figure 4***Average Confidence Score by Gender*

*Note.* Error bars represent the range of confidence scores, from minimum to the maximum, for each gender group.

## Reliability Analysis

The survey was analyzed for internal consistency in order to ensure that the questions in the survey measured the same underlying construct – confidence. The overall survey, which consisted of twenty-four questions, resulted in a Cronbach’s alpha score of .93, indicating excellent reliability and consistency. The survey, overall, measures for the same underlying construct of confidence. Per each content domain, Cronbach’s alpha was above .70, meaning that the questions within each content domain were acceptable, good, or excellent in terms of reliability and consistency. Table 3 summarizes the results below.

**Table 3**

### *Reliability Analysis of Confidence Measures*

Topic	Items	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Self-Perception	8	.82
Investing	3	.73
Self-Promotion	4	.78
Leadership Skills	4	.90
Initiative	2	.77
Negotiation	3	.72
<b>Overall</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>.93</b>

*Note.* Items refers to the number of questions in each sub-topic.

## Independent Samples T-Test

Before beginning the analysis, an F-Test was run to compare the variances between male and female respondents. The  $p$ -value from the F-test was .590, meaning that the variances of the two groups were not significantly different. Therefore, an independent samples t-test assuming equal variances was conducted to compare the means between female and male respondents. A t-test was conducted for each individual domain and the entire survey. Along with the t-test, Cohen’s  $d$  was

calculated in order to measure the magnitude of the difference between the two groups per content domain and the entire survey. Table 2 summarizes the results.

**Table 2**

*Statistical Analysis of Confidence Scores*

Topic	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Self-Perception	2.30	129	.012	0.41
Investing	4.49	129	<.001	0.80
Self-Promotion	2.68	129	.004	0.48
Leadership Skills	1.76	129	.040	0.31
Initiative	1.04	129	.149	0.19
Negotiation	1.87	129	.032	0.33
<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.22</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>.001</b>	<b>0.57</b>

*Note.* A *p*-value < .05 is statistically significant. All *p*-values are one-tailed *p*-values.

The result of the t-tests shows that the difference in confidence levels between female and male respondents is statistically significant, with a *p*-value of .001. The results indicate that male students have higher confidence levels than female students. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis – male undergraduate students at Colorado College exhibit higher levels of confidence than female students – is accepted. This finding supports Kay and Shipman’s (2014) conclusion that a confidence gap exists, with females exhibiting lower confidence than males. The finding is further supported by an overall effect size, 0.57, indicating a moderate to large difference between male and female confidence levels. The results are not only statistically significant, but also practically significant.

Of all of the results by content domain, each was statistically significant, except for the topic “Starting a Project or Initiative.” The result does not support Thébaud’s (2020) conclusion that females are less confident in entrepreneurial spaces. The observed result might occur because “Starting a Project or Initiative” is not

necessarily equivalent to starting a business, which may possibly require greater capital, time, and risk outside of the college context. According to Thébaud (2010), entrepreneurial confidence may be influenced by levels of education, therefore, the domain may not fully capture the complexities involved in the entrepreneurial space (p. 298). This could lead to the lack of significant difference in the results.

The difference in the “Investing and Financial Topics” domain was the most statistically significant, with a  $p$ -value of  $<.001$  and a large Cohen’s  $d$  of 0.80, indicating a large effect size. This supports previous research, which finds that confidence is an important marker when it comes to investing, and one of the key barriers that stops women from investing is confidence (BNY, 2022; Cupák et al., 2021). This finding has major implications for female’s future economic standing. As Wells Fargo (n.d.) finds that investing is a tool to build wealth (para 2), positioning an individual to strategically stay ahead of inflation and create streams of passive income (SmartAsset, 2024, para. 1).

The category of self-promotion has a moderate effect size of 0.48, showing that females are less confident in advocating for themselves compared to males. This finding supports Dickerson and Taylor’s (2000) conclusion that men typically take the risk and self-promote to move ahead in their careers, whereas women often decline to engage in self-promoting behavior if they feel they lack the qualifications to succeed.

