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A Review of Cultural Background and College Students' Academic Resilience:

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A Review of Cultural Background and College Students' Academic Resilience:

Masten (2001) described *resilience* as a class of phenomena that is characterized by positive and good outcomes, despite the presence of negative influence or threats to adaptation. It is individuals' ability to deal with and overcome difficult circumstances that can undermine their expected progress and development (Masten, 2011). This phenomenon is not a personal trait but a broad dynamic system that can cut across individual's health, beliefs, skills, nutrition (Masten & Obradovic, 2006), and academics. While resilience is typically beneficial in academic settings, its effect may sometimes not be universally beneficial. For example, in the context of domestic violence, resilience can perpetuate cycles of abuse by encouraging endurance rather than reconfiguring one's actions through emancipation to promote transformative change (Oliveira, 2024). Its effect may vary widely based on individual background and personal circumstances, nevertheless, resilience is an important aspect of everyday life (Hawken et al., 2020), if managed and channeled properly. Given this foundational understanding of resilience, it is important to examine its application within the academic context because it significantly influences students' academic performance, wellbeing, and ability to navigate challenges (Rachmawati et al., 2024).

Academic resilience is the heightened likelihood of educational success despite personal adversities or vulnerabilities presented by experiences or environmental conditions (Wang et al., 1994). Beyond achieving success, academic resilience helps students navigate tough academic challenges effectively, thereby transforming feelings of helplessness into strength, empowering them to confront and overcome academic adversity, especially in the context of psychological conditions and evolving social roles encountered in college (Rachmawati et al., 2024). Internal factors including self-efficacy, self-regulation, and emotional indicators (Shen et al, 2024), as well as external factors like social support and community building are significant factors that provide a sense of belonging and security, which are essential for building resilience (Rachmawati et al., 2024).

Cultural background, which is a huge part of social support, plays an important role in building academic resilience, influencing the ways individuals and communities navigate educational support and respond to adversity. Varying across different cultural settings, academic resilience is influenced by specific cultural and contextual aspects of one's life (Ungar, 2008), this is done by shaping values, perceptions, and responses to crises (Johnson, 2023). A quantitative study that examined cultural connectedness among international students for instance showed that strong cultural ties and belief

systems enhance academic buoyancy which sustains students' resilience in the face of academic challenges (Dahal et al., 2018). Another qualitative study that explored the experiences of Chinese international students on academic probation found that proactivity, independence, and flexible thinking are main resilience traits that help students cope with the stresses of academic probation (Huang et al., 2024). When there is a disconnection between international students and these cultural and family supports, they often experience cultural shock, which includes identity confusion, home sickness, and cultural dissonance, leading to heightened stress, challenges in cross-cultural adjustment and engagement, and anxiety that negatively affects their academic performance and well-being (Chai et al., 2020; Mulyadi et al., 2024).

Considering the importance of cultural background amongst college students, particularly international students, this literature review delves into the resilience that students internalize through their culture, community, and family and how that shapes their academic resilience in college. Culturally sustaining pedagogy was also explored as a foundation for the study.

Academic Resilience

Academic resilience is the capacity to overcome acute or chronic adversity that poses a significant threat to a student's educational development (Cassidy, 2016). Individuals with academic resilience can achieve academic success and demonstrate high level of performance, especially in the face of challenging life circumstances and adverse living conditions that may otherwise predispose them to academic failure and dropping out (Shengyao et al., 2024). Enjoyment of learning (intrinsic motivation) and motivation for academic success (extrinsic motivation) are major facilitators of academic resilience. (Ye et al., 2024). Academic self-efficacy also plays a big role in building academic resilience, because students' belief that their capabilities significantly influence their ability to cope with pressure and major challenges in their academic journey (Cassidy, 2015). These factors enhance academic resilience by driving students to overcome challenges and achieve better results, which can further boost motivation, thereby creating a positive loop of feedback (Ye et al., 2024).

In comparison with academic persistence which is students' ability to remain enrolled in a course and make progress towards their completion goals (Kennel & Ward-Smith, 2017), or academic buoyancy which helps students handle everyday setbacks like poor grades or negative feedback, academic resilience helps to overcome major or chronic academic challenges such as subject failure or expulsion from school (Martins, 2013). Academic resilience entails not only the ability to bounce back

after overcoming major academic obstacles but also the capacity to maintain positive learning engagement despite these challenges (Nair & Kumar, 2024).

For college students, resilience is a crucial attribute that significantly impacts their academic performance and overall well-being by serving as a cushion against various challenges and stressors encountered in college (Zhu, 2024). Resilience is associated with improved academic outcomes, as it helps students maintain motivation, manage stress, and adapt to adversity, all of which are crucial for academic success (Etherton et al., 2022). For instance, a quantitative study that investigated the structural relationship among resilience, academic stress, and academic achievement in university students majoring in piano and vocal music found notable positive relationship between academic resilience and academic achievement (Du et al., 2025). Various factors can promote college students' academic resilience, such as self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation, social support, positive physical learning environment, and a warm and supportive family environment (Cobb et al., 2024; Gorghiu et al., 2024; Kumalasari, 2023; Zhu, 2024).

