

Cancel Culture as a Stressor: Implications for Student's Resilience and Coping

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ABSTRACT

Cancel culture, broadly defined as the collective withdrawal of support, trust, or acceptance from an individual or group in response to perceived transgressions, has become increasingly visible in educational institutions. While often framed as a tool for accountability, it also functions as a form of social exclusion that shapes the psychosocial experiences of students. This paper explores the implications of cancel culture as a stressor, with particular attention to its impact on student resilience and coping. Drawing on existing qualitative research, theoretical perspectives on resilience, and psychological frameworks of stress and coping, this literature review interrogates how students experience, interpret, and navigate the pressures of cancellation in academic settings. The review highlights three key dimensions: The psychological impact of cancel culture on identity, belonging, and self-esteem; the coping strategies (adaptive and maladaptive) that students employ when faced with reputational threats and peer rejection; and the role of institutional culture in either amplifying or buffering these stressors. By synthesizing insights from psychology and sociocultural studies, the paper argues that cancel culture in schools and universities can act as both a catalyst for resilience and a risk factor for psychological distress. Ultimately, this duality raises a dilemma: should educational institutions treat cancel culture primarily as a legitimate form of student voice and accountability, or as a psychosocial hazard that undermines well-being?

Key Terms: Cancel Culture; Resilience; Coping strategies; Stress; student well-being.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, educational institutions have witnessed growing attention to cancel culture, a phenomenon commonly understood as the collective withdrawal of support, trust, or acceptance from individuals or groups due to perceived transgressions, often amplified through social or digital networks. While much of the popular discourse frames cancel culture as a mechanism for accountability or moral growth, academic scholarship is increasingly unpacking its darker side: how it functions as a psychosocial stressor for students, with potential consequences for identity, belonging, and well-being (Zembylas, 2024; Martinez & Stewart, 2021).

Resilience, the capacity to adapt, recover, and thrive amid adversity, is central within psychosocial perspectives in education, understood both as process and outcome (Wang et al., 2025; Steel et al., 2024). Coping strategies, whether adaptive or maladaptive, mediate the relationship between such stressors and student outcomes (Berru Amalianita et al., 2025). While much research has examined academic stress, social isolation, and mental health during crises (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic), there is limited qualitative literature explicitly addressing how students experience cancel culture: how they interpret it, narrate it, and deploy strategies for resilience in the face of socio-academic exclusion.

This paper addresses that gap. It seeks to synthesize what recent literature reveals about three intertwined questions:

- How does cancel culture impact students' psychological functioning, particularly identity, self-esteem, and belonging?
- What coping or resilience-fostering strategies emerge?

c) How can institutional culture amplify or buffer the stress associated with cancellation?

By centering psychosocial perspectives in education and employing a qualitative literature review, this work positions cancel culture not merely as a social phenomenon but as a complex set of interactions involving power, belonging, stigmatization, and student voice. Importantly, this duality generates a core dilemma: although cancel culture may serve legitimate ends—accountability, justice, and moral development—it may also inflict harm when peer judgments or institutional responses become punitive, when due process is lacking, or when individuals are socially isolated. Such harm can undermine the psychological well-being that schools aim to foster. In response, this review argues that educational institutions must cultivate practices that balance accountability with empathy, promote restorative justice, and develop inclusive support systems so that student well-being is protected alongside the values cancel culture seeks to uphold.

Cancel Culture in Educational Contexts

Cancel culture, broadly defined as the withdrawal of support from individuals or groups perceived to have violated prevailing social norms, has increasingly permeated educational contexts (Nguyen, 2021). While much scholarship initially located cancel culture within political or media landscapes, schools and universities have become microcosms where these dynamics unfold. Within classrooms and campus communities, students and staff are held accountable not only for academic performance but also for their alignment with dominant social or moral values (Cisneros & Nakayama, 2021). This shift highlights how educational spaces are no longer neutral grounds but contested arenas where power, identity, and morality intersect.