The content domains of self-perception, negotiation, and leadership skills all reported statistically significant results with small to moderate effect sizes. The findings show that females are less confident in their general self-perception, leadership abilities, and negotiation skills. These results align with previous studies, which report that females are less confident in how they perceive themselves, their

place in a group setting, and their negotiation abilities (Biasi & Sarsons, 2021; Herbst, 2020; Kay & Shipman, 2014).

### **Optional Question**

At the end of the 5-point Likert scale questions, respondents had a choice to answer an optional open-ended question: *Can you describe a time where you experienced a lack of confidence?* Fifteen females and ten males opted to answer the question, representing 19.23% of the total female respondents and 18.87% of the total male respondents, respectively (see Appendix B for all optional responses). Based on the survey data, men and women were equally likely to engage in the optional question. However, other research, such as Dunn and Gómez (2023), shows that women are “less likely to respond to open-ended question prompts than men” (para. 11). While females and males responded to the prompt at nearly equal rates, the content, detail, and length of their responses varied.

From the responses, men tended to use multiple sentences to describe their experiences, while female respondents generally provided shorter answers, often limited to one sentence or just a few words. Hence, male responses tended to be more specific while female responses typically summarized broader experiences. For example, some female respondents said:

- “Public speaking, presenting in class.”
- “Being rejected romantically.”
- “When I feel left out, excluded, or like I don’t belong in a social setting.”
- “dealing with body appearance.”

These responses lacked specific details about each situation. For instance, they did not indicate in which class the individual felt unconfident presenting in, nor the

reasoning behind feeling excluded in a social setting. Females tended to provide broader statements and generalized feelings without much elaboration.

Some male respondents discussed their lack of confidence in a professional setting, while female respondents focused on social, academic, and group settings. For example, four male respondents discussed their lack of confidence in an internship, interview, or managerial role:

- “I did not feel confident going into my **internship this past summer**. Although I knew that I had worked hard to land the position, I felt a strong sense of imposter syndrome before starting. All the other interns were from ivy leagues and in my mind must have had far more experience and been much more qualified.”
- “**During my internship over the summer**, I experienced a confidence drop. It was my first position in a **professional setting** in the career I am hoping to pursue. I did not have any new ideas and felt severely behind without much guidance. I ended up consulting professors, close friends and families to help navigate my imposter syndrome and lack of confidence.”
- “My **first interview**, I was very very nervous and it led to me making mistakes and not sounding very confident. I did not get a second round.”
- “When I first started a **managerial role**, I wasn't confident about making certain logistical decisions and moving people around. I worked through this problem by talking to my supervisor and holding daily meetings with the team I was responsible for.”

Zero female respondents talked about their lack of confidence in a professional setting. Females, on the other hand, focused on academic, group, or interpersonal settings. For example, female respondents wrote:

- "I tend to lack confidence in **interpersonal settings** more often than in academic or corporate ones."
- "One time where I experienced a lack of confidence was when I had to do a **presentation in Italian** as I have very little experience speaking the language."
- "When I was pushed back against after advocating for needs with **school staff**."
- "In a **group project** last semester, I struggled to assert my opinion on what we should focus on when a particularly opinionated group member took control."
- "Sometimes I am afraid to approach **professors** with a question because I am scared they will think it's stupid."
- "Today, it's one of those **ungraded classes** where you share what grade you feel you should get and I'm feeling anxious about saying "oh yeah I deserve an A" in front of my peers, even if I believe that I do deserve a good (grade) for working harder than most."
- "It is often difficult to talk over more assertive peers in **group settings**."