The concept of academic resilience in high school is very different from what many college students now experience. Unlike high school students who have access to more readily available family and community support which plays a vital role in the adaptation process (Sampe et al., 2024), college students often rely on institutional support like student organizations, supportive faculty, and student support services to navigate transition and mitigate feelings of loneliness (Means & Payne, 2017). Although the above mentioned non-parental relationships can provide a form of comfort (Crosnoe & Elder, 2004), it doesn't completely fill the discrepancies gap between the social support needed and the one received. These discrepancies are linked to increased depressive symptoms, highlighting the emotional impact of unmet support needs among college students (Rankin et al., 2018).

An increasing number of studies have addressed academic resilience among college students, particularly among first-year college students. A study that measured self-compassion and academic resilience among first-year students in Indonesia for instance, found a significant positive correlation between self-compassion and academic resilience (Ramdhanyanti & Dewi, 2024). Another correlational study that analyzed variable of emotional domain, such as emotional intelligence, emotions, wellbeing, and resilience, in relation to academic performance and dropout intentions among first-year forestry students found that academic resilience alongside other variables, significantly influenced academic performance (Năstasă et al., 2022). Factors including self-efficacy, self-regulation, parental support,

feeling of determination and optimism about the future, and academic achievement directly influence college students' academic resilience (Gause et al., 2024; Shen et al., 2024).

Resilience also plays a major role across different student intersectionality. A qualitative focus group study on the experiences of college women of color (CWOC) at historically white institution showed that high-achieving African American and Latinx female college students employed a psychological mechanism of resistance to cope with their intersectional experiences of racial and gendered bias (Johnson et al., 2022). For first-generation college students, who often navigate the complexities of post-secondary education without the guidance of family members with prior college experience, several factors including fear of failure, parental expectations, community influences, and mental toughness determine their level of academic resilience and motivation (Nkansah & Ikbal, 2024). Lastly, for college student-athletes, there is a significant positive relationship between sports enjoyment and academic resilience. Specifically, when student-athletes derive greater enjoyment from sports, their ability to persevere academically is enhanced (Pasno, 2024).

Cultural Background and Academic Resilience

A substantial body of work around culture, cultural identity, and cultural background (Baker-Bell et al., 2017; Bond, 2017; Dansu & Strong, 2024; McCarty & Lee, 2014; McDaniel, 2024; Scalise, 2020) connects to *culturally sustaining pedagogy* (CSP), which is an educational approach that seeks to support and sustain the cultural identities of students while promoting academic success. It actively incorporates students' cultural backgrounds into the learning process, ensuring that education is both relevant and meaningful to them, at the same time combating the harmful outcomes of systemic racism and colonial ideologies that may marginalize or overlook diverse cultural perspectives (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017). Yosso's community cultural wealth also shares a common emphasis with culturally sustaining pedagogy on countering deficit-based narratives by centering marginalized students' cultural and linguistic assets (Yosso, 2005). Culturally sustaining pedagogy is particularly important for this literature review because it provides a foundation that validates and sustains the culture and cultural identity of students as assets rather than barriers to academic success.

Culture is a dynamically stable process which results from the interaction of two main components: collectively created knowledge structures that are unevenly shared among networks of individuals, and practical rules for their usage (Patterson, 2014). It is composed of several key elements that define the way of life and identity of a society or group of people. These components include

symbols, language, norms, values, and practices (Achiței & Nistor, 2023). In literature, culture is often represented either with a big 'C' or a small 'c' depending on the author's context and focus. While culture with a big 'C' is referring to achievement culture, and includes elements like history, geography, institutions, music, and literature which are significant cultural achievements and are often easier to identify, culture with a small 'c' is referring to behavioral culture, encompassing culturally influenced beliefs and perceptions, which are expressed through behaviors that affect acceptability in a community. This includes everyday living, attitudes, and interpersonal relationships (Matić, 2015).

Culture significantly influences individual and group behavior in different ways across different societies. For instance, cultural differences between collectivist and individualistic societies are profound and can manifest in various aspects including parenting, social values, mental health, and even creative expressions. In collectivist cultures, like those prevalent in China, group harmony, family obligations and community are emphasized over individual desires. This can be seen in parenting styles where expectations for family obligations and warmth are more pronounced, leading to fewer externalizing problems in children. In contrast, individualistic cultures, like those in western countries, prioritize personal autonomy and self-expression (Gorla et al., 2024; Wu, 2025). Despite major differences, family and cultural background play an important role in fostering resilience among college students that are faced with academic stress and challenges.

