

INNATE RESILIENCE:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE DRIVE TO THRIVE IN THE FACE OF
ADVERSITY OF A SELECTION OF STUDENTS AT TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

College students, both traditional and nontraditional, face pressures, stress factors, harsh life experiences, and adversity. They are expected to push through all of the challenges and succeed. Universities currently measure student success by grades and graduation rates. A need for change is evident in an examination of the unmet needs of current students and expressed concerns regarding the traditional college admission process. The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify themes that activate a thriving response to adversity in college students.

A purposive sample of five college students from Texas A&M University who had faced an adversity but now identify as thriving were interviewed. Data were collected in individual interviews. Three conceptual models were developed. The first model outlines student transition from dysfunctional reintegration to resilient reintegration from adversity. The second model outlines the direct transition in factors from dysfunctional to resilient. The third model outlines the reintegration process into a state of thriving by college students. The data suggest that student attitude, sense of belonging, sense of purpose, and support system are integral to reintegrating resiliently.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES.....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
LIST OF FIGURES.....	viii
LIST OF TABLES.....	ix
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION.....	1
Overview of Chapter.....	1
History of Education.....	1
Measuring Education’s Success.....	2
Today’s Student.....	3
Texas A&M University Students.....	3
College Readiness.....	5
Adversity Factor.....	6
Resilience and Student Success.....	7
Statement of the Problem.....	7
Purpose and Objectives.....	8
Definitions of Terms and Concepts.....	9
Study Assumptions.....	9
Delimitations/Limitations.....	9
Significance of the Study.....	10
CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW.....	11
Summary.....	11
Trauma and Society.....	12
How the Brain Processes Trauma.....	14
Waves of Resilience Research.....	16
The Metatheory of Resilience.....	17
The Factors at Play.....	19
A Factor of Resilience: Self-Efficacy Theory.....	21
A Factor of Resilience: Self-Determination Theory.....	22

A Factor of Resilience: Self-Authorship Theory	22
Schreiner’s Thriving Quotient	23
CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY	26
Research Design.....	26
Research Participants	28
Data Collection	31
Data Analysis	33
Trustworthiness.....	34
Reflexivity.....	36
CHAPTER IV FINDINGS	37
Participant Testimonies.....	37
Summary of Findings.....	39
CHAPTER V DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	57
Discussion of Findings.....	57
Recommendations for Practice	65
Recommendations for Further Research.....	69
Summary.....	70
REFERENCES	71
APPENDIX A.....	83
APPENDIX B	84
APPENDIX C	85

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1 Potential Responses to Trauma	15
Figure 2 The Resilience Model	18
Figure 3 Student Transition from Dysfunctional to Resilient Reintegration	58
Figure 4 Student Transition from Dysfunctional Reintegration to Resilient Reintegration.....	59
Figure 5 College Student Reintegration-to-Thriving Process.....	62

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1 Thriving Quotient Results.....	30
Table 2 Participant Pseudonym's.....	33
Table 3 Participant's Adversity Faced.....	36

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview of Chapter

This chapter provides a brief overview of the history of the education system. Performance indicators measuring an institution's success are linked to the needs of today's students. The purpose of the study is outlined and definitions of terms are provided. Finally, the significance of the study is described.

History of Education

Since the time of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, philosophers have been contemplating the function that education should serve in society, whom it should serve, and how it should serve society (Noddings, 2018). Over the centuries, education has developed from peer-to-mentor training to a formal system of education that plays a prominent role in society. Shapiro (2009) stated the belief that "all higher education institutions, both public and private, both nonprofit and for-profit, and from state colleges to research universities to community colleges to a wide variety of technical and professional schools, serve a public purpose...they each play a distinctive and important role" (p. 2). Governments and societies have prioritized the role of education to serve the public. In fact, of all government investments, "the provision of education, training, and degrees is one of our longest-running public projects in the United States (Pusser & Doane, 2001, p. 4). Universities serve society by "experimenting, questioning and [being] open to reckon that nothing is impossible. They are also the universes of

learning, endeavor new ideas, diverse thinking, and dialogue on issues based out of deep thinking, research, new theories, and data” (Gharai, Panigrahi, Das, & Satpathy, 2018, p. 2). Centuries have passed since the original philosophers began questioning education; the conversations have yet to digress. Current questions posed in society over education include determining the roles and responsibilities of the university and student, the resources necessary for students to succeed whether schools should develop character, whether poor students can learn as much as rich students, and how student success should be measured (Noddings, 2018).

Measuring Education’s Success

Today, governments use performance indicators to determine the success of students and academic institutions. The United States uses the most performance-oriented system for public university budgeting and funding (Jongbloed & Vossensteyn, 2001). University systems are measured by their performance using indicators including, but not limited to, (a) number of credits accumulated by students, (b) number of graduates (i.e., degrees awarded), (c) research publications, and (d) number of doctoral theses (Jongbloed & Vossensteyn, 2001, p. 134). Therefore, student success has for decades been defined by the students who are able to meet these performance-oriented standards. As Schreiner (2014) put it, student success is defined by “grades and grads” (p. 41). To encompass student success simply by the measurements of grades and graduation rates does not accurately portray a holistic perspective of the success of a student. Additionally, it does not translate to success after students’ academic careers. In fact, there is a gap between student competency at graduation and the expectations of

future employers (Alsop, 2004; Brink & Costigan, 2015; Chegg, 2013; Driscoll, 2011; Scasta, 2018; Wisconsin v. Yoder, 1972).

Today's Student

The number of students in colleges or universities worldwide more than doubled from 2000 to 2014, rising from 100 million to 207 million (United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2017). In the United States, 18.4 million students were pursuing collegiate academic endeavors in 2017 (United States Census Bureau, 2018). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has projected that up to 19 million students will be in college by 2024 (Hussar & Bailey, 2017). Female representation within undergraduate students is 55%, and within graduate students is 60%. Of undergraduates, 20.9% are Hispanic, 15.1% are black, and 7.6% are Asian. Student type varies from age 15 to over 35, full-time to part-time, and civilian to veteran (United States Census Bureau, 2018). As diverse and ever-changing as the demographics of the current student population are, so are the needs of students entering college campuses—thus transforming the role of educators and academic professionals based on the needs of the clientele, the students.

Texas A&M University Students

In December 2018, Texas A&M University published recommendations from the Student Success Task Force, an initiative created by the Office of the Provost to support students in several areas. The main focus of the initiative was to address undergraduate retention and graduation at Texas A&M University (Texas A&M University, Student Success Task Force, 2018). The task force developed three main goals for incoming

freshman at Texas A&M. The first was to “increase first year retention from 92 percent of the fall 2019 entering freshmen class to 95 percent.” The second was to “increase four-year graduation rates from 54 percent to 65 percent,” and the last was to “increase six-year graduation rates from 82 percent to 85 percent” (Randall, 2018, p. 1). According to Randall (2018), university officials reported that Texas A&M University had dropped in its rankings of student success based on the Association of American Universities (AAU). One major finding was that 42% of students who had left the university reported the decision as being caused by a “lack of connection to the school and because they felt like they did not belong” (Randall, 2018, p. 1).

In order to achieve the previously mentioned goals and increase the AAU rankings of Texas A&M, the Student Success Task Force made seven recommendations: (1) increase efforts to boost first-year retention; (2) expand criteria for, increase per-student funding of, and increase support for new and existing Regents’ Scholar programs; (3) create a culture that celebrates first-generation students; (4) increase support and consistency for academic advising; (5) establish a help desk to assist students with barriers to timely graduation; (6) increase support for the Office for Student Success; and (7) establish a university-wide first-year experience (Texas A&M University, Student Success Task Force, 2018, p. 8–14). The resiliency of students—their ability to stay in school and graduate—is of concern to Texas A&M University. Understanding the challenges of students and what drives them ultimately to thrive in college is important to examine.

College Readiness

A need for change within higher education has been indicated by the unmet needs of current students and the expressed concerns of higher-education professionals (Smerdon, Kim, & Alfeld, 2018). Traditionally, the methods of reviewing college readiness have been the nationwide standardized tests referred to as the SAT and the ACT. In addition to these standardized test results, colleges and universities look at factors including grade-point average (GPA), the rigor of high school curriculum, and high school performance (Barnes & Slate, 2013; Barnes, Slate, & Rojas-LeBouef, 2010; Greene & Winters, 2005; Harvey, Slate, Moore, Barnes, & Martinez-Garcia, 2013). However, there has been research to encourage expansion of the factors used to determine college readiness. Certain states within the United States have expanded factors that determine college readiness. These factors include concepts such as resilience and grit (English, Rasmussen, Cushing, & Therriault, 2016), teamwork (e.g., New Jersey and Michigan), citizenship (e.g., Hawaii and Oklahoma), and persistence and goal setting (e.g., Ohio) (Smerdon et al., 2018, p. 106). The development of additional factors as college success predictors reflects that “academic ability is necessary, but not sufficient, for success” (Smerdon et al., 2018, p. 106). But the expansion of factors has yet to resolve the college readiness gap that still exists.

According to *Inside Higher Ed* and other sources, the College Board will add a new concept for admission offices: the adversity index (Bartram, 2019; Jaschik, 2019). In order to provide additional context for admission counselors, the adversity index is designed to explain student academic performance further—within the context of the

high school environment. This index would indicate the environment's resource accessibility based on where the student lives and learns (Jaschik, 2019). The College Board's decision reflects the realization of adversity as a factor of student performance. It also indicates a need to proactively help students reintegrate from adversity to aid their performance and success.

Adversity Factor

The assumption that all students rising to their collegiate careers come into college at the the same level of development would be counterintuitive to everything we understand about human development (Shapiro, 2009). The reality is that college students are in crisis. Students entering the collegiate experience are expected to stabilize themselves in an often unknown environment and to navigate the symptoms of any previous adversity they have faced. Regardless of a student's previous experience, the education system within the United States provides a plethora of opportunities for students to face adversity. Among these severe psychological problems is the risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviors (STBs). College students are among the subpopulation that sees an increase in risk for STBs (Mortier et al., 2018). Trauma is a very real part of a student's reality. It impacts how a student thinks, learns, lives, and ultimately makes decisions, specifically in the classroom settings (Brunzell, Waters, & Stokes, 2015). "Because challenges are ubiquitous, resilience is essential for success in school and in life" (Yeager & Dweck, 2012, p. 1). According to Hartley (2011) and the American College Health Association, "stress impedes academic performance for a third of the college population" (p. 596).

Resilience and Student Success

If students are not resilient, they can become unable to reintegrate positively from adversities within an academic environment. It is therefore critical that students have resiliency to combat setbacks and academic pressures (Martin, 2002). Resilience “can enhance student achievement and help to create an environment in schools more conducive for learning (Sternberg & Subotnik, 2006, p. 1). Sternberg and Subotnik (2006) developed a model for optimizing student success in schools. The model, emerging from an initiative that began with the American Psychological Association (APA), shows the problem-solving steps to get from problem to solution. The researchers noted that in every step of the problem-solving model, resilience is an “integral component” (Sternberg & Subotnik, 2006, p. 231).

Resilience serves as a key determinant to academic and social integration (Hartley, 2011). Hartley (2011) conducted a study with a sample of 605 students from 2 major universities during the 2007–2008 academic year. The study measured if resilience contributed to student GPA and student sense of belonging. The researcher concluded that “the demands in college are significant and there is a need for more research on the concept of resilience as it relates to college health and academic persistence” (Hartley, 2011, p. 2). The research reveals a relationship between resilience and student success.

Statement of the Problem

State governments evaluate the success of and determine funding allocations for educational institutions based on performance-oriented measurements.

Therefore, these same universities and colleges have prepared and evaluated student success based on grades and graduation rates. Unfortunately, grades and graduation rates do not translate to student success after their academic careers. In an effort to help students achieve success by the limited definition of current performance measurements, education systems have missed the need of current students to be prepared for long-term success in a manner that supports society. Current measurements do not account for the individual adversities that play a role in the success, or lack thereof, of a student. There is a need for further research to be conducted on the concept of resilience as it relates to academic success. Furthermore, research on individual accounts of the drive behind thriving in the face of adversity has not been conducted to form the best approach to increase resilience in order for college students to thrive.