In practice, cancel culture in schools and universities often manifests in both digital and face-to-face interactions. For example, when a student or teacher expresses a controversial opinion, the response may quickly escalate from disagreement to coordinated ostracism, petitions, or even formal complaints. Research by Liu and Steele (2022) shows that digital platforms such as class WhatsApp groups, Discord servers, or university forums have amplified the speed and reach of cancel culture dynamics. In such cases, the disciplinary mechanism does not necessarily emerge from institutional policies but from peer-driven accountability, with peers acting as both judges and enforcers of communal norms.

The psychological impact on students is profound. Fear of cancellation can increase anticipatory anxiety, social withdrawal, and reluctance to participate in classroom dialogue (Dettmar, 2021). Students report engaging in “self-censorship” to avoid reputational harm, which undermines the very goals of higher-order learning such as critical thinking, perspective-taking, and intellectual risk-taking (Rogers, 2022). For students directly targeted, the consequences are more severe: loss of friendships, stigmatization, and diminished self-worth. A 2023 survey on student activism in U.S. universities indicated that those who experienced cancellation were more likely to report symptoms of depression and lower academic motivation compared to peers who had not been targeted (Warner, 2023).

Cancel culture does not affect only students. Educators, too, experience its weight. Teachers whose pedagogical choices are perceived as insensitive or misaligned with current socio-political expectations may be subjected to online harassment, professional scrutiny, or calls for dismissal. One notable case occurred in the United States where a professor faced petitions and protests after showing a controversial film in class (Johnson, 2021). While the film was presented as part of a critical analysis, the reaction highlighted how educational spaces can become volatile when trust between teachers and learners breaks down. Such incidents create a climate of professional insecurity, where educators feel pressured to sanitize content, avoid difficult topics, and minimize intellectual controversy. This dynamic undermines academic freedom and narrows the scope of inquiry that is possible within schools and universities.

At the same time, scholars caution against framing cancel culture exclusively in negative terms. From one perspective, cancel culture provides marginalized students with tools to challenge oppressive structures and call out harmful practices. For example, Morris (2021) argues that cancel culture in educational institutions has at times served as a catalyst for meaningful reform, such as prompting schools to address racial bias in curricula or discriminatory disciplinary practices. In this sense, cancel culture can be interpreted as a form of collective resistance that empowers vulnerable groups to demand accountability.

Yet the challenge lies in the absence of restorative processes. Without mechanisms for dialogue, reflection, and reconciliation, cancel culture often devolves into punitive exclusion rather than constructive transformation (Rogers, 2022). This is particularly troubling in education, where the mission is not only to transmit knowledge but also to nurture resilience, empathy, and critical citizenship. Thus, cancel culture in schools presents a dilemma: it can both serve as a mechanism for social justice and, paradoxically, create environments of fear, silence, and division.

Ultimately, cancel culture in educational contexts cannot be dismissed as a passing trend. It represents a cultural phenomenon with deep psychological and institutional implications. Its dual character—empowering some while silencing others—raises urgent questions about how schools and universities should navigate accountability, free expression, and well-being in increasingly polarized environments. As Nguyen (2021) emphasizes, the challenge is not whether cancel culture exists, but how educational systems can respond to it in ways that preserve dialogue, promote inclusivity, and safeguard the psychological health of all stakeholders.

Cancel Culture as a Stressor for Students

The discourse on cancel culture within educational institutions is not merely abstract; it is lived daily by students navigating social, academic, and digital spaces. In U.S. high schools, for instance, cases have emerged where students were “canceled” by their peers for expressing controversial opinions online or making insensitive remarks. While disciplinary responses have historically been the domain of school administrators, the digital age has amplified peer-driven accountability, where reputational consequences are swift and often unforgiving (Nguyen, 2021). Such dynamics intensify stress for adolescents, as reputational harm in this developmental period is closely tied to identity formation and belonging (Stevens & Prinstein, 2021). When students perceive that a single misstep can lead to ostracism, they may experience heightened anxiety, emotional withdrawal, or defensive self-censorship, thereby compromising both their social learning and academic engagement.