In contrast to female respondents, multiple males used the word "imposter syndrome" to describe their feelings, while the term did not appear in any female responses. This finding is interesting because the term "imposter syndrome," historically, has been attributed to women. In fact, the concept was originally termed "imposter phenomenon" in a 1978 study by Psychologists Pauline Rose Clance and Suzanne Imes who focused their study on high-achieving women" (Burey & Tulshyan, 2021, para. 7). The usage of the word could indicate the type of vocabulary males are using to frame their lack of confidence. It could also signify a trend towards greater acceptance and recognition of imposter syndrome among males.

In addition, two male respondents discussed how they moved through and dealt with their lack of confidence:

- “I ended up consulting professors, close friends and families to **help navigate my imposter syndrome and lack of confidence.**”
- “**I worked through this problem** by talking to my supervisor and holding daily meetings with the team I was responsible for.”

Zero female respondents discussed how they dealt or coped with their feelings.

This could indicate that females see a lack of confidence as a constant ongoing struggle instead of a moment or feeling they need to work through. In fact, one female respondent wrote, “It feels like a daily struggle.” This may reflect a sense of persistent self-doubt that is more difficult to overcome, which could exacerbate the confidence gap.

Across all respondents, both females and males tended to experience a lack of confidence because they felt less experienced, less deserving, less intelligent, and/or less qualified in comparison to other people. Typically, individuals noted a lack of confidence when they compared themselves to other individuals or were in the presence of others. For example, respondents wrote:

- “I often feel **insecure about my intelligence** when I am **with my peers.**”
- “When I took a political history class knowing nothing about. **Everyone was more informed than I was.**”
- “A time when I experienced a lack of confidence was **hearing other people's accomplishments** and feeling like **I wasn't good enough.**”
- “Working in a group project with individuals who acted as though they **were more qualified** simply because of the **prestige of their upbringings/backgrounds.**”

- “Whenever a **close friend** who i trusted to share my achievements with **dismissed my accomplishment** or thought my ambition was unrealistic, not worth pursuing, aligned with the wrong values, or idealistic.”
- “It usually happens in a **class setting**. I am better in a small group setting. As a POC I do feel imposter syndrome a lot especially at a PWI such as CC.”
- “**All the other interns were from ivy leagues** and in my mind must have **had far more experience** and been much **more qualified.**”

From the responses, a lack of confidence tended to manifest in the presence of others or an innate drive to compare oneself to other people. The social comparison often resulted in feelings of inadequacy, as individuals measured themselves against those around them. The lack of confidence observed in these responses suggests that a lack of confidence may be shaped by the social comparisons individuals makes with those around them. By recognizing the moments when a lack of confidence arises, individuals can start to understand the root causes of these feelings and begin to develop strategies for overcoming them.

## **Conclusion**

This study sought to understand: To what extent does a confidence gap exist between undergraduate college students at Colorado College who exclusively identify as male or female? The results of the study found that a moderate to large confidence gap exists between female and male students at Colorado College, with females reporting less confidence than males. Five of the six content domains – general self-perception, investing and financial topics, self-promotion, leadership skills, and negotiation – reported statistically significant results with small to moderate effect sizes. The only content domain that did not report statistical significance was “starting

a project or initiative.” Confidence in investing and financial topics saw the largest gap, with a 0.80 effect size, followed by self-promotion, with a 0.48 effect size.

The responses to the optional question revealed that individuals noted a lack of confidence when they compared themselves to other individuals or were in the presence of others. Females tended to write about their lack of confidence in social, academic, or group settings, with less detail and context. On the other hand, some males, in addition to academic or group settings, wrote about their lack of confidence in professional settings, such as in internship or managerial roles. Zero female respondents discussed how they dealt or coped with their feelings, while two male respondents touched on how they got through their lack of confidence. This could indicate that females see their self-doubt as a constant ongoing struggle instead of a moment or feeling they need to work through, which could exacerbate the confidence gap.

