

Co-cultural identities impact on Appalachian college student’s health-seeking behaviors



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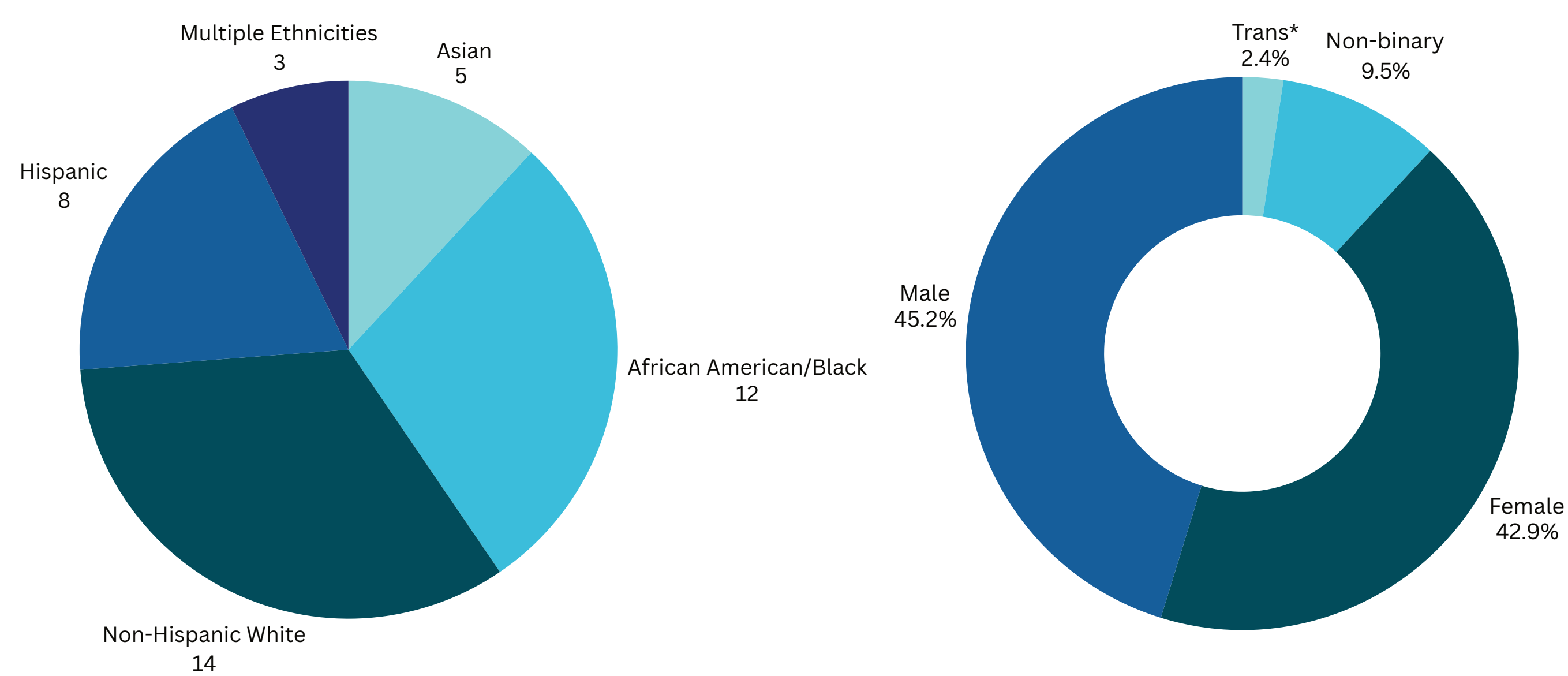
Background

- There is an increasing health disparity between Appalachia and the rest of the United States.¹
- Students from rural Appalachian backgrounds are less likely to seek healthcare², even when financial barriers are removed, in large part due to Appalachian cultural norms³.
- In many studies related to Appalachia, markers such as income, education, and level of access are the focus, leaving the influence of culture out of the findings.
- Racial inequities in U.S. healthcare persist even after accounting for socioeconomic status and education⁴.
- The stereotypical Appalachian is often interpreted as 'white mountain folk'; however, the Appalachian region continues to grow in diversity, with ethnic minority populations climbing from around 10% in the 1990s to now more than 20% of residents⁵.
- **The purpose of this study was to understand the health experiences, behaviors, and beliefs of co-cultural undergraduate students in Appalachia.**