Purpose and Objectives

The primary focus of this study was to explore the characteristics and factors of individuals who have seen significant growth in response to adversity, conduct interviews with students who have thrived when facing adversity, and determine potential ways to instill and develop resilience. Endeavoring to understand what activates a thriving response to adversity, this study examined the experiences of students at Texas A&M through qualitative research.

The following objectives were developed to accomplish this purpose:

1. Explore students' perceptions of adversity, resilience, and thriving.
2. Identify the factors that play a role in reintegrating resiliently.

3. Examine the personas and/or characteristics of those who successfully thrive in the face of adversity.

Definitions of Terms and Concepts

Resilience. Positive adaptation despite adversity (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008; Werner, 1995).

Resilience Theory. Force within everyone that drives them to seek self-actualization, altruism, wisdom, and harmony with a spiritual source of strength (Richardson, 2002).

Thriving. Having significant growth in response to adversity (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995).

Study Assumptions

In conducting this study, the following assumptions were made:

1. The development of an individual's capacity for thriving is desirable.
2. The students who participated were capable of self-evaluating their own level of thriving.
3. The students self-identified their level of thriving to the best of their ability.
4. The students self-identified truthfully.
5. The students answered the interview questions truthfully.

Delimitations/Limitations

The study was delimited to individuals who were full-time students at Texas A&M University in the Fall of 2018. The study also was limited to the availability of the students to meet within a specific time frame for interviews.

Significance of the Study

“University and college counseling centers have reported a shift in the needs of students seeking counseling services, from more benign developmental and informational needs, to more severe psychological problems” (Kitzrow, 2009, p. 647). This study is important because of the increase in student mental health issues. Mental health issues should be of utmost importance to institutions because of the issues’ ability to impact an individual’s academic, emotional, and physical functioning (Brackney & Karabenick, 1995; Landow, 2006).

Among the many developments occurring in education, student population growth is one to be expected. There was approximately 18.3 million students enrolled in college in 2017; 19 million students are expected to be enrolled by 2024 (Hussar & Bailey, 2017). As academic institutions attempt to meet the demands and needs of students, they will have to continue to match the high demands of a growing population whose mental health issues have been unclear. If students are resilient, they will have the capability to reintegrate positively from setbacks, academic pressures, and other adversities. Provided with this study of resilience and its relationship to student success, higher-education professionals, from academic advisors to counselors to professors, will be able to support students better and therefore increase student success rates.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Summary

This review of literature focuses on human psychology as it relates to the human narrative, metatheory of resilience, factors of resilience, and Schreiner's quotient for thriving.

McAdams and McLean (2013) theorized that people make meaning not only by processing of one's account, but also by the process of choosing what the narrative will be. This allows for a self-reflection. These narratives reveal not only one account, but also the underlying cultural and societal influences that have built the narrative. The better we understand the meaning made by collegiate students of their experiences in facing adversity, the better we can understand the needs they have and how best to support them.

Factors exist that influence an individual to be more likely or less likely to be resilient. Regardless of these factors, though, resilience remains a choice made by the individual. If one has a strong self-efficacy, he or she is more likely to persevere when facing adversity. This self-perception is one of many beliefs about self that equates to the resilience level of an individual. Self-perception is a crucial part of growing from adversity.

Trauma and Society

Across the United States alone, an estimated 70% of adults, approximately have experienced at least one traumatic event in their lifetime (“Post-Traumatic Stress,” 2017). Individuals encounter adversities including but not limited to natural disasters, poverty, terminal illness, financial crisis, human enslavement, sex trafficking, school shootings, and terrorist attacks. Best defined by the American Psychiatric Association, a traumatic event is an experience a person is confronted with that brings actual or serious harm, injury, or threat to the individual (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p.2). The National Institute of Mental Health and PTSD United have disclosed that up to 20% of those who have faced a traumatic experience go on to develop posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (PTSD, 2017). This statistic represents about 8% of Americans which is the total population of the state of Texas. While many people who experience a traumatic event are able to move on with their lives without lasting negative effects, others may have more difficulty managing their responses to trauma. Trauma can have a devastating impact on physical, emotional, and mental well-being. Unresolved trauma can manifest in many ways, including anxiety disorders, panic attacks, PTSD, and addictions (Adams, 2010; Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005; Felitti & Anda, 2010; Harvard School of Public Health and Children’s Hospital Boston, 2010; Jennings, 2004).

Felitti and Anda (2010) revealed the enduring connection between the often unrecognized childhood trauma and adulthood behavior. Unlike the traditional hypothesis that certain patients are victims to unexplainable diseases or mental illnesses, they proposed adverse childhood experiences as leading to health implications in

adulthood. The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study, an observational study of the relationship between trauma in early childhood and morbidity, disability, and mortality in the United States, demonstrated that trauma and other adverse experiences are associated with lifelong problems in behavioral health and general health (Adams, 2010; Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005; Felitti & Anda, 2010; Harvard School of Public Health and Children's Hospital Boston, 2010; Jennings, 2004).

Trauma is not only harmful to the individual but also, according to the National Institute of Health, United States Department of Veterans Affairs, and Sidran Institute, comes at a high economic burden (PTSD, 2017). Trauma has a high cost for the public health sector due to the results of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, neglect, violence, war, loss, disaster, and other emotionally harmful experiences (Adams, 2010; Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005; Felitti & Anda, 2010; Harvard School of Public Health and Children's Hospital Boston, 2010; Jennings, 2004). Within the framework of society, college students make up a key portion of human capital (Alonso et al., 2019).

“University and college counseling centers have reported a shift in the needs of students seeking counseling services, from more benign developmental and informational needs, to more severe psychological problems” (Kitzrow, 2009, p.647). The annual survey of the Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors reported that of 274 institutions, 85% saw an increase in “severe” psychological problems in the last half-decade. These included learning disabilities (71%), self-injury incidents (51%), eating disorders (38%), alcohol problems (45%), drug use (49%), sexual assault on campus (33%), and issues connected to earlier sexual

abuse (34%) (Gallagher, Sysko, & Zhang, 2001; Gallagher, Gill, & Sysko, 2000).

“Colleges across the globe are contending with rising rates of mental disorders, and in many cases, the demand for services on campus far exceeds the available resources” (Auercach, et al., 2018, p. 623-638). Comorbid mental disorders play a major role in impairment in college students (Alonso et al., 2019). A meta-analysis estimated that 30.6% of college students meet the criteria for major depression (Ibrahim, Kelly, Adams, & Glazebrook, 2013).

How the Brain Processes Trauma

The brain is an extremely powerful organ that allows us to operate our internal and external functions on a day-to-day basis, often without even thinking about it. “The brain accounts for only two percent of the body’s volume, yet it consumes twenty percent of its energy” (Cron, 2016). At any moment, it is taking in sounds, smells, and tastes and making calculations based on those experiences. Like a computer, the brain is always processing data and information. “The outside world is the brain’s real food . . .” (Kotulak, 1997, p. 4). To understand fully how people think and why certain decisions are made, it is crucial to understand how the brain works.

Felton Earls, professor of human behavior and development at Harvard University’s School of Public Health and professor of child psychiatry at Harvard Medical School said that “just as the digestive system can adapt to many types of diet, the brain adapts to many types of experiences” (Kotulak, 1997, p. 4). If the brain is a house, we process information on the first floor, where the command center for emotions is stored. The second floor contains the part of the brain where we do our problem

solving. Information gets to the first floor twice as fast as it can get to the second floor. This sometimes can lead to an information overload or overstimulation, which causes a person to hit the panic button on the first floor, which results in the individual's response of fight, flight, or freeze.

The brain responds to adversity in one of four ways, which can be seen in Figure 1: (a) becomes permanently dysfunctional, (b) adapts with loss, (c) bounces back to normal (resilience), or (d) grows from adversity (thriving) (Carver, 1998).

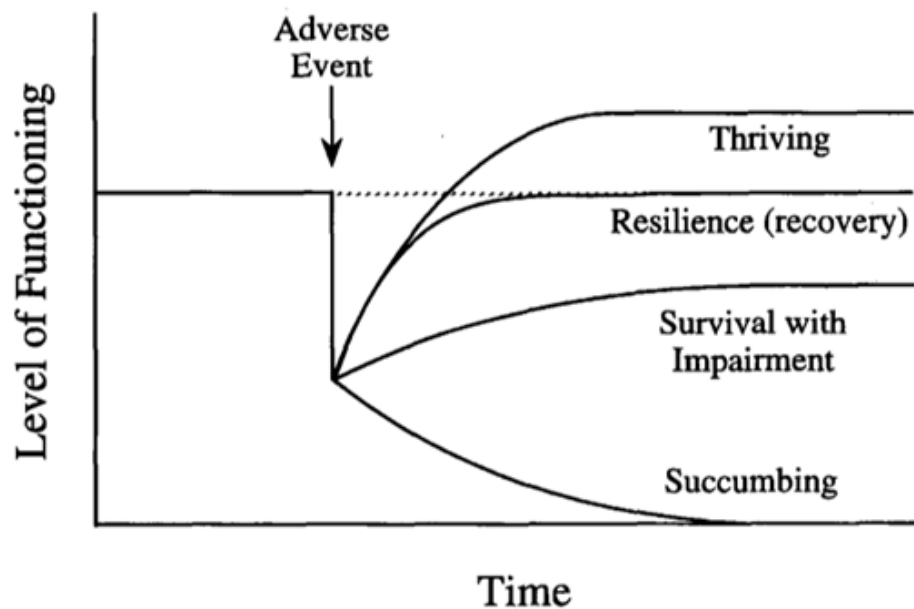


Figure 1. Potential responses to trauma. Reprinted with permission from Carver, 1998.

After decades of studying individuals with brain-related diseases, neuroscientists have found evidence that shows the brain's power to heal itself. The brain has been equipped to take on challenges and adversities with the hormones and chemicals that nurture and sustain it back to healing (Kotulak, 1997). The human brain has the capacity to adapt and grow despite the ailments it may face.

Waves of Resilience Research

Today, resilience is understood most commonly to mean positive adaptation despite adversity (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008; Werner, 1995). In other words, to bounce back. It implies the ability to adapt and navigate strategically through obstacles, adversity, or trauma while maintaining a strong fortitude to prevail (Campbell, Campbell, & Ness, 2008). In spite of difficulties, regardless of the level of intensity, one is able to acclimate in a positive manner.

This modern-day definition has come from almost six decades of research. A construct of academic and professional interest for decades, resilience remains a valued interest in local, national, and international communities. Even cities and government agencies have made efforts to build resilience as a priority (Wilkinson, 2012). It is a versatile concept with a plethora of applications in a variety of fields including agriculture and psychology. According to Werner (1995), resilience has three main purposes: “good developmental outcomes despite high-risk status; sustained competence under stress; and recovery from trauma” (Werner, 1995, p. 81).

The academic research behind resilience has developed from concentrating on a specific arena of mental health into a more general understanding of its role in overall health and has spread to the fields of child development, psychology, psychiatry, and sociology (Werner, 1995). This academic evolution of the construct of resilience can be categorized into three waves, according to Richardson (2002): (1) descriptive, (2) reintegration, and (3) drive.

The first wave of resilience theory, descriptive, derives from the concept of resilience as a construct. Resilience research first was conceived in the field of psychology (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008; Werner & Johnson, 2002). Original studies on resilience honed in on individual testimony of adversity and resilience. Commencing as a psychological, sociological, and psychiatric perspective on children, the research focused on the individual, specifically children and youth. The children being evaluated were diagnosed with schizophrenia in the early 1960s and 1970s (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008). In an effort to understand better what precursors or factors determine a child's likelihood of positive adjustment to life's challenges, psychologists began to study children with and without schizophrenia; the constant factor held by both parties was the presence of adversity. The second wave of resilience research has been referred to as resilient reintegration (Richardson, 2002). Its primary focus was to understand how to adapt to growth in response to the disruption. As its primary research inquiry, the "postmodern wave" of resilience aims to understand "the force within everyone that drives them . . ." (Richardson, 2002, p. 307-321).