The findings highlight the presence of the confidence gap among undergraduate students at Colorado College. Each content domain maps out to the skills needed to succeed in the professional or post-graduate workforce. The gap of confidence found in five of the six content domains could have major implications for the career trajectories and economic outcomes for female-identifying individuals, if left unaddressed.

### **Conclusion**

The confidence gap describes a phenomenon where women, independent of competence, display lower levels of confidence and self-assurance compared to men (Heath et al., 2022). A lack of confidence can lead to inaction, negatively impacting a person’s choices and opportunities. This study sought to understand: To what extent does a confidence gap exist between undergraduate college students at Colorado

College who exclusively identify as male or female? The results of the study found that a moderate to large confidence gap exists between female and male students at Colorado College, with females reporting less confidence than males in five out of six content domains. The research showed that male undergraduate students were more confident than females in the categories of general self-perception, investing and financial topics, self-promotion, leadership skills, and negotiation – aligning with previous research on the confidence gap (Biasi & Sarsons, 2021; Carlin et al., 2018; Cupák et al., 2020; Dickerson & Taylor 2000; Exley & Kessler 2022; Herbst, 2020; Kray & Kennedy, 2017; Rudman, 1998; Wade, 2001). The only content domain that did not report statistical significance was “starting a project or initiative,” which differs from other research pertaining to confidence in entrepreneurial activity (Thébaud 2010).

Previous research has focused on the confidence gap between men and women in the workforce, pinpointing areas where women display a lack of confidence (Biasi & Sarsons, 2021; Bleidorn et al., 2016; Carlin et al., 2018; Exley & Nielsen, 2024; Kay & Shipman, 2014). These areas include negotiation, self-promotion, leadership, entrepreneurship, and investments. Women are less likely to engage in the listed activities due to a lack of confidence, which has major negative implications for their career trajectories and economic outcomes. However, the potential existence of the confidence gap has not been extensively studied at the undergraduate college level. This study shows that the confidence gap does exist in the undergraduate context at Colorado College. The research extends the confidence gap discussion beyond the workforce and into early career development. The study finds that the confidence gap is already present before the students enter the workforce.

The confidence gap in the undergraduate context has the potential to impact a student's willingness to apply to leadership positions, participate in class, self-advocate, and choose certain career paths. This could have negative effects on their educational experience. Since this confidence gap exists at the undergraduate level at Colorado College, college could be the environment to potentially address and help close the confidence gap before students step out into the workforce. Tackling this issue early could be a pivotal step towards a more equitable world. Further research should be done in order to understand if this confidence gap is evident across other peer undergraduate institutions. If women are displaying a lack of confidence early in their academic careers, this needs to be addressed before they enter the workforce. Further research should be done to understand how and if colleges could address the confidence gap in their curriculum. If left unaddressed, this underlying confidence gap has wide-reaching negative effects on women's careers and economic positions in society. The economic blockade must be acknowledged early, dismantled, and proactively addressed. By building confidence, women can move up and move forward. The "no" can become a "yes."

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## Appendix A

### Confidence Survey

# Confidence Survey

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#### Start of Block: Informed Consent Form and Questions

#### Informed Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study about the confidence gap. The study's purpose is to understand whether or not a confidence gap exists at the undergraduate level among Colorado College students. Participants will answer questions about their confidence levels related to certain tasks. This survey should take you **no more than 10 minutes** to complete in its entirety.

The benefit to this study is to understand whether or not a confidence gap exists. If it does, this study is interested in understanding whether colleges should address this gap in their curriculum.

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You should only decide to take part in this study because you want to do so. If you choose to be in the study, you can withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. Participating in this study does not mean that you are giving up any of your legal rights. We do not expect you to experience any kind of harm or discomfort if you participate in this study, beyond what you would experience in everyday life.

The person in charge of this study is Sasha Akinchina. You can contact Sasha at [s\\_akinchina@coloradocollege.edu](mailto:s_akinchina@coloradocollege.edu) or (719) 582-2721.