Beyond the U.S., cancel culture in schools intersects with broader socio-political currents. In the United Kingdom, debates about decolonizing the curriculum have seen students push for certain texts, symbols, and practices to be removed, sparking resistance from other community members (Wong, 2022). For some students, such activism represents empowerment and agency, but for others, particularly those whose views or identities are aligned with the “canceled” content, it fosters an atmosphere of polarization and fear. The psychological impact of this polarization is often overlooked. Students caught in these cultural battles may feel pressured to conform to dominant peer narratives or risk exclusion. In such contexts, cancel culture becomes not only a stressor but a potential barrier to the kind of open, dialogical learning that schools strive to cultivate.

In non-Western settings, cancel culture assumes culturally specific forms. In parts of Africa, for example, student-led boycotts or social media-driven campaigns against peers or teachers accused of discriminatory behavior mirror global patterns but are also entwined with struggles around identity, cultural authenticity, and power (Molefe, 2021). While these actions can amplify marginalized voices, they can also reinforce binaries of inclusion versus exclusion. Research shows that students in such environments often experience moral dilemmas, supporting justice and accountability while simultaneously fearing the psychological toll of ostracism if they dissent (Chukwuorji et al., 2022). The result is a fragile social balance where resilience is continuously tested.

Psychologically, cancel culture can be conceptualized as a modern form of peer-enforced social regulation, one that blends punitive justice with community-driven accountability. Unlike formal disciplinary measures, however, it often lacks restorative components, making reintegration difficult. Studies on adolescent stress highlight that chronic exposure to peer rejection and social humiliation is strongly associated with increased risk for depression, anxiety disorders, and even self-harm (Rapee et al., 2020). Thus, the stress induced by cancellation is not trivial; it is embedded in relational ecosystems where identity, belonging, and resilience collide. Students forced into defensive strategies, whether hiding their opinions, over-conforming, or withdrawing socially, may appear resilient in the short term, but such coping often erodes long-term psychological well-being.

Taken together, these cases suggest that cancel culture as experienced in educational institutions is a double-edged sword. While it promotes accountability and reflects students' capacity for moral agency, it also generates stress, shame, and exclusion. For educators and psychologists, the challenge lies in discerning how to transform these moments into opportunities for restorative dialogue, resilience-building, and the cultivation of empathy rather than alienation.

School Climate and Belonging

Across education systems, school climate- the constellation of norms, relationships, teaching practices, safety, and supports that characterize daily life in a school- functions as the social ecology in which learning and development occur. Within that ecology, belonging, broadly defined as feeling accepted, valued, and connected within a school community, is consistently identified as a predictor of academic success, motivation, and psychological well-being (Allen et al., 2023; OECD, 2023; Štremfel et al., 2024). In a systematic review of 86 studies, Štremfel et al. (2024) showed that belonging both predicts outcomes such as achievement, behaviour, and psychological well-being, and is predicted by malleable school-level levers such as teacher relationships, safety, fair treatment, and inclusive pedagogy. This bi-directionality positions belonging as a keystone construct for improvement efforts. Yet, when a student is "canceled", whether through peer exclusion, social media backlash, or silencing in class, the immediate effect is often the erosion of this sense of connection. What was once a secure environment becomes fraught with fear of judgment, rejection, or loss of peer support.

The international evidence base since the COVID-19 pandemic adds texture. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022, spanning 81 systems, was the first large-scale study to collect performance and well-being data both before and after pandemic disruptions. Beyond test scores, the OECD's "Happy Life Dashboard" tracked facets such as engagement, relationships, and belonging (OECD, 2023a). Countries reporting shorter or less widespread closures saw stable or improving belonging, with Japan highlighted as an example, suggesting that school continuity and re-entry conditions mattered for socio-emotional recovery, not just academic outcomes. Cross-national variation is evident: in New Zealand, 68% of 15-year-olds reported that they "feel they belong" at school compared to the 75% OECD average, while Norway paired strong safety indicators with reduced bullying exposure where belonging improved (OECD, 2023b). These results caution systems to monitor belonging alongside achievement when judging post-pandemic recovery.