The Metatheory of Resilience

Individuals "have the potential for significant growth" in response to adversity (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995, p. 56). What drives an individual to thrive? According to Richardson (2002, p. 318), resilience theory proposes that there is a "force within everyone that drives them to seek self-actualization, altruism, wisdom and harmony with a spiritual source of strength," and that force is resilience itself. According to the resilience model, seen in Figure 2, when a stressor disrupts an individual at

biopsychospiritual homeostasis, the individual progresses to reintegration (Richardson, 2002). The individual then has the choice, whether conscious or unconscious, to reintegrate dysfunctionally with loss back to homeostasis or resiliently (Carver, 1998; O’Leary & Ickovics, 1995; Richardson, 2002). Reintegration—regardless of how one reintegrates—is a choice.

Metatheory of Resilience and Resiliency

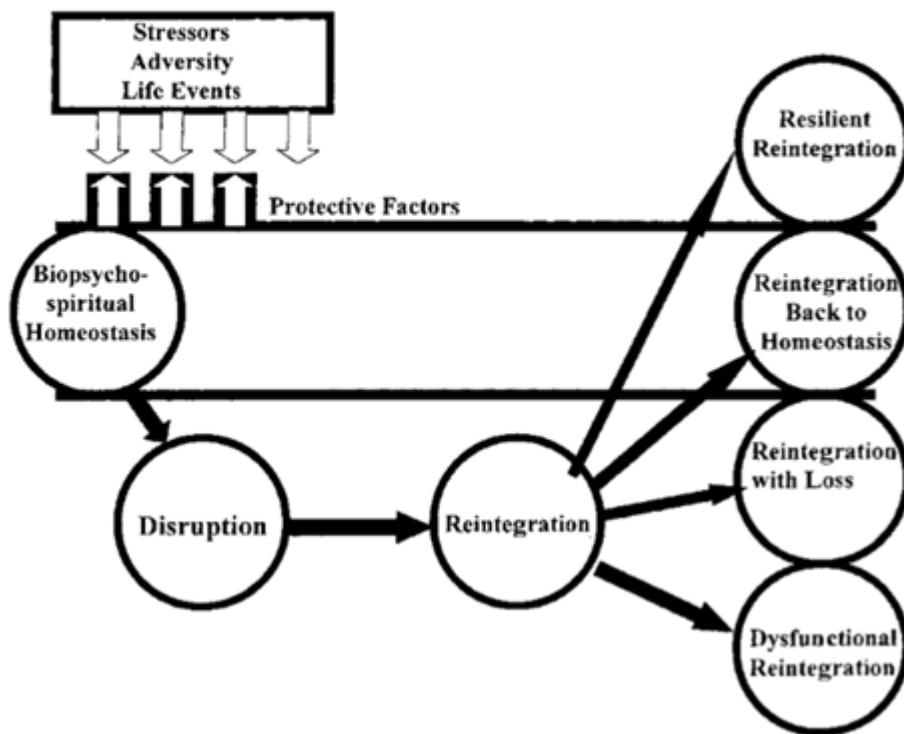


Figure 2 The Resilience model. Reprinted with permission from Richardson, 2002.

The Factors at Play

When stepping back and taking a more holistic view of the individual, researchers discovered important factors that come into play. According to Fleming and Ledogar (2008), the following factors promote resilience: “What promotes resilience originates outside of the individual . . . factors at the individual, family, community - and, most recently, cultural - levels” (p. 1). Resilience is not holistic—it can “demonstrate resilience in one domain, but suffer disorder in another domain” (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008, p. 2). Factors that play a part in resiliency for an individual include characteristics or qualities of the individual, family dynamics, and societal communities and larger public environment (Luthar, 2006). Werner (1993) showed the value of considering community resilience, but pointed out that research-revealed evidence supports the community as a factor in encouraging or discouraging positive adaptation to adversity.

Resilience is tied directly to the outcome or response of a group or individual when faced with adversity. If a positive adjustment is made, regardless of circumstance, there is a high level of resilience. There is also the case where maladapted responses are common, which would be a situation with little to no resilience. This case does not necessarily represent a negative adaptation to adversity, but it certainly is not ideal. Therefore, two distinguishers of resilience were developed: less-optimum resilience and optimum resilience (Hunter, 2012). Resilience can be compartmentalized into two dimensions that can be used as a measure to infer whether one has resilience or not. Adopted and accepted by numerous researchers, resilience comprises two major

components: noteworthy difficulty or hardship and affirmative adjustment (Luthar, 2006). The capacity to which one can measure adversity is not a matter set in stone. Therefore, researchers infer based on individual judgment to determine a situation's level of adversity. Positive adaptation, however, has a more concrete measurement gauge that can be evaluated. Encountering adversity produces the opportunity to develop in a negative or positive manner. Someone with resilience adapts positively.

As diverse as the research is, resilience is a complex construct. As Bonanno (2004) concluded, there is more than one pathway to resilience. Bonanno (2004) proposed that there is not one way to the path of resilience and recovery, but a variety of methods for which each individual can navigate him- or herself. In the game of resilience, several pieces are at play. From protective factors to risk factors to vulnerability levels, all have an impact on the potential to modify an individual's response to adversity. Researchers believe that there are specific influences at work that shield an individual in the midst of adversity; these are referred to as protective factors. These factors can differ based on one's social environment, community, family dynamics, upbringing, and individual characteristics.

The importance of this research is understood and accepted by local and international communities. Missing from the research are perceptions of resilience and the role that individuals believe it plays in their lives. Additionally, there are major implications of resilience on the fields of national security, military preparation, education, nongovernmental organizations, and government agencies. Werner (1993) alluded to research showing the imperative nature of education in training to prevent

negative adoption to adversity. To best understand this complex construct, it is important to clarify what resilience is versus what it is not. First and foremost, resilience is not the same as resiliency (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008). Resilience implies a process (Rutter, 1987). It is believed to be an internal and developmental process of steady progress. On the other hand, resiliency is a trait itself that does not require adversity be present. Secondly, there is a clear distinction in the research between resilience, bouncing back to the original state of mind, and what some researchers refer to as thriving. There are several responses to adversity. Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995) proposed that individuals having “the potential for significant growth” in response to adversity be referred to as thriving (p. 56). To grow from facing adversity, there are several factors that can support growth.

A Factor of Resilience: Self-Efficacy Theory

Self-efficacy is the self-perceived belief of being capable to produce a specific outcome (Bandura, Pastorelli, Barbaranelli & Caprara, 1999). This perception of self is a belief that serves as the foundation for human motivation (Bandura, 1997, 2006). In fact, “whatever other factors may serve as guides and motivators, they are rooted in the core belief that one can make a difference by one's actions” (Bandura, 2010, p. 1). These beliefs determine the potential of human capacity and overall emotional health. Efficacy beliefs regulate human functioning through four major processes: cognitive, motivational, emotional, and selection (Bandura, 1986; Hamill, 2003). A poor self-perception leads to poor choices, a conclusion backed by the research of Malloy and

Janowski (1992), who found leadership metaperception and self-perception to be correlated.

It is crucial to understand the role that self-efficacy plays in one's capacity to grow from adversity. Specifically, when looking at those who face adverse circumstances, those who believe that they can are more likely to persevere (Ozer & Bandura, 1990). Without the belief in oneself to produce certain outcomes, one "will have very little incentive to persevere in the face of difficulties" (Hamill, 2003, p. 3).

In this study, a student's self-perception was the degree to which a study participant self-identified at a specific level of thriving.

A Factor of Resilience: Self-Determination Theory

Self-efficacy serves as a key cognitive factor determining human operation, according to Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory. The social cognitive theory reveals the cognitive relationship between a leader's self-confidence and successful leadership as self-efficacy and self-determination (McCormick, 2001). Self-efficacy and self-determination work together to build an individual's resilience. The self-determination theory (SDT) states that a human's motivation is based on psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000). These individual needs specify the particular conditions necessary to help motivate a person toward natural growth processes to find well-being.

A Factor of Resilience: Self-Authorship Theory

As one finds natural motivation to grow naturally, the individual also will develop definitions for his or her belief system. Self-authorship is the "internal capacity to define one's beliefs, identity, and social relations" (Magolda, 2008, p. 269). As one

grows into an adult, expectations of responsibilities require self-authorship to take place. Kegan (1994) conveyed that self-authorship can be seen in the very DNA of being an adult, as one is expected to “invent or own our work . . . to be self-initiating, self-correcting, self-evaluating . . . to be guided by our own visions” (p. 153). To perform one’s job or fulfill responsibilities effectively, each must craft his or her own vision. It is how one makes meaning of knowledge. Meaning and knowledge impact the behavior one chooses. “People often act in ways that follow logically from the stories that they have created about themselves, and as such, narratives may guide future behavior” (Roy & McAdams, 2006, p. 78). By understanding the stories that people choose to tell and the meaning they make from them, researchers can understand humans better in a much more general way. “People typically use stories to explain how the *human* world works—how and why, that is, human beings do what they do. Stories deal with human needs, wants, and goals, which connect the present self to the past and the future” (Adler & McAdams, 2007, p. 97).

Schreiner’s Thriving Quotient

With college students in a state of crisis, understanding that growing from adversity and attempting to increase that likelihood for students is imperative. Thriving has many different definitions and different pathways to achieving it. Thriving in college has been defined as being “fully engaged intellectually, socially, and emotionally in the college experience” (Schreiner, 2010a, p. 4). According to Schreiner (2014), thriving in college conceptualizes student success. Although for this study thriving is defined by the capacity for growth in response to adversity (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995), Schreiner’s

(2010a) definition allows us to see that in order to gain the capacity to grow, an individual must be fully engaged. The thriving quotient is based on five scales and measures students' self-reported engaged learning, academic determination, positive perspective, social connectedness, and diverse citizenship (Schreiner, 2010a).

Engaged learning is “a positive energy invested in one’s own learning, evidenced by meaningful processing, attention to what is happening in the moment, and involvement in learning activities” (Schreiner & Louis, 2011, p. 6). An engaged learner is invested in his or her individual learning process. Academic determination “includes an emphasis on goal setting, the ability to regulate one’s own learning processes . . . , investment of effort . . . and time and resource management” (Schreiner, 2014, p. 42–43). It is an internal force that pushes an individual to aim for success within academic endeavors.

Positive perspective aligns with students having a positive lens through which they view the world. “Students who are thriving view the world and their future with confidence; they expect good things to happen and reframe negative events into learning experiences” (Schreiner, 2014, p. 42). Social connectedness refers to the health and capacity of one to have friends and be in consistent relationships with others. It is important that they “feel connected to others so that one is not lonely” (Schreiner, 2014, p. 43). Diverse citizenship is the internal desire to influence one’s community in a positive manner (Schreiner, 2014).

In this study, the thriving quotient was utilized to evaluate students' thriving levels. It gave a holistic perspective of the areas in which the participants were or were not thriving.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In the most basic of terms, qualitative research uses humans as an instrument and the subjects' words as data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The subject is witnessed within its natural environment (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Researchers who utilize qualitative data are "interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed; that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p.15).

Within the field of agricultural education, the favored methodology appears to be quantitative research methods (Dooley, 2007). According to Miller (2006) there is a need for more qualitative research within Agricultural Education to provide another lens through which we view the discipline. Wardlow (1989) professed that "social science research does not always lend itself to quantitative description. There are phenomena for which a deeper understanding of personal attitudes and values is required" (p. 5). Having knowledge about individuals' attitudes and values allows the researcher to gauge a better understanding of the underlying motivations of a group, generation, or specific audience. The qualitative concept challenges the traditional style of quantitative research of a single meaning of reality (Dooley, 2007). This singular reality impacts the meanings researchers can make of the data. Meaning is the most important tool held by qualitative researchers in using humans as data.

In order to investigate the research questions for this study effectively, it was important to understand “the meanings leaders and followers ascribe to significant events in their lives. . .” (Klenke, 2008, p.4). These significant events cannot be captured to their full extent without an interpretive approach. “Life does not come to us like a math problem, but more like a story” (Dooley, 2007, p.33). These stories accumulate to knowledge which provides meaning (Avis, 1995; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Reed, 1995; Streubert & Carpenter, 1999). This research approached this heavy focus on the stories of individuals through phenomenology. Husserl (1931) articulated phenomenology as the study of how people describe and experience things through their senses.

The best way to answer the research questions in this study was a qualitative methods approach. Interviews served as the primary source of data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This research design allowed for an in-depth microscopic view of the thought processes of individuals as they faced adversity, how they came to make meaning of the experiences they faced, and how that might have turned into action that propelling them towards positive reintegration. To understand how an individual thrives from adversity the qualitative approach was necessary. The purpose of this study was to identify the themes activating a thriving response to adversity.