If you have any questions about whether you have been treated in an illegal or unethical way, contact the Colorado College Institutional Research Board chair, Dr. Amanda Udis-Kessler at 719-227-8177 or [audiskessler@coloradocollege.edu](mailto:audiskessler@coloradocollege.edu).

#### Additional Information Regarding Confidentiality

Any report of this research that is made available to the public will not include your name or any other individual information by which you could be identified unless you have specifically given permission to be identified publicly.

The small number of participants in the study might make it more likely that the participant could be identified. This study is expected to have around 50-

100 participants. It is possible that anonymous survey response data may be used in the future or shared with other research as part of further academic research, but the data will not contain information that could directly identify you.

I may share your research information with other researchers without asking for your consent again, but it will not contain information that could directly identify you.

**By checking the YES box below, you confirm that you have read the above information, are a student from Colorado College, are 18 years of age or older, and consent to participate in the research project.**

- YES, I consent to participate in this research project (4)
- NO, I do not consent to participate in this research project. (5)

*Skip To: End of Survey If Informed Consent Form You are invited to take part in a research study about the confidence gap.... = NO, I do not consent to participate in this research project.*

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Page Break

## General Self-Perception

The following questions ask about the general self-perception of your personal confidence.

Please indicate your level of agreement using the scale below

---

Q1 I see myself as a confident person.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
  - Disagree (2)
  - Neither agree nor disagree (3)
  - Agree (4)
  - Strongly Agree (5)
- 

Q2 I would describe myself as assertive.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
  - Disagree (2)
  - Neither agree nor disagree (3)
  - Agree (4)
  - Strongly Agree (5)
-

Q3 I am confident in expressing my opinions in group settings.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
  - Disagree (2)
  - Neither agree nor disagree (3)
  - Agree (4)
  - Strongly Agree (5)
- 

Q4 I am confident in asking for help when I need it.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
  - Disagree (2)
  - Neither agree nor disagree (3)
  - Agree (4)
  - Strongly Agree (5)
- 

Q5 I am confident in making decisions even when faced with uncertainty.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
  - Disagree (2)
  - Neither agree nor disagree (3)
  - Agree (4)
  - Strongly Agree (5)
-

Q6 I am confident in speaking up in group settings.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
  - Disagree (2)
  - Neither agree nor disagree (3)
  - Agree (4)
  - Strongly Agree (5)
- 

Q7 I am confident in presenting in front of others.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
  - Disagree (2)
  - Neither agree nor disagree (3)
  - Agree (4)
  - Strongly Agree (5)
- 

Q8 I am confident in saying no, even when I feel pressured to agree.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
  - Disagree (2)
  - Neither agree nor disagree (3)
  - Agree (4)
  - Strongly Agree (5)
-

## Investing and Financial Topics

The following questions ask about your confidence with investing and financial topics.

Please indicate your level of agreement using the scale below.

---



Q1 I am confident in managing my personal finance (ex. budgeting, saving).

- Strongly Disagree (1)
  - Disagree (2)
  - Neither agree nor disagree (3)
  - Agree (4)
  - Strongly Agree (5)
- 

Q2 I am confident that I can make informed decisions about investments.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
  - Disagree (2)
  - Neither agree nor disagree (3)
  - Agree (4)
  - Strongly Agree (5)
-

Q3 I am confident discussing money or financial topics with others.

- Strongly Disagree (6)
- Disagree (7)
- Neither agree nor disagree (8)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

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Page Break

### **Self-Promotion**

The following questions ask about your confidence in self-promotion.

Please indicate your level of agreement using the scale below.

Q1 I am confident in highlighting my achievements in applications for internships, jobs, and other related activities.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)

Q2 I am confident in talking about my strengths during interviews.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
  - Disagree (2)
  - Neither agree nor disagree (3)
  - Agree (4)
  - Strongly Agree (5)
- 

Q3 I am confident in sharing my accomplishments with others.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
  - Disagree (2)
  - Neither agree nor disagree (3)
  - Agree (4)
  - Strongly Agree (5)
- 

Q4 I am confident in asking for what I believe I deserve.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
  - Disagree (2)
  - Neither agree nor disagree (3)
  - Agree (4)
  - Strongly Agree (5)
-

## Leadership Skills

The following questions ask about your confidence related to leadership skills.