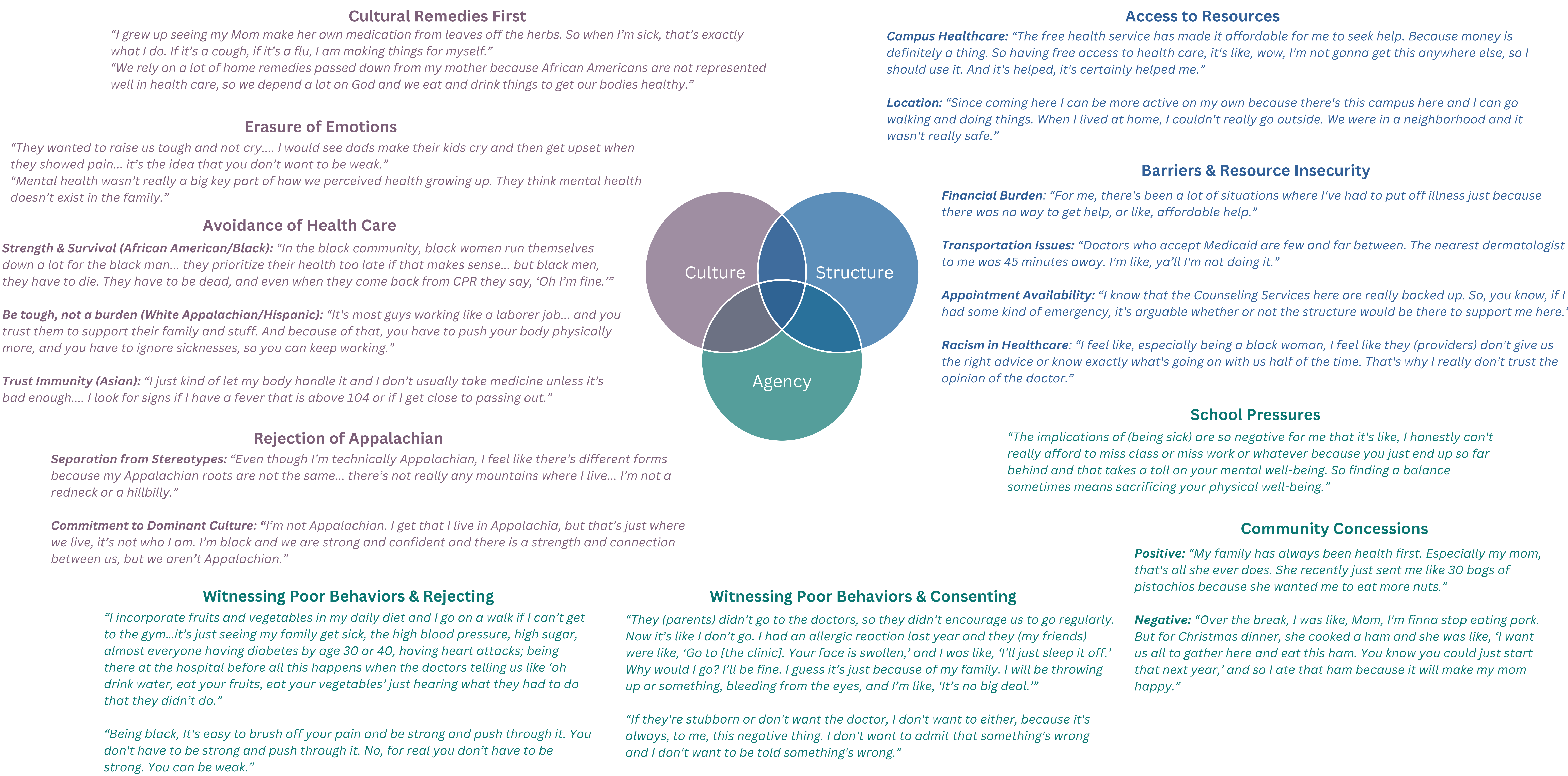
Methods & Participants

Semi-structured interviews with students at Berea College. Inclusion criteria: 1 year in Appalachia (before college), does not identify as non-Hispanic white OR comes from a disadvantaged background as determined by criteria from the National Institute of Health. Phronetic iterative approach with open and axial coding.

Participants (N=42)



Culture-Centered Approach & Themes



Discussion

This research validates previous findings that those living in Appalachia often avoid healthcare, seeking home remedies first. However, it revealed cultural nuances in rationales for avoiding healthcare. It also showed that co-cultures within Appalachia tend to reject the Appalachian label and identify strongly with their ethnic identity. Students who rejected the Appalachian label also frequently rejected the health behaviors of their family/culture, adopting healthier food and exercise habits while at college. Students across cultures noted that while the access to resources at college were helpful, barriers still existed regarding the financial burden of healthcare costs and difficulty obtaining transportation to out-of-town appointments. Future research should explore motivations to overcome these barriers, specifically in consideration of culturally-learned health behaviors and student's agency.

Related literature