The specific research questions for this study were as follows:

Questions 1. What are students’ perception of adversity, resilience, and thriving?

Question 2. What are the factors that play a role in reintegrating resiliently?

Question 3. What are the characteristics of those who thrive in the face of adversity?

Research Participants

Research participants for this study were Texas A&M University full-time graduate and undergraduate students who had experienced adversity and subsequently had experienced significant growth. The goal was to develop an understanding of the characteristics, mental thought processes, and factors of individuals who have seen significant growth in response to adversity. The researcher used purposive sampling. Of the purposeful sample, the researcher utilized a convenience, criteria-based sample.

A purposeful sample is “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p.79). In this study, the purposeful sample was Texas A&M students who were enrolled full-time during the time of the study and who had faced an adversity.

Then, the researcher used convenience sampling. Convenience sampling selects a sample based on “time, money, location, availability of sites or respondents, and so on” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 79). The researcher emailed professors within Texas A&M’s College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Mays Business School, Bush School of Government and Public Service, and the College of Liberal Arts. This strategy was applied because the researcher had previously existing relationships with professors within these colleges. With professor permission, the researcher visited the granted classes and spoke about the study. The researcher’s email was left in each classroom for

students to contact if they were interested. Additionally, an email was sent through the Texas A&M email system to garner interest. From classroom visitations and the email, 103 individuals requested to participate.

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), sample selections based on convenience sampling alone is not very credible. Therefore, criteria-based sampling was utilized as well. To answer the research questions posed for this study, students had to be thriving. To test a student's level of psychologically thriving, the researcher relied on the thriving quotient (Schreiner, 2014) using a questionnaire that consisted of a five-point, Likert-type response scale (Likert, 1932). The participants rated their agreement with each of the items by using a one to six scale, with one indicating "strongly disagree" and six indicating "strongly agree." The questionnaire evaluated engaged learning, academic determination, social connectedness, diverse citizenship, and positive perspective. Additionally, students were asked to self-identify whether they were thriving. This decision was based on the research that self-efficacy, a self-perceived belief, is a factor of resilience. To do this they selected one of the following: (a) not even surviving, (b) barely surviving, (c) surviving, (d) somewhat thriving, (e) thriving most of the time, or (f) consistently thriving. The questionnaire took no more than 30 minutes. Fifty-two students completed the thriving quotient questionnaire.

The student scores then were then calculated, with a select few statements being reverse-scored. The students scoring 120 and above were deemed to be thriving. However, because part of thriving is determined based on an individual's self-confidence, we also required students who were selected to interview to have self-

identified as (e) thriving most of the time or (f) constantly thriving. Participant responses to the questionnaire are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Thriving Quotient Results.

Thriving Quotient Results	#
Self-identified as consistently thriving and 120+	3
Self-identified as thriving most of the time and 120+	18
Self-identified as somewhat thriving and 120+	14
Self-identified as surviving and 120+	4
Self-identified as barely surviving and 120+	0
Self-identified as not even surviving and 120+	0
Self-identified as consistently thriving and <120	0
Self-identified as thriving most of the time and <120	0
Self-identified as somewhat thriving and <120	4
Self-identified as surviving and <120	8
Self-identified as barely surviving and <120	0
Self-identified as not even surviving and <120	0
Did not self-identify and 120+	0

Table 1 Continued

Thriving Quotient Results		#
Did not self-identify and <120		1
Did not finish		1
Total		53

Next, I reviewed the 21 participants who were viable candidates for interviews, including the participants who self-identified as consistently thriving and gained a score of 120+ and who self-identified as thriving most of the time and gained a score of 120+. I reviewed race/ethnicity, gender, age, work commitments, academic program, percent of program completed, and financial income. Patton (2002) urged avoidance of one-sidedness of representation by diversifying one's sample population (p.109). Of the 21 participants who had scored 120+ and self-identified as thriving, 21 participants were asked to continue in the study. Five had the availability to continue in the study.

All five of the students who participated in this study, all of them were full-time students. Four participants were female; one was male. Four of the participants were between the ages of 18 and 21. One was over the age of 61 years. One was Latina, and the rest were white/of European descent. Four were undergraduate students, and one was a doctoral candidate.

Data Collection

Interviews

Data were collected in the form of interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Interviews can be understood best as intentional conversations, according to Dexter

(1970). Each interview lasted a maximum of 90 minutes. The interviews were used to collect rich, thick descriptions of participants' individual experiences. Interview questions were semi-structured and open-ended to ensure a holistic understanding of each participant's experience. The interviews were framed to be open-ended to ensure the ability to collect data in the following areas:

- Personal definitions of resilience
- Personal definitions of thriving
- First-hand accounts of experiences with adversity that resulted in thriving
- The meaning made of the experiences they faced
- Factors that play a role in reintegrating resiliently
- Characteristics of an individual who successfully thrives

All of the participants were interviewed in person. Interviews, with the consent of the participant, were all recorded. Field notes were also utilized as well. The researcher portrayed "an empathic stance in interviewing" and "understanding without judgment by showing openness, sensitivity, respect, awareness, and responsiveness" (Patton, 2002, p. 40). No identifying information was asked or recorded. All data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed with field notes.

Confidentiality

Participant confidentiality was maintained through the entirety of the study. No specific information, such as demographics, was collected. During the interviews, any identity-related information was deleted and/or not added to written notes. Participant's confidentiality was also maintained through a coding process as well. All participants

were given a participant number and a pseudonym. The pseudonym assignments to each participant can be seen in Table 2 .

Table 2
Participant Pseudonym's.

Participant #	Pseudonym
1	Ashley
2	Taylor
3	Bruce
4	Emilia
5	Jennifer

Data Analysis

“Qualitative data analysis is a continuous, interpretive enterprise” (Miles & Huberman, 2002, p. 12). The process began the moment the interviews started. For the data analysis, inductive analysis and analytical coding were utilized. Inductive analysis uses qualitative content (transcripts in this study) to look for insights on which situations, settings, styles, images, meanings, and nuances are key topics (Altheide, 1987; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Analytical coding is the process of grouping open codes (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) “that come from interpretation and reflection on meaning” (Richards, 2014, p. 94). From the codes that emerged from the transcripts, a master list of codes was created. This master list consisted of “a primitive outline or

classification system reflecting the recurring regularities or patterns,” also referred to as themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 180). When it comes to qualitative datasets, thematic analysis is a method for capturing patterns or themes (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, & Terry, 2019).

Trustworthiness

“Trustworthiness relates to the degree of confidence that the findings of the study represent the respondents and their context” (Dooley, 2007, p. 38). This element required that the researcher ensure that the information provided by the participants was transferred with the same accurate intention of meaning as it was being analyzed. There are four different approaches that can be taken to gain trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to gain credibility, I strategically used two of the six approaches presented by Lincoln and Guba (1985): peer debriefing and member checks.

Credibility

Member checks, also referred to as respondent validation, is the practice of “soliciting feedback on emerging findings from some of the people interviewed” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 217). Participants should be able to see interpretations and still find the information valid according to what was conveyed originally. This was done by the researcher sending the analysis of the interviews back to the participants to review and confirm that the information was as they had intended it to be interpreted.

Dependability

An audit trail was conducted to ensure trustworthiness and dependability. An audit trail in “qualitative study describes in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 223). This was done so in the form of a log.

Confirmability

Peer examination is the use of a peer or colleague who is knowledgeable about the topic to “review the raw data and assess whether the findings are plausible based on the data” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 220). A fellow graduate student familiar with qualitative data served as the peer examiner for this study. The graduate student that served as the peer examiner agreed with the findings and found them plausible. Additionally, committee members reviewed data to ensure the correct direction of the investigative inquiry process.

Transferability

A researcher needs to “provide sufficient descriptive data to make transferability possible” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 224). Within the findings, the researcher included sufficient rich, thick descriptions of the raw data to ensure transferability. Table 3 outlines the participant adversity experiences.

Table 3
Participant's Adversity Faced.

Participant #	Pseudonym	Adversity Faced
1	Ashley	Suicidal thoughts; Rape victim; First generation college student; Immigrant
2	Taylor	Father with addiction; Parents divorced; Personal medical issues
3	Bruce	Anxiety & Depression
4	Emilia	Female in Corp of Cadets Organization
5	Jennifer	Only female in workplace; Children with major illnesses

Reflexivity

It is crucial to confirm the accuracy with which a researcher has represented the views of the subject in the conclusion. It is impossible to maintain a completely neutral approach given the nature of human bias. As such, a researcher must report biases that could affect the study (Patton, 2002). With the help of a fellow graduate researcher and my graduate committee, I participated in reflexivity for this study and was able to identify potential biases that could impact judgement. I recognize the bias of personal religious faith as a means to resilience, preconceived notions of what resilience is, and being a white female with specific perspectives on what adversity is or is not. As such, I was mindful of these biases and tried to ensure an objective experience.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The aim of this study was to understand the process of how college students can thrive resiliently when faced with adversity. The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

Question 1. What are students' perceptions of adversity, resilience, and thriving?

Question 2. What are the factors that play a role in reintegrating resiliently?

Question 3. What are the characteristics of those who thrive in the face of adversity?

Participants shared their perceptions of adversity, resilience, and thriving. There were consistent perceptions throughout all five interviews. The results revealed three different forms of themes: pre-thriving (dysfunctional reintegration), bridge to thriving, and thriving.

Participant Testimonies

Participant 1: Ashley

Participant 1 is a female undergraduate student referred to as Ashley. Ashley is the only child to a single mom. She worked through high school to get her associate's degree, so she came into college as a junior. Ashley is involved with many organizations on campus. Ashley encountered many adversities as a child. She was the only child to a single mother who is an immigrant. As a child, she was raped by someone she knew. As she grew older, she struggled with suicidal thoughts. She is a first-generation student.

Participant 2: Taylor

Participant 2 is a female undergraduate student referred to as Taylor. A junior at Texas A&M, Taylor transferred after spending her freshman year at another school. Both her parents work in the medical field. She has had several medical issues throughout her life. This challenge, combined with her family's background, has made hospitals feel similar to home. As a child, she wanted to be a pediatrician. As she became exposed to medical field specialties, Taylor desired to work with sick children in clinics. She was heavily involved with Future Farmers of America (FFA) and other organizations. She set expectations for herself to achieve all As, even if it was not a precedent set by anyone else. The adversities mentioned by Taylor are her father's harmful addiction, her parents' divorce, and the medical issues she has had to endure since being a young child and through college.

Participant 3: Bruce

Participant 3 is a male undergraduate student referred to as Bruce. He spent much of his adolescence moving around because of his father's job. Bruce is involved heavily with his church and faith. According to him, it is the most important part of who he is. He has a passion for photography and recently began his own photography business. Bruce has struggled most of his life with anxiety and depression. It has been so severe that it has controlled his life for a long time.

Participant 4: Emilia

Participant 4 is a female undergraduate student referred to as Emilia. Emilia is a very bubbly, positive-perspective student who loves learning and growing. She was a dancer for 13 years. She is in the Corp of Cadets. Much of her adversity comes from the challenges she has faced being a female with a small physique in the Corp of Cadets, a university leadership organization that utilizes military training.

Participant 5: Jennifer

Participant 5 is a female doctoral candidate referred to as Jennifer. Jennifer grew up in a small farming community. Farming and agriculture have been a huge part of her life. The adversity Jennifer has faced includes being the only female member within her field of agriculture in her job and her children suffering from major illnesses, which has forced her to live in a hospital.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this chapter are divided into three sections based on the three questions posed in this research study.

Research Question 1: What are students' perceptions of adversity, resilience, and thriving?

Student Perceptions of Adversity

The first question posed to all participants was “What does adversity mean to you?” The students could answer this question by giving a theoretical definition or by giving an example of adversity to describe what they believe it means. Specific definitions of adversity were described by participants as verbal or group opposition. This was seen with Emilia, the female undergraduate in the Corp of Cadets. She said, “A lot of people didn’t think I would make it . . . They were not expecting the amount of

drive and grit.” The experience she described is that people had verbally told her they didn’t think she would make it through the physical expectations required by the Corp of Cadets. She expressed this lack of confidence in her training ability as very discouraging for her. Jennifer described a similar experience in her workplace. Jennifer noted being the only female in her agricultural job and traveling with only men, whose wives she understood not to work. She conveyed that it had not been common for her to see many women in the workplace. She recalled one of the wives critically saying at an event, “Yeah I’ve heard about you. You’re the one that is chasing all of the men.” Jennifer describes this adversity as the tension she has had to navigate in not being a man in a man’s world and not being a traditional woman for her time.