Please indicate your level of agreement using the scale below.

-----

Q1 I am confident in running for leadership roles.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
  - Disagree (2)
  - Neither agree nor disagree (3)
  - Agree (4)
  - Strongly Agree (5)
- 

Q2 I am confident in managing a team effectively.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
  - Disagree (2)
  - Neither agree nor disagree (3)
  - Agree (4)
  - Strongly Agree (5)
-

Q3 I am confident in my ability to lead a group.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
  - Disagree (2)
  - Neither agree nor disagree (3)
  - Agree (4)
  - Strongly Agree (5)
- 

Q4 I am confident in making decisions on behalf of a group.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
  - Disagree (2)
  - Neither agree nor disagree (3)
  - Agree (4)
  - Strongly Agree (5)
- 

Page Break

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## Starting a Project or Initiative

The following questions ask about your confidence in terms of starting a project or initiative.

Please indicate your level of agreement using the scale below.

---

Q1 I am confident that I have the skills to start a project or initiative.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
  - Disagree (2)
  - Neither agree nor disagree (3)
  - Agree (4)
  - Strongly Agree (5)
- 

Q2 I am confident in my ability to organize a team in order to start a project or initiative.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
  - Disagree (2)
  - Neither agree nor disagree (3)
  - Agree (4)
  - Strongly Agree (5)
- 

Page Break

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## Negotiation

The following questions ask about your confidence in terms of negotiation. Please indicate your level of agreement using the scale below.

---

Q1 I am confident in negotiating for better roles and opportunities (ex. classes, internship/job offers, leadership positions)

- Strongly Disagree (1)
  - Disagree (2)
  - Neither agree nor disagree (3)
  - Agree (4)
  - Strongly Agree (5)
- 

Q2 I am confident in advocating for my needs (ex. grades, deadlines) in conversations with professors or advisors.

- Strongly Disagree (1)
  - Disagree (2)
  - Neither agree nor disagree (3)
  - Agree (4)
  - Strongly Agree (5)
-

Q3 I am confident in advocating for my ideas when others disagree (ex. group projects, club activities).

- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)



Can you describe a time where you experienced a lack of confidence? (This question is optional)

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End of Block: Informed Consent Form and Questions

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Start of Block: Personal Demographic Questions

### **Personal Demographic Questions**

The following questions ask about your personal identity.



Q1 What is your gender identity? *Your gender is an important part of this research study. It helps us understand key trends and differences in the data.*

- Male (1)
  - Female (2)
  - Non-Binary (3)
  - Agender (4)
  - Transgender (6)
  - Genderfluid (7)
  - Prefer to Self-Describe (8)
- 

- Prefer Not to Answer (9)
- 

Q2 What is your expected graduation year?

- 2024 (1)
  - 2025 (2)
  - 2026 (3)
  - 2027 (4)
  - 2028 (5)
  - 2029 (6)
-

Q3 What is your major(s)? *If on your laptop, hold down the "Ctrl" key (on Windows) or "Command" key (on Mac) to select multiple options from the list.*

- Anthropology (2)
- Art (3)
- Asian Studies (6)
- Business, Economics, and Society (BESoc) (7)
- Chemistry and Biochemistry (8)
- Classics (9)
- Classics-English (10)
- Classics-History-Politics (11)
- Comparative Literature (12)
- Computer Science (13)
- Economics (14)
- Education (15)
- English (16)
- Environmental Studies and Science (17)
- Feminist and Gender Studies (18)
- Film and Media Studies (19)