Belonging's pathways are increasingly well specified. Identity-safe classroom practices, such as high expectations with high relational support, inclusive materials, and routine opportunities for student voice, are associated with improved engagement and socio-emotional outcomes, particularly for students from marginalized groups (Learning Policy Institute, 2023). Reports synthesizing this work argue that "whole-child" climates, which intentionally cultivate relationships, relevance, and emotional safety, yield both motivation gains and achievement gains by reducing threat and increasing meaningful participation (WestEd, 2024). This complements policy-focused reviews calling for school-wide conditions such as predictable routines, restorative responses to conflict, and teacher collaboration time that enable classroom-level belonging practices to take root (Štremfel et al., 2024).

The mental health link is robust and consequential. Prospective and longitudinal studies indicate that higher school belonging in adolescence predicts lower anxiety, depression, and stress in young adulthood (Allen et al., 2023). Newer work also examines belonging as a mediator between experiences of discrimination, such as racial microaggressions, and academic or mental health outcomes (Song et al., 2024). This clarifies why climate reforms must pair universal practices with targeted, equity-attentive supports. In other words, belonging is not merely "nice to have"; it is a protective factor that can interrupt risk pathways when schools address safety, connectedness, and fair treatment systematically.

Importantly, the drivers of belonging are actionable. The recent literature converges on several levers: relational pedagogy (frequent formative feedback, interest in each student's learning, advisory or homeroom structures that make time for connection); predictable, restorative discipline that minimizes exclusion and emphasizes reintegration; student voice in classroom norms, assessment choices, and school-wide decision-making; coherent SEL embedded in academic instruction; and adult culture that mirrors what schools expect of students, including collaboration, recognition, and psychological safety for staff (Learning Policy Institute, 2023; WestEd, 2024).

The PISA 2022 results also flag a warning: students' perceptions of receiving "extra help when needed" have declined over the last decade in many countries, signaling that teacher workload pressures can erode the very relationships that sustain belonging (OECD, 2023a).

Finally, context matters. International schools and diverse urban systems face belonging challenges, such as language barriers, cultural distance, and high mobility, but also have powerful assets, including multilingualism, intercultural curricula, and service learning. Climate work that honors identity through culturally responsive pedagogy and multilingual family engagement, while ensuring safety through anti-bullying and bias incident procedures, helps transform diversity from a stressor into a source of collective efficacy (Štremfel et al., 2024). Cross-system reviews emphasize that belonging must be measured with reliable tools, co-designed with students and staff, and iteratively improved, treating climate not as a slogan but as a continuous-improvement domain alongside instruction (OECD, 2023a). For educators, the dilemma lies in the dual role of belonging: it is both the resource that protects students and the very thing that cancel culture threatens to dismantle. Cancel culture weaponizes belonging by creating "in-groups" and "out-groups," where inclusion is conditional on conforming to dominant views. In this sense, belonging becomes precarious, and resilience is tested not only by the experience of being cancelled but also by the anxiety of potentially becoming the next target

Cancel Culture, Belonging, and Resilience: A Process Model

When the cultural practice colloquially termed cancel culture enters schools, it does more than trigger a one-off conflict; it reorganizes the social ecology in which young people learn. A typical episode begins with a perceived norm violation (a classroom remark, a post shared from a dorm, an ill-judged meme). Social media affordances—speed, scale, and permanence—amplify the event, turning private disapproval into a public call-out and, at times, a cascading "pile-on." In educational communities, that acceleration collides with slower pastoral and disciplinary systems, producing a mismatch between the tempo of online outrage and the deliberative pace required for fair process. The educational stakes are high because these episodes unfold inside institutions that are charged with cultivating intellectual risk-taking, ethical growth, and civic participation, all of which depend on a baseline of psychological safety and mutual regard (OECD, 2023).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) helps to clarify why cancel episodes feel so destabilizing. SDT posits that flourishing depends on the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs: relatedness (belonging), competence, and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Public shaming threatens all three simultaneously. First, it fractures relatedness: peers withdraw, online disapproval accumulates, and classroom interactions become wary. Second, competence is undermined as the target internalizes global judgments ("I am a bad person/student") rather than specific, improvable feedback. Third, autonomy constricts because students learn that voicing uncertainty or testing ideas carries outsized reputational risk; they manage impressions instead of engaging in inquiry. Appraisals of procedural fairness further shape the emotional trajectory. When students perceive that adults rush to judgment or allow the online crowd to dictate outcomes, anger and cynicism dominate; when students see that context is heard, intent and impact are disentangled, and there is a pathway to repair, shame can be metabolized into accountability and growth (Ryan & Deci, 2020; OECD, 2023).