Participants also noted adversity as a personal choice to push oneself even if emotionally difficult. Jennifer described it this way: “You know, you just feel like, you know, you’re in a war fighting. And so adversity for me is how deep you keep fighting, how do you come back and keep fighting.”

Adversity as Identity

Jennifer was adamant that she needed to keep fighting no matter what. It was difficult though, she later described, to fight when she began to identify herself by the adversities she had faced. This was a notable theme in a majority of the participants. Jennifer shared, “Your mind begins to shift from, I’m not surviving now, I’m making this [adversity] my friend, and it’s defining me. You can’t talk about anything else So like one woman, it began to define her happiness . . . and we started comparing.” Jennifer expressed spending much of her time in the hospital allowing herself and the

things she loved to be taken over by the medical concerns consuming her life. She indicated forgetting who she was in the midst of it. Taylor, when asked to share an adversity she had faced, began with “. . . so I’ll probably start off with the one that has defined my life, um, which is my parents, um, were divorced.” The rest of the experiences she shared stemmed from this divorce, which deeply impacted her. In describing her adversity, it was not something she had experienced; she defined herself by the adversity. Ashley had a different experience, as she changed who she was to fit the identity she thought she needed to have. She shared about “. . . being a freshman doing senior-level courses and people always pointed out my accent. So I was scared to talk in classes because I don’t have it anymore, but I had it a lot my freshman year, but I didn’t know what they were talking about. But I, like, I understand, like, wearing my accent so I was scared to talk in classes. I actually didn’t start talking to classes until this semester . . . it took like two years.” Ashley expressed not talking to anyone in her classes. It was not until two years into her program that she said something in a class. At that point, she had worked very hard to get rid of her accent so that she could fit in and so that people would not think she was different.

Student Perceptions of Resilience

The second question posed to students was “How do you define resilience?” The participants’ responses were all similar. Resilience was described as a choice to never give up and to bounce back from the adversity faced. Ashley defined it as “never giving up. So getting through whatever life is throwing at you. Um, you’re just getting through

it, like pushing through and persevering and getting to whatever your goals are.” Jennifer had similar thoughts:

Resilience is just the ability to bounce back . . . the ability to hang on, uh, to weather the storm, to move from one season to another. I love the parables, you know, that come out of the Bible that talk about seasons of how people, you know, they’re in the desert for seasons, and then there’s droughts for seasons.

Resilience also was described as a character trait that has a threshold or limit for when it can run out. Emilia conveyed the following:

I think you can be resilient and fail, but as soon as your, like, drive fails and your will fails, that would be the end result. Like you can’t be resilient if your will gives out. Like when you meet your threshold for resilience and you are no longer resilient. Whereas a person who’s not resilient might take on a lot of things, but at a certain point their will to function gives out. Resilience is being able to handle a lot of things . . . a large amount of pressure . . . There will still come a point where I’m no longer resilient.

Student Perceptions of Thriving

The third question asked of all participants was “How do you define thriving?” The students portrayed thriving not as a trait but as a state of being that fluctuates day to day. Jennifer defined thriving as “a state that I am in on any given day . . . Thriving is a process . . . Thriving goes with, uh, wilting . . . Watering it, it begins to wilt and you put water on it and immediately pops back.”

Other students expressed thriving as being a goal of achieving one’s ultimate best version of him- or herself, personal satisfaction, or happiness that is unique to the individual. Ashley defined thriving as follows:

So not just staying stuck in one of the places but to be satisfied with where you’re at at that time. ‘Cause it may be good, but that’s not, like, the best you can get. So thriving is getting to your . . . to be the best that you can be.

Taylor had similar notions: “Well, I think thriving is being happy with what you’re doing. Um, meeting your goals and meeting your, um, morals and values.”

Many of the students also connected thriving with the ability to be vulnerable with other people and let people into their lives. Bruce heavily repeated “being vulnerable with people” as an important attribute to thriving. He shared the following:

I think also being vulnerable with people, um, and letting people into our life, um, to know that they can understand you better, um, so that you are able to, um, just . . . I think there’s a lot of power in vulnerability, and, uh, I think it’s very easy for the world we live in today for the people to put on this mask of what the world tells them and what, um, people ought to be like or should be like, um, and I think for me it’s just a matter of, like, living in a healthy community . . .

Research Question 2: What are the factors that play a role in reintegrating resiliently?

In this section, the findings revealed data as separated into two sections. The first section represents the factors playing a role in dysfunctional reintegration. This section includes the factors that emerged from the raw data that impact the reintegration process in a negative way. The second section represents the factors playing a role in resilient reintegration. This section includes the factors that emerged from the raw data that impact the reintegration process in a positive way.

Factors Playing a Role in Dysfunctional Reintegration

Within the data, several themes emerged as factors playing a role in reintegrating resiliently. In addition, themes emerged as factors causing dysfunctional reintegrating. The main themes leading to dysfunctional reintegration include isolation, negative thoughts, and seeking validation through other people. Subthemes include lack of

belonging, taking on adversity as one's identity, and comparing oneself to others' experiences.

Isolation

Isolation is a major theme that emerged as a factor impacting the reintegration process negatively. A majority of the participants described the isolation they experienced while in a state of dysfunctional reintegration. For Ashley, the isolation was because "I moved six hours away from home I didn't have help because I didn't talk about it to anybody." Ashley described her feelings of isolation occurring before and during her suicidal thoughts. Jennifer, during the interview, reflected on her dysfunctional phase, saying, ". . . and so you have to reckon with that so you're not isolating yourself from, um, reality. Crazy how fast you can lose yourself. I think that's what scared me is I felt so lost and so isolated and so blue and so dark when I came back because I thought, 'I totally have lost me.'" Here, Jennifer was describing being in the hospital for months because of a serious illness that could have killed her child. While she was in the hospital, Jennifer's life became consumed with medical issues. She did not do or think about anything else. Bruce said his anxiety was at its worst during the semester he had free time when all of his friends were in classes. He was constantly alone in his room. It left him with his thoughts, and he felt isolated.

Negative Thoughts

A majority of participants also shared the struggle of negative thoughts consuming their day-to-day realities while in the dysfunctional stage of reintegration. Ashley reported that as she struggled with suicidal thoughts, she had this thought

replaying in her head all the time: “I don’t want to be here. Like, and it’s better for me not to be here than to be here.” Bruce had a similar experience. Bruce struggled with anxiety and depression. He described his mental thought process filled with negative thoughts:

I was constantly thinking about it, was constantly, like, bitter because I was thinking about it so much and it frustrated me and it was making me mad. And so, in turn, since I was constantly focusing on things that I thought were bad and things I had no control over, it affected, like, how I lived my life out with friends and with meeting new people I personally struggle with anxiety . . .

Jennifer also elaborated on her thoughts during the time she was in the hospital:

And we began to get into this, uh, rat race, and all was said and that’s all we were thinking about was how bad things are You can’t talk about anything else I can’t talk about anything else. I haven’t picked up a book, I haven’t read a magazine that wasn’t having to do with this illness. Who am I? You get lost. You get lost in the adversity and you get lost in the doldrums of it all.

Jennifer struggled as she and the other moms of sick children began comparing themselves, their stories, and their children. “It became a competition,” she said.

Seeking Validation from Others

The last major theme that emerged from this study is the validation that participants sought from other people during the dysfunctional reintegration. Bruce, who struggled with anxiety and depression, shared that he was constantly trying to get affirmation and validation from other people. He shared, “. . . having to get your validation from people . . . well if I don’t have anywhere to run and these people aren’t

giving me that validation and these people keep on failing me because I am putting unrealistic expectations of what I want on them . . . ” Bruce said that he did not know that needing other people to validate him constantly was an unhealthy set of expectations until he transitioned into being healthy. Jennifer sought affirmation from people in how she performed. She confessed, “They said, you know, ‘You’re nothing if you quit. You’re nothing if you fail,’ you know, and so your validation was all about that. So that’s where mine came from.”

Lack of Belonging

Similar to the theme of isolation, a subtheme emerged in which participants testified to a feeling of a lack of belonging during their adversity or during the dysfunctional reintegration phase. Ashley transferred from a small school in Texas. When she came to Texas A&M, she said, “Um, it was just because, like, I came from a really small school in the valley and so I didn’t feel like I belonged.” Like Ashley, Bruce came from small communities that made him feel like he did not have a community for a period of time at Texas A&M University. Emilia also struggled with the feeling of not belonging. As she entered the Corp of Cadets, many people told her that she wouldn’t make it, making her feel like she didn’t belong. She said that at one point while training, “I thought they hated me. I was terrified to see [the older male cadets] again.” Emilia felt this the most when the Corp of Cadets would go on runs within their specific groups. Emilia recalled the cadets having to run between the first and last person in line. To fall behind the assigned last person meant to “fall out of block.” When she fell out of block,

she reported the older cadets teasing her: “You’ll never make it to be a sophomore if you cannot keep up.”

Identification by Adversity

Another subtheme that emerged in factors impacting the reintegration process negatively is participants identifying themselves by their adversity. In this way, the adversity becomes more than just an experience; it becomes one’s view of oneself. The findings for this subtheme can be found in the section on research question 1.

Factors Playing a Role in Resilient Reintegration

Within the data, several themes emerged as factors playing a role in reintegrating resiliently. The main themes leading to resilient reintegration, and ultimately a state of thriving, include the individual’s faith, realistic expectations, and becoming tired or sick of the current state.

Faith

Faith is a theme that emerged for which all five participants mentioned being an important value to them, a concept bringing a community to them, or the thing getting them through the adversity and leading to growth. Jennifer described her faith:

People are always going to let you down no matter if you love them or not because we’re not perfect, right? And relying on somebody who is perfect [Jesus] is a whole lot better than relying on somebody that may disappoint you. So for me that’s a really core part of dealing with adversity.

Bruce had a similar view to Jennifer:

I would say just having a constant joy and a constant peace. And for me I know I am a believer and I am a follower of Jesus . . . just a matter of, um, being completely satisfied in Jesus, and people are going to fail you like [Jesus] will never fail you.

On the other hand, Emilia expressed a different experience with faith. She reported faith being about the practice and activities around the religion. Emilia shared, “I am very religious. I work going to church in my schedule.” Taylor expressed sharing Emilia’s perspective. Taylor mentioned faith as always having been a part of her life:

I think something that has always kind of been there in the background is my faith . . . [My mother] always said, um, from the beginning of everything that God sees, God hears, God cares. I think I have a different perspective because I was raised in the church. I don’t know a time where I didn’t believe that God existed and wasn’t immersed in the church . . . It just kind of goes back to it’s always kind of been there, and it’s helped me establish my morals and what I stand for and what I believe in . . .

Ashley described her faith as a relationship and described the community that it gave her:

I did decide to, like, start trying to go to church . . . and building my relationship with God . . . but my family is like a really big, um, Christian family, I guess you can say. Um, so, like, I’ve always had my faith, but I just want to, like, go deeper into it.

Expectations

A second subtheme that materialized from the interviews was transitioning from unrealistic expectations to realistic ones. Jennifer described a process that took place for her as she transitioned from dysfunctional to resilient reintegration: “. . . and so you’re mourning but you’re not really mourning because you have them, but you’re mourning because your life is not what you expected. You, you’re mourning the fact that things

may not be perfect.” Many participants shared that the transition from unhealthy expectations to realistic expectations was a difficult process of letting go. Bruce described himself as a perfectionist. As such, he said his process was unique to that characteristic:

You know, nothing’s perfect. And it was just, like, a process of Jesus more than wanting the things of this world and wanting my relationships to be perfect and wanting my parents to be back in Texas and wanting . . . it was just a lot of selfishness. And that’s what it was, and so it was a process of giving up a lot of sin to Jesus.

Taylor also shared her expectation of perfection for herself and everything she did. She testified, “For me personally, I’m very hard on myself. I expect a lot of myself, more so than even my parents. Like, they never pushed me to be a straight-A student or anything, but I was always doing it to myself.”