- French (20)
- Geology (21)
- German (22)
- Hispanic Studies (23)
- History (24)
- History-Philosophy (25)
- History-Political Science (26)
- Independently Designed Major/IDM (27)
- International Political Economy (IPE) (29)
- Italian (30)
- Mathematical Economics (31)
- Mathematics (32)
- Molecular Biology (33)
- Music (34)
- Neuroscience (35)
- Organismal Biology and Ecology (36)

- Philosophy (37)
- Physics (38)
- Political Science (39)
- Psychology (40)
- Race, Ethnicity, and Migration Studies (41)
- Religion (42)
- Russian and Eurasian Studies (43)
- Sociology (44)
- Southwest Studies (45)
- Theatre and Dance (46)
- Undeclared (47)

End of Block: Personal Demographic Questions

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## Appendix B

### Optional Survey Responses

<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>
One time where I experienced a lack of confidence was when I had to do a presentation in Italian as I have very little experience speaking the language.	It usually happens in a class setting. I am better in a small group setting. As a POC I do feel imposter syndrome a lot especially at a PWI such as CC.
dealing with body appearance	I did not feel confident going into my internship this past summer. Although I knew that I had worked hard to land the position, I felt a strong sense of imposter syndrome before starting. All the other interns were from ivy leagues and in my mind must have had far more experience and been much more qualified.
When I was pushed back against after advocating for needs with school staff	Whenever a close friend who i trusted to share my achievements with dismissed my accomplishment or thought my ambition was unrealistic, not worth pursuing, aligned with the wrong values, or idealistic.
A time when I experienced a lack of confidence was hearing other people's accomplishments and feeling like I wasn't good enough.	Working in a group project with individuals who acted as though they were more qualified simply because of the prestige of their upbringings/backgrounds.
When I feel left out, excluded, or like I don't belong in a social setting	During my internship over the summer, I experienced a confidence drop. It was my first position in a professional setting in the career I am hoping to pursue. I did not have any new ideas and felt severely behind without much guidance. I ended up consulting professors, close friends and families to help navigate my imposter syndrome and lack of confidence.

<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>
<p>I find that when I am in a group setting with people I don't know, or don't know super well, that I have a lack of confidence. I feel like it takes me a month to really warm up to a group, and then I will be super confident. However, this doesn't translate to academics, as I feel like I was raised in a setting where I prioritized asserting myself and my needs in an academic setting, which has been very helpful on the block plan.</p>	<p>Recently as I was starting my thesis, I changed my topic 3 times and did not have confidence that I would be able to find enough data on anything I was interested in. Here I experienced a lack of confidence in my own abilities.</p>
<p>In a group project last semester, I struggled to assert my opinion on what we should focus on when a particularly opinionated group member took control.</p>	<p>I often feel insecure about my intelligence when I am with my peers.</p>
<p>Sometimes I am afraid to approach professors with a question because I am scared they will think it's stupid</p>	<p>I would say I don't usually lack confidence but usually lack the fervor to stand up for my opinions if a teamwork setting leaves me outnumbered</p>
<p>Today, it's one of those ungraded classes where you share what grade you feel you should get and I'm feeling anxious about saying "oh yeah I deserve an A" in front of my peers, even if I believe that I do deserve a good great for working harder than most.</p>	<p>My first interview, I was very very nervous and it led to me making mistakes and not sounding very confident. I did not get a second round.</p>

<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>
<p>Being rejected romantically</p>	<p>When I first started a managerial role, I wasn't confident about making certain logistical decisions and moving people around. I worked through this problem by talking to my supervisor and holding daily meetings with the team I was responsible for.</p>
<p>When I took a political history class knowing nothing about. Everyone was more informed than I was</p>	
<p>It is often difficult to talk over more assertive peers in group settings.</p>	
<p>public speaking, presenting in class</p>	
<p>I tend to lack confidence in interpersonal settings more often than in academic or corporate ones</p>	
<p>It feels like a daily struggle</p>	