Belonging sits at the center of this calculus. International evidence since the pandemic shows that students' sense of belonging is tightly coupled with life satisfaction, engagement, and behavior across systems, and it is responsive to school-level levers such as safety, adult support, and fair treatment (OECD, 2023). In that light, cancel episodes are not merely individual crises; they are belonging shocks that ripple outward through classrooms, teams, and residences. Schools that maintain transparent norms, predictable responses, and spaces for dialogue are better able to contain the shock and restore relational trust. Conversely, where norms are ambiguous and adult responses are inconsistent, the same episode can depress participation far beyond those directly involved, cooling discussion and encouraging strategic self-censorship.

The effects are not evenly distributed. A large body of contemporary work shows that belonging mediates the relationship between social positioning (e.g., racial/ethnic identity, language status, newcomer status) and academic and mental-health outcomes: when belonging is low, risk pathways intensify; when belonging is protected, achievement and well-being improve, particularly for marginalized groups (Allen et al., 2021). This means that the same cancel event can carry very different meanings depending on power dynamics and prior

inclusion or exclusion. For some students, call-outs may operate as a long-denied route to accountability; for others, they confirm a pre-existing sense that the community is unforgiving. A process that is blind to identity risks compounding harm; one that is identity-attentive without being punitive can uphold standards while enlarging the circle of belonging.

Resilience, in turn, is best understood not as a trait but as a multisystemic process- an evolving interaction between individual coping and the quality of the social and institutional supports available (Ungar, 2021; Masten, 2021). After a cancellation, students commonly cycle through shame, fear, or anger. Whether they adapt or calcify depends on what the system makes possible. In a punitive pathway, ostracism hardens into status loss; students retreat, self-censor, or disengage; internalizing symptoms rise; and what appears superficially as “toughening up” is actually brittle resilience- protective in the short term but developmentally costly. In a restorative pathway, adults slow the cycle, surface perspectives, and separate condemnation of the act from exclusion of the person; peers practice perspective-taking; specific harms are addressed; and a re-entry is structured so that competence and autonomy can be rebuilt alongside relatedness. Syntheses of restorative practice in secondary schools consistently report improved connectedness, fewer conduct incidents, and better climate when these processes are embedded rather than episodic (Lodi et al., 2021).

Taken together, the model posits a clear causal chain with feedback loops: trigger → amplification → institutional filters and identity moderators → SDT need threats and fairness appraisals → coping pathway → resilience outcome, which then feeds back to shape future climate.

The practical implication is crisp: because belonging functions as both a resource and a regulator of coping, the decisive move for schools is not to suppress conflict, but to pre-commit to processes that keep people in community while addressing harm. That means visible norms for dialogue, graded accountability rather than permanent social exile, and guaranteed opportunities for learning and re-integration. In such climates, cancel episodes become demanding but teachable moments; absent those structures, they become corrosive, leaving students more cautious, less curious, and less able to participate in plural, democratic life.