Dissatisfaction

Another subtheme emerging in the data is participants having experienced feelings of dissatisfaction with their current state of existence. At some point, almost every participant shared dissatisfaction with their state or condition. Bruce described his experience as follows:

But there was change that was happening that I had no control over. And so, on November 30, I was sitting at Babe’s donuts, um, coffee shop in College Station/Bryan, and you know, I was just like, ‘I am sick of living this way. I’m sick of being mad, I’m sick of being bitter. I’m sick of being resentful towards people. I’m sick of being so selfish that I don’t even care how other people feel.’ It was, like, truly affecting my friendships. It was affecting my relationship with my family. And I was just tired of that . . . It was just kind of like a boiling point.

Research Question 3: What are the characteristics of those who thrive in the face of adversity?

Characteristics of Those Who Thrive

With each participant's story of adversity, the researcher gained data on the participants in three stages: life before thriving (dysfunctional reintegration), life during the transition to reintegrating resiliently and becoming resilient and thriving, and life at the point of reintegrating resiliently. The data were able to convey the factors preventing participants' resilient reintegration, the bridge helping them transition, and the factors revealing a thriving state of mind. These characteristics reveal the traits of students now in a state of thriving. The themes that emerged include strong self-efficacy, positive perspective, and support. The subthemes include having goals, understanding individual purpose, and desiring to help others.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is a theme that emerged from all the participant interviews. Ashley, who once struggled with suicidal thoughts, answered the question "What makes you think you are thriving now?" by saying, "So I was still in love with myself, like I am still in love with myself right now, I'm literally the best person I know. But, um, and that's why I think I'm thriving. I know I am smart." Ashley described her state of thriving as thinking highly of herself. Emilia explained seeing herself differently as well. She compared her first year and second year of being in the Corp of Cadets:

Last year was me trying to prove myself. And this year is more like I want to stick it out because I want people to feel like I did my freshman year to be able to see me and think that this is possible . . . where people think there is a chip on

your shoulder because you're small and people don't think you can accomplish things and that chip pushes you to work even harder.

Positive Perspective

Another major theme that emerged is having a positive perspective. Ashley conveyed “. . . feel[ing] like I'm trying to be an optimistic person, but no matter what happens there's always something good.” She repeated the positive phrase “there's always something good” several times throughout her interview. This was a major difference from the beginning of her interview when she reported having felt like she didn't think she needed to exist. Taylor also represents a positive perspective, as she had not thought she would ever be able to go to college. She said, “. . . probably a lot of people would say I shouldn't be in college, um, or that I shouldn't have done all the things I've done and been successful at, but I think if you use it to propel yourself forward” At the time of the interview, Taylor's medical issues were the same as they were when she had negative thoughts. The only thing that changed was her perspective from negative to positive. Bruce had a similar transition to Taylor. When asked how he viewed his adversity now, he said the following:

And so it's like, whatever's happening in my life, whether people think it's bad or other people don't think it's a big deal, I get to know that the Lord is gonna work this for good . . . not look at the circumstances. Instead I'm gonna be joyful for the gospel and I'm gonna be excited.

Emilia advocated optimism and positive perspective being a personal choice. She said, “I am pretty good focusing on things, but I have a lot of energy . . . so, like, enthusiastic, like, bubbly. I dance when I eat when the food is good I think it’s depending on how optimistic you choose to be. If optimism is a choice.”

Support

Another major theme seen with most of the participants is having some form of external support, whether it be an individual or a group. Ashley reported involvement in several organizations and mentioned having support from one specific organization:

. . . so, I also, because of that and my mentor, like, my supervisor mentor, I guess you can say I'm a Neph fellow. So she's my Neph, um, mentor, and I, she's my supervisor for my internship. Um, and she's also, like, the person that oversees the [student organization]. Um, she tells me all the time that I'm super smart and she's like, ‘Why don’t you just say something?’ So she pushes me literally every single day. So I guess that's also why . . . because I have her behind me, like, her in the back of my head. Like, ‘You need to talk now.’ Like, ‘You need to stop being scared,’ so

Ashley credited her mentor, who advises a student organization, as the reason she decided to start talking in classes after two years of being afraid to participate. Taylor was involved heavily in FFA through high school and now college. The organization’s leaders became more than just acquaintances to her. They became her family:

. . . but I was very fortunate to have two of my ag teachers, um, really invest in me and treat me like their daughter. One of them to this day I still talk to like a

couple times a week, um, just, like, throughout the day and whatnot about, you know, just life and all that stuff, and occasionally we have these deep, like, life, heart-to-heart talks or whatever.

For some participants, support came not from someone older, but from a peer on the same level. For Bruce, it was his roommate:

Like, my roommate, he, like, literally the other night I was talking to him about, um, talking to him about, like, a circumstance that was happening, and I was just, like, really freaking me out and stressing me out and I don't know, like, how to control it and he was just like, "Bruce, like, you're believing a lie." Like, "That is a lie, don't believe that." Like, "That's not true of you." And it's like, for every lie, I'm like, "Combat it with the truth."

Emilia also had a peer who supported her in the time she needed someone most, the point at which she wanted to drop out of the Corps of Cadets:

So what ended up happening was at the table, the junior who was there said something encouraging. . . . When I said I wasn't good, he [the junior] pulled me aside and talked to me a little bit and then he said, "I'm gonna put you with our chaplain." And so I walked back to the dorm separate from everybody else and I got, like, a little break from, like, all the, like, fish stuff And I walked back separate with our chaplain and she [the chaplain], like, kind of, like, gave me some motivation she told me that, um, first of all it wasn't personal She told me that, um, I think that, like, if . . . man, it's hard to remember. I know that, like, a lot of it probably has to do with it not being personal. And I think I, I think my main question for her was like, "Am I cut out for this?" And she was basically saying, like, "Yes, you are." Um, "It'll be hard, but, like, you can handle it. Everyone comes in here with different struggles, you just have to, like, put effort and, like, try and people can see when you're trying." And that was basically like a lot of what she told me.

Jennifer shared a similar experience to Bruce and Emilia. A peer impacted her, but unlike Bruce and Emilia, no one verbally affirmed her. Instead, they pulled her out of her isolation and reminded her of what she was missing:

What happened was I went home for a weekend and my husband came and stayed,

and I completely got out of the environment. And I went home and my friends at home, I went to coffee with them, and I gave them all a sort of update. I gave them the update, and they began to talk about what was going on in their other kids' lives, and one of them had just won, you know, student of the month and one had just, uh, hit a home run at the baseball game, and I'm sitting there and I have nothing in common with them. These were my best friends, and all of a sudden I realized, I don't have anything in common with them anymore. Why? And really that was a short amount of time. Six weeks you think about it how fast, how fast you can lose yourself. I think that's what scared me is I felt so lost and so isolated and so blue and so dark when I came back because I, I thought, "I totally have lost me. I've totally lost myself in this situation, in this problem, in this where I'm at, and yet I've got not 6 weeks more, I might have you know 18 weeks more or 24 weeks more. I may have a long time. And I've already in 6 weeks lost myself?" So it was kind of a wakeup call for me to say you know, "Girl get your shit together," you know?

Goals

A subtheme that emerged is the individual having aspirations or goals once thriving. Ashley very confidently said that she ". . . knew where my goals were and I didn't have goals my freshman year I wanted to work with kids who had been abused because that's people that I want to help. Um, and, like, I said, like, my purpose in life is to make a difference in other people's lives." Ashley reported having specific goals she was going after and a sense of direction. Taylor expressed a similar experience to Ashley. Both were impacted by their adversities, and it translated to working to fix a problem they had encountered. According to Taylor, "I have quite a lot of medical issues . . . so I was always in the doctor's office . . . then I started seeing more specialists for other things like, oh, I wanted to be pulmonologist. Like, I want to go work at clinics and take care of really sick children."

Individual Purpose

Along with goals, participants expressed a clear understanding of what they believed to be their individual purpose. Ashley previously shared knowing her “purpose in life.” She noted being confident in going after that:

. . . um, because I know I have a bigger purpose. Like in my life, like whenever I was born I died for like five minutes because I was pretty immature. So I, like, God didn't save me for no reason. Like, not even just once, but twice. Like, I know I have a bigger purpose and, like, my . . . I know my purpose in life is to make a difference in other people's lives. Like, I have my goals and stuff and, like, where I want to be and a few years or in 10 years, in 20 years or whatever. But my purpose is to make a difference in people's lives. Like, whether that just be one person or, like, hundreds of people. Like, I know I'm here to serve a purpose, like, to change your life.

Bruce conveyed the purpose he had felt for himself since the moment in Babe’s donut shop:

And I think for me it’s just, I am changed because of that and my life has changed because of the gospel, and my life is changed because that’s my number one priority in life. My two priorities in life are to live a life that is glorifying and honoring to the Lord and to tell people about the redemption of Jesus.

Desiring to Help Others

Another subtheme that emerged from the data is a desire to help others. Sometimes the desire to help others was expressed as being in the exact area a participant had faced adversity. Ashley wanted to “work with kids who had been abused because that's people that I want to help. Um, and, like I said, like my purpose in life is to make a difference in other people's lives.” Taylor wanted to help others too and expressed compassion:

And then, you know, there's been times. So, I don't, I think it it's maybe more compassionate towards others, I always think about, um, in the back of my head it's always, like, okay this person is acting really rude, but why? There must be something else that's going on. And I try to be conscious of that for myself and not let my emotions affect my attitude, which it does sometimes. But I think it's made me more compassionate and able to help others when they're dealing with things for the first time 'cause I've had previous experience in dealing with, you know, whatever. And I'm not always able to relate to them on a situational level, but in the grand scheme of things I know how you're feeling.

Taylor continued to share how she wanted to make sure everyone feels valued and loved.

She noted that this was different than her behaviors in middle and high schools. She confessed that she was very mean and angry during that time. Taylor described this change as turning bad into good. Emilia described a similar experience. Emilia had a rough first year in the Corp of Cadets. During her second year in the Corp, she made it a priority to help others who were in the same situation she had been in. She said, "I'm like, 'he knew how hard I was working' and that, that would show to the freshmen, like, how much effort I put into things" She continued to describe how her behavior changed to intentionally falling back in group runs to be encouraging to any freshman who might do the same—and staying at their pace to help them develop.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to identify the themes that activated a thriving response to adversity in college students. The specific research questions that guided this study were as follows: What are students' perceptions of adversity, resilience, and thriving? What are the factors that play a role in reintegrating resiliently? What are the characteristics of those who thrive in the face of adversity? The findings from this study included rich, thick descriptive data regarding students reintegrating from adversity resiliently. While the findings are not generalizable to all populations or demographics, the descriptive nature of this study provides for the findings to be transferable to similar college students experiencing similar circumstances.

Discussion of Findings

The discussion section of this chapter is divided into the three sections based on the three different research questions posed for this study. The first section provides an interpretation of the findings presented in the first research question (What are the students perceptions of adversity, resilience, and thriving?). The second section provides two models created based on the findings of this study from the second research question (What are the factors that play a role in reintegrating resiliently?). Model 1 is a model of students transitioning from dysfunctional reintegration to resilient reintegration from adversity, and Model 2 is a model of students thriving. The third section offers an interpretation and discussion of Model 3, which is a model of university college students' reintegration-to-thriving process. Model 3 is based on the second and third research question, the third research question being as follows: What are the characteristics of those who thrive in the face of adversity?

Research Question 2: What are the factors that play a role in reintegrating resiliently?

The findings indicated several factors influencing a student's ability to reintegrate resiliently. The data also revealed factors hindering resilient reintegration. Based on the data gathered, two conceptual models were created. The first model, Figure 3, describes students transitioning from dysfunctional reintegration to resilient reintegration after facing an adversity. The second model, Figure 4, explains the specific emotions and tensions displayed by the participants in the dysfunctional stage and the resilient stage.