College students' ability to internalize resilience is profoundly influenced by their cultural background, community ties, and family support (Chai et al., 2020; Dahal et al., 2018; Hawken et al., 2020; Jimenez et al., 2022). For many college students, especially those from marginalized communities, familial support serves as foundation for their academic resilience. Students of Mexican heritage often attribute their academic success to the unwavering support they receive from family, especially their mothers who instill in them, the importance of education and perseverance (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004). Community ties also play a significant role in shaping American Indian college students' academic resilience. Tribal traditions and community support are pivotal to their ability to persist in college (Montgomery et al., 2000). The element of family and community is interconnected for many college students, creating a web of support with community networks often reinforcing the cultural values instilled by families (Campa, 2013; Montgomery et al., 2000; Morgan Consoli & Llamas, 2013).

Particularly for international students, many draw strength from their cultural heritage, which instills in them a sense of purpose and determination to succeed. They manifest these through the

preservation of their language, religion, and traditions as cultural practices from where they find comfort and strength for continuity in a foreign environment (Baolian Qin et al., 2022). A study that investigated challenges faced by Burmese international college students in China showed that cultural and familial factors were major external factors in fostering sense of belonging and strength which enhanced the students' academic resilience (Moe, 2021). Another study on Saudi students in Malaysia found that family support significantly reduced the link between academic stress and cultural adaptation difficulties, enhancing the students' academic success and overall well-being (Alshammari, 2024).

Either as a resource for independent coping, fostering an "I" identity or as a resource for collective support, enhancing a "we" identity, family and community support are pivotal in resilience building for college students (Makhnash et al., 2024). However, prolonged disconnection from family and community support can lead to a decline in academic resilience for international students. They often experience increased anxiety, stress, and feelings of isolation (Zhou, 2023). Prolonged disconnection from family and support networks can also have severe consequences on international students' mental health leading to issues like depression and loneliness (Bedi et al., 2024). As it touches on institutional and cultural barriers, students have reported limited access to counseling and cultural stigma as hindrance to their help-seeking. This makes them delay support seeking until problems become severe (Sakız & Jencius, 2024). Many institutions also frame mental health issues as individual problems, placing the responsibility on students to develop resilience without addressing the systemic factors such as financial exploitation and neglect, that are often embedded in the logic of international education (Peterie et al., 2024).

Several research shows that many international students exhibit a high level of academic resilience by internalizing resilience through the support from their family, community, and cultural background (Alshammari, 2024; Baolian Qin et al., 2022; Ge, 2021; Kim et al., 2019; Mandell et al., 2022; Moe, 2021; Permatasari et al., 2021). However, this can be further strengthened through tailored support programs and inclusive strategies that promote identity recognition and cultural understanding (Salgado et al., 2024). There is a need for more quantitative studies with rigorous designs that specifically explore the importance of family support on academic resilience, literature should also focus more on younger and male students (Yi et al., 2024). While literature examined factors such as self-efficacy, self-regulation, and emotional well-being and how these shapes academic resilience (Shen et al., 2024; Rachmawati et al., 2024), gaps remain in exploring how cultural background intersects with

other social identities like socioeconomic background, first-generation status, and gender. There is need for more studies like Johnson et al. (2022) which highlighted how high-achieving African American and Latinx female students use psychological resistance to navigate racial and gendered bias. Further studies can examine how such intersectionality shapes resilience differently across diverse groups.

Although cultural background is recognized as foundational to academic resilience (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Moe, 2021), resilience is still framed by many institutions as an individual trait rather than addressing systemic barriers (Peterie et al., 2024). Therefore, there is need for more studies around institutional policies that enhance culturally sustaining resilience-building strategies. Lastly, increased academic stress has been linked to cultural dissonance and adaptation challenges (Chai et al., 2020; Mulyadi et al., 2024), showing that more studies need to examine how different acculturation strategies such as integration, assimilation, marginalization or separation (Baolian Qin et al., 2022) impact students' academic resilience, and explore which strategies are most effective for sustaining resilience across different cultural groups.

Conclusion

The influence of cultural background on college students' academic resilience underlines the importance of community, family, and cultural identity in shaping students' ability to navigate academic obstacles. Culturally sustaining pedagogy is an important approach for ensuring that students' backgrounds are acknowledged as well as integrated into institutional support systems. When cultural diversity is embraced in resilience-building efforts, universities and colleges can empower students from various backgrounds to succeed. However, despite the increase in literature that recognizes links between cultural background and resilience, gaps that remain include generalization of cultural influences without addressing the nuanced experiences of specific subgroups. Institutional barriers as well continue to limit students' access to needed culturally responsive support. Future work must explore these complexities to develop more comprehensive models of college students' academic resilience.

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