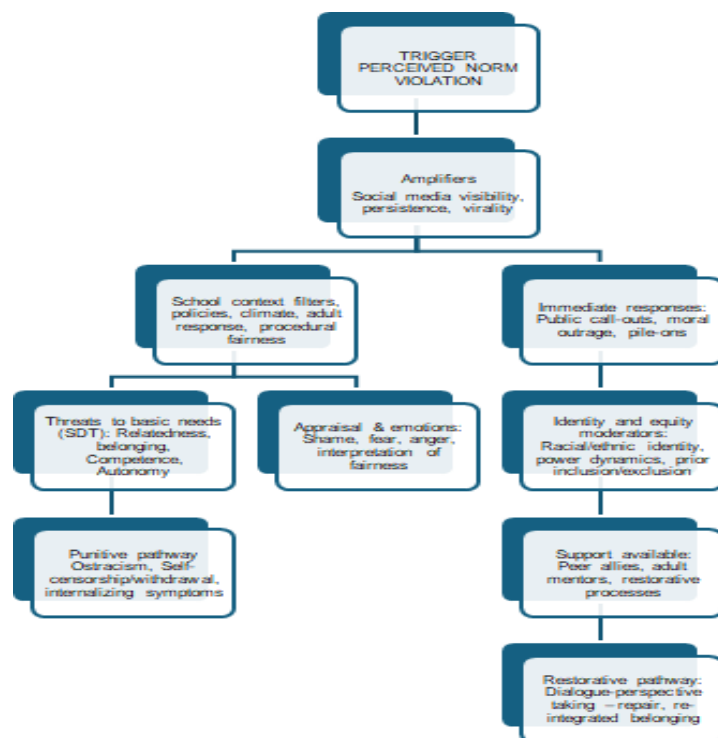


Figure 1: Cancel, belonging, resilience model

This model is not a statistical pathway but a causal narrative, organized around stages of escalation and response. It was constructed inductively through a thematic review of studies published between 2020–2023 on student well-being, school climate, and resilience in the context of social media–driven controversies (e.g., Allen et al., 2021; OECD, 2023; Ungar, 2021). In line with qualitative research traditions, emphasis was placed on the

interpretive logic linking concepts rather than on variable quantification. Each thematic strand- social media amplification, belonging as mediator, SDT need satisfaction, identity moderation, restorative versus punitive pathways- was identified across multiple sources and then woven into a single conceptual framework.

The epistemological stance is critical-interpretivist. Cancel culture is treated not as a monolithic or universally negative phenomenon but as a contested social practice that can either erode or reinforce resilience depending on the institutional ecology. In presenting the model, the paper seeks to surface tensions rather than resolve them prematurely: belonging is both fragile and repairable, resilience can manifest as growth or as brittle adaptation, and fairness can be procedural or relational. This positioning allows for nuance, aligning with qualitative traditions that highlight meaning, context, and lived experience as central to research (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

By mapping findings into a dynamic process model, the review produces a heuristic that educators, counsellors, and policy-makers can use to anticipate the ripple effects of cancellation episodes. Rather than offering prescriptive “best practices,” the framework invites contextual adaptation: schools may differ in cultural norms, resources, and governance structures, but the causal logic- trigger, amplification, belonging shock, coping pathway, resilience outcome- provides a transferable scaffold.

Implications for Practice: From Model to Educational Interventions

The process model outlined in Figure 1 underscores that cancel culture in educational institutions is not simply a matter of peer conflict but a systemic phenomenon with implications for belonging, resilience, and identity development. Translating this conceptual insight into practice requires schools to move beyond ad hoc crisis responses toward deliberate, proactive strategies.

First, the model highlights the mediating role of belonging. When a cancellation episode threatens a student’s sense of inclusion, the key determinant of resilience is not the incident itself but whether the institutional environment provides credible avenues for repair. Schools therefore need to design structured belonging repair mechanisms, such as restorative dialogue circles, peer-support programs, or advisory systems where students can safely re-enter the community after conflict (Morrison & Vaandering, 2021). For example, advisory structures can be expanded to include “restorative advisory sessions” where both harmed and accused students engage in facilitated conversations that focus on perspective-taking and mutual responsibility.