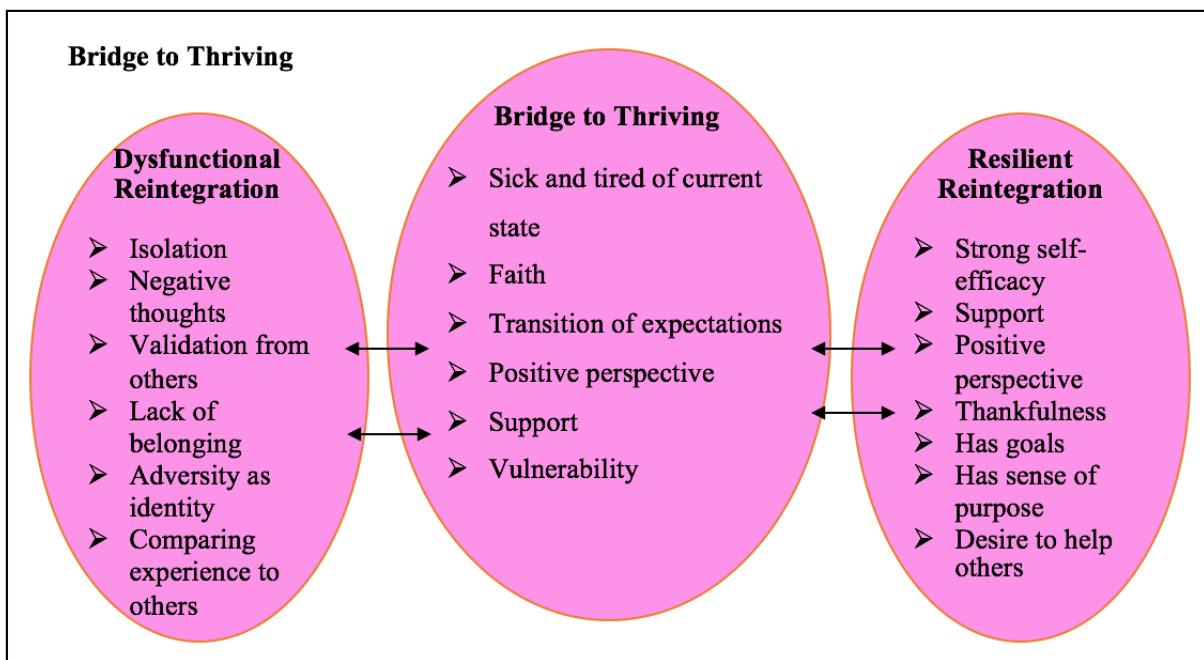


Figure 3 Student transition from dysfunctional to resilient reintegration.

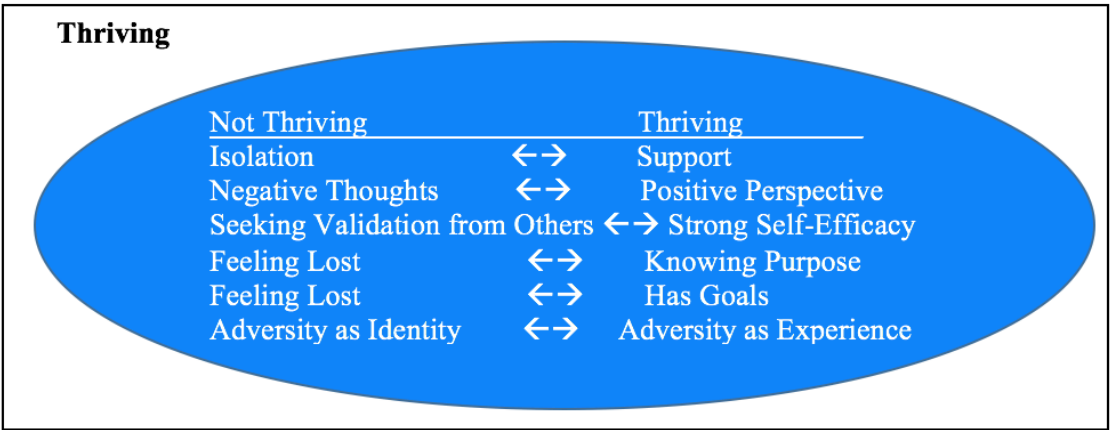


Figure 4 Student transition from dysfunctional reintegration to resilient reintegration.

Explanation of Model 1

The model of students transitioning from dysfunctional reintegration to resilient reintegration when faced with adversity describes the three phases of going from dysfunctional to resilient reintegration. Each participant shared a story of an adversity they faced. In listening to the participants’ stories, none reintegrated resiliently right away. There was a period in which participants were not thriving. They described in depth why they had not thrived, what motivated them to transition to thriving, and what changed when they were thriving. Therefore, the model represents the three phases existing within each of the participant’s stories: dysfunctional reintegration or pre-thriving phase, the bridge or transition phase, and resilient reintegration or thriving phase. The student is the main focus of each of the phases. Each of the themes and subthemes is explained in depth in the previous section.

The pre-thriving phase, otherwise referred to as the dysfunctional reintegration phase, is the emotional states experienced by the participants before transitioning. Each of these emotional states holds unhealthy habits or thought processes existent within the participant. Often, these thought processes motivated the fears and anxieties the participant would have during decision

making—so much so that these exact emotional states prevented many of the participants from doing something they would have benefited from.

The bridge, or the transition phase, represents the motivations enabling a participant to transition out of the dysfunctional phase. It also represents some of the emotional processes required to transition successfully from one phase to another. It is important to note that the bridge phase was revealed as a process for all of the participants. It was never described as a single moment after which thriving occurred. However, all participants but one did report having a single moment at which they realized their ability to not be dysfunctional anymore and deciding it was time to shift reintegration phases. It is important to note that the arrows on the figure go in both directions to and from phases. At any point, a process could begin that reverses progress, transitioning someone back to a dysfunctional phase.

The thriving stage, scientifically referred to as resilient reintegration, is the last stage of the reintegration process. It is portrayed as an ideal state of growth. This study suggests that no one reaches this phase immediately after facing an adversity. There is a process to working toward this stage. If the first two stages are not worked through properly, then it is possible never to reach this last stage. The arrows in the figure point in both directions in each phase to show that it is common for students to transition from one phase to another during high-stress periods. In addition, two arrows exist because students can be thriving in one area and be dysfunctional in another.

Explanation of Model 2

The second model aims to describe the transition of emotional states between dysfunctional and resilient reintegration phases. This model addresses the second research question: What are the factors that play a role in reintegrating resiliently?

Research Question 3: What are the characteristics of those who thrive in the face of adversity?

Based on the data gathered, a third conceptual model was created. For this research question, the conceptual model is explained. In addition, the concepts that emerged in research questions 1 and 2 are compared with the literature. The model, Figure 5, describes the overall process occurring for the college student participants who thrived in the face of adversity. The model was created in concentric ovals. The outside area of the circle represents the external factors of adversity. Adversity can include stressors, adversity of any kind, and life events. There are three arrows directing from the stressors, adversity, and life events into the fifth layer of the circle. This imagery represents that there is no limit to the quantity of adversities an individual can be facing. They take on many forms. The circle reveals five layers. The outermost circle (5) is the reintegration process that takes place when individuals face adversity. Within this layer is the statement “defining experience.” How one defines the adversity determines whether or not he or she reintegrates negatively or resiliently. The next four layers, circles (4) to (1), are the four protective factors for college students found from the data: attitude, belonging, purpose, and support. The four protective layers are based on the major themes and subthemes. The participants appeared to work through the reintegration process from the inside of the model outward. Therefore, the rest of this description occurs from the center outward. The innermost circle (1) is college student attitude. This includes self-determination, positive perspective, self-efficacy, and vulnerability. The fourth circle, belonging, includes classroom setting, clubs and organizations, relationship with faith-based community, and peers and coworkers. The third

circle, purpose, includes desire to help, goals, and personal purpose. The second circle, support, includes advisors, community, family, mentors, and professors.

There are two arrows that go from the innermost circle (5) to the reintegration layer (1) in order to portray the process that the participants worked through. When facing adversity, one's internal attitude, feelings of belonging, sense of purpose, and support all impact the reintegration process negatively or positively.

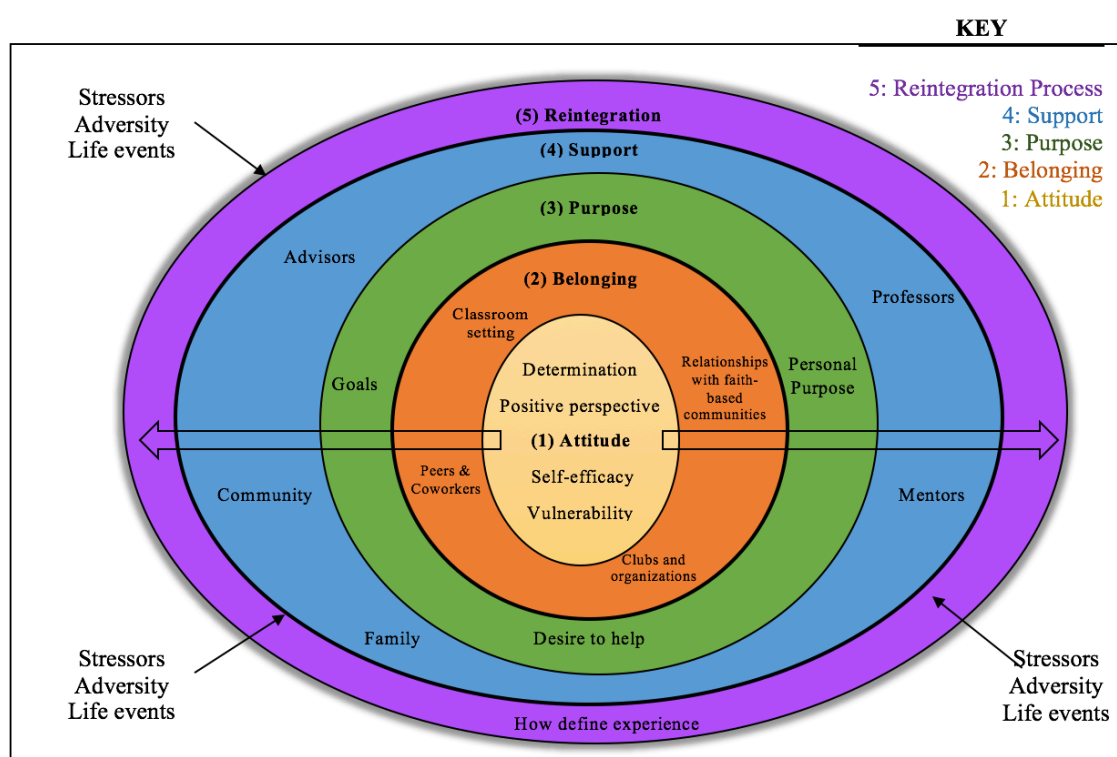


Figure 5 College student reintegration-to-thriving process.

Attitude

Attitude consists of self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 2000), positive perspective (Schreiner, 2014), self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986; Hamill, 2003), and vulnerability (Brown, 2015). All of these factors impacted the student participants' ability to thrive. As the students described experiences to which they had responded with dysfunctional reintegration, the researcher was able to see the factors that played a role in reintegrating resiliently. In the experiences in which students had low self-efficacy, low self-determination, negative perspective, and an unwillingness to be vulnerable, they were not able to reintegrate resiliently. In the experiences in which students had strong self-determination, a positive perspective, strong self-efficacy, and a willingness to be vulnerable, they were able to reintegrate resiliently. The research works of Bandura (1986, 1997, 2006), Hamill (2003), and Malloy & Janowski (1992) are consistent with the findings of this study: the perception of self therefore determines positive or negative human motivation.

Belonging

Belonging for the participants included the main areas in which they either felt like they belonged or desired to feel like they belonged. This included the classroom setting with peers and professors; peers and coworkers in a work setting; clubs and organizations with mentors, advisors, and peers; and communities that were faith-based. All of these areas offered a sense of belonging to the students. Erikson's (1968) research conveyed that belonging is tied to one's identity and is crucial for growth.

Purpose

The belief that one can make a difference is key to reintegrating resiliently (Bandura, 2010). This comprises having personal goals (Adler & McAdams, 2007; Pintrich, 2004), having

a sense of purpose (Schreiner, 2014, and desiring to help others or desiring to influence one's community (Schreiner, 2014).

Support

Support consists of the different mentors or influences mentioned by the students as having an impact positively or negatively. In this study, this included advisors, the student's chosen community, family, professors, and mentors. Having support was reported as being part of the equation for the students to reintegrate resiliently. This result is backed by several previous studies (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008; Luthar, 2006; Werner, 2002). Fleming and Ledogar (2008) shared that what promotes resilience originates outside of the individual . . . factors at the individual, family, community . . . and cultural level. This study reveals that statement to be only partially true. Yes, resilience in college students is promoted by having external support that originates outside of the individual. However, the latter four factors are very much internal processes. Luthar (2006) believed that an individual's role in the larger community is crucial to having resilience. This is similar to a sense of belonging.

Reintegration

It is important to note that the first circle in the figure shows the reintegration phase as its own entity. This imagery is because resilience reintegration is a process. Bouncing back from adversity does not happen automatically. The findings in this study are consistent with the research of Bonanno (2004) and Rutter (1987), who said that there is more than one pathway to reintegrating resiliently and that it is a process. It is also clear that growth is possible when facing adversities (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995).

Recommendations for Practice

I have several recommendations for academic institutions to consider based on the conclusions of this study.

Admission Offices

Colleges and universities should look at factors including GPA, the rigor of high school curriculum, and high school performance (Barnes & Slate, 2013; Barnes et al., 2010; Greene & Winters, 2005; Harvey et al., 2013) to evaluate whether or not students meet the standards to enter into the collegiate institution. However, the methods for reviewing college readiness should be reevaluated to include resilience to ensure that students are prepared. In order to provide additional context for admission counselors, students should provide essay testimonials of how they have overcome an adversity. Answers with critical thinking, positive attitude, sense of involvement, and desire to be invested in a community are all signs of a student who can be resilient. To help admission offices with the amount of time it might take, a Likert-scale that evaluates these exact concepts for admissions offices to see would be beneficial. This is not to say those who do not have these should not be admitted. Rather, knowing this information to best support the students transition to succeed. This consideration, matched with the adversity index, could provide additional helpful information unavailable in transcripts.

Student Transitions

The transition into the first year of college is a pivotal time for students and is the best opportunity for students to gain a sense of belonging. Finding strategic ways to make the transition into university life as smooth and streamlined as possible is important for a student to feel that he or she belongs. The admission office is the first connection students usually have with the university. By college and university admission offices conducting campaigns that allow

students to connect their stories with that of the university, students can gain a greater sense of belonging. This method could also be beneficial to help with student transition.

Student orientation, orientation weeks, university camps, and weeks of welcome are all great opportunities to build a sense of community and belonging for students. Cossy (2014) recommended that colleges and universities consider a process-based, an outcomes-based, and a goals-based evaluation of orientation. Any introductory orientations, camps, and weeks of welcome should have goals centered on creating a sense of community and belonging for students. This strategy helps to build student resilience through college and to retain students through graduation.

Advisors

The data from this study showed that advisors serve an important role in supporting students who thrive from adversity. Advisors serve as mentors who provide guidance and direction for both professional and personal endeavors. Putting systems in place in which advisors have the capacity to keep track of the status of a student's overall involvement would be beneficial for them to help make strategic plans with the student. Additionally, ensuring necessary training and support for academic advisors would be beneficial to advisor support of students. Training could include the phases of resilience, red flags to know when a student is reintegrating in a negative way, and questions to ask that would best support a student's academic journey.

Partnership Between Advising and Counseling Services

As counseling services have been evolving quickly to meet the needs of students, having a strong relationship between the advising office and the counseling services office is important. Advising offices can include those on the college level or the university-wide level. Advisors

should be able to connect a student with counseling services easily when signs of dysfunctional reintegration are evident. Creating a partnership between counseling services and advising would allow advisors to recommend counseling services for a student who might be in need. This partnership would be a preventative measure to ensure student success before poor academic performance becomes a major issue.

Higher-Education Professionals

In order for students to attain student success in their academic endeavors, resilience is crucial. As such, higher-education institutions should aim to (1) help students create a narrative of university or college as part of their story, (2) create a sense of belonging, (3) help students find a sense of purpose, (4) have support systems in place, and (5) integrate resilient reintegration processes into every area of the university. From curricula to activities, opportunities for resilience building can be integrated into the framework of higher education.

Higher-Education Professionals: Creating a Narrative

Marketing officials for universities have an opportunity to intentionally create ways in which students can make the institution a part of their story. The more they identify, the more they will commit to the school. As students transition into a school, any sense of belonging is gained within the first year, if at all. As such, the transition is a crucial time for student affairs to engage with students with first-year-specific programming.

Higher-Education Professionals: Sense of Community and Belonging

A sense of community is the foundation of thriving. According to the data presented by the Student Success Task Force, 41% of Texas A&M students drop out because of not feeling a sense of belonging (Randall, 2018). This study concludes that sense of belonging is a factor of resilience and can be made possible through the university. Sense of belonging is created both

formally and informally, internally and externally. Students who find a club, organization, or faith-based community to plug into or who find a mentor, advisor, professor, or other person to connect with are more likely to find a sense of belonging. Universities have the opportunity to create mentorship programs within student affairs or within colleges themselves to this end.

Mcmilan and Chavis (1986) defined sense of community as “a feeling that members have belonging and being important to each other, and a shared faith that their needs will be met by their commitment to be together” (p. 9). Having a sense of community develops a sense of belonging in students. They become invested and, therefore, give back to the community. According to Schreiner (2010a), there are four key elements for building a sense of community: membership, ownership, relationship, and partnership. Universities should consider ways in which they can enhance the community for a stronger sense of belonging. At Texas A&M University, activities and organizations like Fish Camp (Texas A&M, 2019) and Impact (Impact, 2019) are a great way to give students a sense of community and, therefore, a sense of belonging.

There is also an opportunity for professors to provide a sense of belonging for students. Many of the students in this study mentioned professors who took a personal interest in them. This investment made an impact on the trajectory of their lives and the decisions they made. Many students picked their majors and future careers because of the investment of a professor.

Higher-Education Professionals: Sense of Purpose

All of the students in this study reported feeling a sense of purpose in knowing their next steps and long-term goals in life. Having learning communities or academic advisors for helping students find their purpose is a crucial part of keeping students connected. This research proposes that students who have a sense of purpose for their lives can adapt better to stressors thrown their way. Offices of leadership and/or service within universities should seriously

consider using curriculum that helps students build their own sense of purpose. When students have a sense of purpose, the work they do feels meaningful. They then are willing to contribute more to the work they do. According to researchers, meaningful work is created by being motivated to attain a goal and having an elementary-level knowledge of how to attain the goal (Westbroek et al., 2010). This can occur within student affairs departments, within classrooms, and within student organizations. Advisors can also use this as a method for advising. Asking students their goals, helping them navigate what they want to do, and making plans that allow them to see and attain them are strategic ways to help students succeed.

Recommendations for Further Research

Through this study, several opportunities for further research have been determined. The scope of this study was narrow, as its focus was only on five participants from Texas A&M University. As valuable as this study is, there is still more opportunity for diving into resilience research and its connection to student success.

One avenue for future research is the same study with a larger sample from different geographical and cultural backgrounds. This study included mostly individuals of one race from the state of Texas. Conducting a similar study with different samples and a higher quantity could impact the findings.

It seemed there was merit to compare the difference in thriving from undergraduate students to graduate students. Of the one doctoral student involved in this study, there were major life differences in experience and traumatic depth. In addition, the doctoral program provided its own level of adversity that would potentially provide interesting findings on what doctoral students have to overcome and how that impacts the ways in which they are resilient.

One unique part of this study that also aligned with the findings of Texas A&M University was the role belonging played in retention rates and graduation rates. There is room for further research to develop the role belonging plays for students and investigate how to create belonging in an academic environment to help students succeed.

Lastly, a study on the first-year experiences of students related to sense of belonging could help to narrow the best ways in which educational institutions should focus how to build sense of belonging for the current student population.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to identify the themes that activate a thriving response to adversity. From the data collected through interviews, I was able to describe the factors that allow college students to reintegrate resiliently from adversity and stressors. Based on the results, I drew conclusions and offered recommendations for higher-education institutions. The four main focuses to build resilience include attitude, belonging, purpose, and support. Creating initiatives that help build these elements help students grow resiliently. I hope that this study will help support higher-education institutions to ensure student success.

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APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL

DIVISION OF RESEARCH



EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

October 17, 2018

Type of Review:	Initial Review
Title:	Innate Resilience: A Qualitative Study of the Drive to Thrive
Investigator:	Summer F Felton Odom
IRB ID:	IRB2018-0347M
Reference Number:	075055
Documents Reviewed	IRB Application Version 1.4; Information Sheet Version 4.1; Thriving Instrument Version 1.0; Sample Email Version 1.0

Dear Summer Felton Odom:

The HRPP determined on 10/17/2018 that this research meets the criteria for Exemption in accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b) under Category 2: Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior unless: the information is recorded in an identifiable manner and any disclosure of the subjects' responses outside of research could reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability or reputation.

Your exemption is good for five (5) years from the Approval Start Date. At that time, you must contact the IRB with your intent to close the study or request a new determination.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Administrative Office at 1-979-458-4067, toll free at 1-855-795-8636.

Sincerely,

IRB Administration

750 Agronomy Road, Suite 2701
1186 TAMU
College Station, TX 77843-1186
Tel.979.458.1467 Fax. 979.862.3176
<http://rcb.tamu.edu>

APPENDIX B

EMAIL TO TAMU EMPLOYEE AND STUDENTS LIST SERV

From: All TAMU general interest announce list <TAMU-OPT-EMPLOYEES-AND-STUDENTS@LISTSERV.TAMU.EDU> **On Behalf Of** Kathryn
Sent: Monday, October 22, 2018 11:15 AM
To: TAMU-OPT-EMPLOYEES-AND-STUDENTS@LISTSERV.TAMU.EDU
Subject: [tamu-opt-employees-and-students] Stories of Resilience: The Drive to Thrive

Howdy,

Do you have the drive to thrive in the face of adversity? My name is Kathryn Edmunds, I am a Master's student at Texas A&M. Under the supervision of Dr. Summer Odom, we are conducting a research study on stories of individuals who have resilience and have thrived in the face of adversity.

Participants will be asked complete a questionnaire. Then you will be asked to participate in an interview about your experience(s) with adversity.

If you are interested, please send an email to me (kedmunds@tamu.edu) or call at 817-913-6208. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask.

Additionally, feel free to forward this email to anyone you know has a story of resilience and thriving!

With Unconquered Spirit,
Kathryn

--

Kathryn Edmunds | Research Assistant
Department of Agriculture Leadership, Education, and Communications
Texas A&M University
Tel. 817-913-6208 | kedmunds@tamu.edu

IRB Number: IRB2018-0347M
IRB Approval: 10/17/2018
IRB Expiration: 10/16/2023

APPENDIX C

INFORMATION SHEET

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH PROTECTION PROGRAM

INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Research Study: Innate Resilience: A Qualitative Study of the Drive to Thrive

Investigator: Dr. Summer Odom

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You are invited to participate in this study because we are trying to learn more about: thriving from adversity.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you self-identified as facing adversity and have thrived from it. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate.

Why is this research being done?

The study is designed to investigate how we can improve the likelihood of individuals psychological persevering through adversity

How long will the research last?

The research is expected to last until February 2019.

What will I be asked to do in this study?

Participants will be asked to complete a questionnaire that indicates whether they are psychologically thriving. If found to be thriving, the participant will be interviewed about the story of adversity and the moment they thrived.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research?

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You can decide not to participate in this research and it will not be held against you. You can leave the study at any time.

Are there any risks to me?

No risks are expected to participants in the study. There are no sensitive questions in this survey that should cause discomfort. However, you can skip any question you do not wish to answer, or exit the survey at any point.

Are there any benefits to me?

No benefits are expected to participants in the study.

What happens to the information collected for the research?

Efforts will be made to limit the use and disclosure of your personal information, including research study and other records, to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise complete privacy. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the TAMU HRPP and other representatives of this institution. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published.

Who can I talk to?

Please feel free to ask questions regarding this study. You may contact the Principal Investigator at (979)-862-7650 and summerodom@tamu.edu or the Protocol Director at (979)-862-4673 or schaefer@cs.tamu.edu

For questions about your rights as a research participant; or if you have questions, complaints, or concerns about the project, you may call Human Research Protection Program at Texas A&M University (which is a group of people who review the research to protect your rights) by phone at 1-979-458-4067, toll free at 1-855-795-8636, or by email at irb@tamu.edu.