Second, the model demonstrates that identity dimensions moderate resilience outcomes. Marginalized students may experience cancellation as layered harm, both the immediate ostracism and the reactivation of broader social stigmas. Educational institutions committed to equity must therefore integrate culturally responsive and trauma-informed practices into their well-being policies (Brunzell, Waters, & Stokes, 2021). This may involve professional development for teachers on implicit bias in disciplinary practices, as well as embedding cultural humility into counselling frameworks. In international school contexts, where diversity is often celebrated rhetorically but unevenly supported structurally, this means ensuring that marginalized voices are explicitly represented in student councils, peer leadership groups, and feedback mechanisms.

Third, the model shows that the pathway from belonging shock to resilience is contingent on the coping repertoire available. Students with access only to punitive or avoidance-based strategies are more likely to exhibit brittle forms of resilience, while those with restorative and reflective options can grow stronger. This calls for schools to expand their repertoire of coping interventions. Mindfulness programs, resilience workshops, and student-led well-being initiatives can be reframed not as generic mental health supports but as protective buffers specifically designed to address social ruptures caused by cancel culture. For instance, weekly well-being circles could integrate structured reflection on digital citizenship, equipping students to process online conflicts without resorting to exclusionary tactics.

Fourth, the model foregrounds the importance of leadership in shaping school climate. When leaders frame cancellation episodes solely as disciplinary infractions, they reinforce punitive logics. By contrast, when leaders treat them as teachable moments for dialogue, empathy, and community repair, they set a cultural precedent for resilience. This implies that professional development for school leaders must explicitly address narrative framing of conflict. Workshops on restorative leadership, case-based simulations of online controversies, and

scenario planning for social media crises could equip leaders with the skills to intervene constructively rather than reactively.

Finally, the model suggests that resilience outcomes must be celebrated and made visible. Just as the escalation of cancellation is amplified through social media visibility, so too must the resolution of conflict and the restoration of belonging be publicly affirmed. Schools should institutionalize rituals of closure and recognition: community assemblies where reconciliations are acknowledged, newsletters that highlight stories of resilience, or awards for student initiatives that model empathy and dialogue. These visible signals re-anchor the community's norms around growth and belonging, countering the punitive visibility of cancel culture with a restorative visibility that validates healing.

Taken together, these implications transform the process model into a practical roadmap. The shift is from reactive crisis management toward a proactive well-being infrastructure that anticipates, mitigates, and repairs the fractures cancel culture creates. By embedding restorative practices, equity-sensitive supports, coping skill-building, leadership framing, and rituals of recognition, schools can ensure that cancellation episodes, while inevitable in a hyperconnected generation, do not derail students' growth but instead become opportunities for resilience and deeper belonging.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined cancel culture within educational contexts as more than a passing social trend; it is a psychosocial stressor that directly intersects with belonging, resilience, and student well-being. By framing cancellation as a "belonging shock," we have argued that its impact is mediated through the degree to which schools provide credible, equitable, and restorative pathways back into community life. Drawing on resilience theory, restorative justice, and culturally responsive pedagogy, the discussion has highlighted how cancel culture challenges not only individual coping but also the institutional capacity to sustain a climate of trust and inclusion. The literature reviewed makes clear that while cancel culture often manifests digitally, its consequences are lived in the embodied, daily experiences of schooling: disrupted friendships, loss of peer support, academic disengagement, and, at times, long-term identity struggles. The process model developed here shows that resilience in the face of cancellation is neither automatic nor evenly distributed. Instead, it is contingent upon the resources—personal, relational, and institutional—that students can access in navigating their exclusion. Importantly, the implications for practice are not confined to responding to isolated incidents of cancellation. Rather, they call for a systemic reorientation of school culture: embedding restorative practices, investing in identity-affirming supports, cultivating leadership that frames conflict constructively, and making resilience achievements visible. Ultimately, this paper argues that cancel culture, far from being an external social phenomenon, is already shaping the relational dynamics of schools. Educational leaders, policymakers, and practitioners must recognize its presence and proactively design environments that transform cancellation from a moment of rupture into a catalyst for growth. By doing so, schools not only protect the well-being of their students but also model the very democratic, dialogic, and compassionate values they aspire to cultivate.

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