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The Resilient Turn: College Students' Perspectives - A Phenomenological Inquiry

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The Resilient Turn: College Students' Perspectives
A Phenomenological Inquiry

A DISSERTATION

submitted by

Perah Kessman

In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

LESLEY UNIVERSITY
August, 2014

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

every phase of the program, regularly offering her support, wisdom, and practical advice. Caroline's care and dedication as an educator are unparalleled.

My deepest gratitude goes to the seven courageous individuals who shared their stories for the sake of this study. All seven hoped others would benefit from their participation in the study, and I have no doubt this will occur. Working with the data over the past year, I have been frequently moved by the insight, wisdom, and spirit of their words. I am honored to have had the opportunity to work with these young people, and am forever indebted to them for their contributions.

I would like to thank Kathleen Burke, who has provided her editing skills, painstakingly reading and re-reading the following pages to ensure the clarity and coherence of my work. She has done so as a kindness, taking of her time even when it's been crunched, and asking nothing in return. I am especially thankful to Kathleen for the many years of our friendship, which has provided me with the love, kindness, and acceptance needed to embrace the twists and turns of life. She has given to me when I could not give to myself, and she has seen strength in me when I felt my weakest. She has challenged me in the ways only a best friend can, and I have become a better person through our friendship. Please keep asking the hard questions.

Finally, I am deeply grateful to my family. Without them, this story would have never unraveled as it did. I am thankful for the experiences we shared and for the perspective through which to see them.

Abstract

This qualitative phenomenology was designed to explore with a sample of undergraduate students in psychology-related majors their perceptions of psychological resilience and the factors they believe contributed to it. While previous studies have examined the construct of resilience in childhood and adolescence, relatively little is known about the phenomenon later in the lifespan. Thus, the rationale for the study stems from the researcher's wish to fill this gap in knowledge by studying resilience among emerging adults. It was the researcher's assumption that the knowledge generated from this study would both provide new insights into emerging adult resilience and inform higher education practice. The sample was composed of seven undergraduate students in psychology-related majors who reported a history of trauma as well as a sense of personal thriving. Data was collected primarily through in-depth interviews, and supportive methods of questionnaire and document/artifact review were also utilized. Coding and analysis of data were organized by the research questions, and analysis and interpretation of findings were organized in categories based on the study's conceptual framework. The study revealed that (a) while there are many aspects of emerging adult resilience, it is characterized primarily by the ability to successfully integrate trauma; (b) taking action steps contributed to resilience by targeting the disconnection and disempowerment that can result from trauma; and (c) resilience often both motivates students to pursue a psychology-related education and is an outcome of their engagement in the curriculum as they heal from their own traumatic experiences. Recommendations are offered for practice and policy in higher education and for future research.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

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"Freedom is what you do with what's been done to you." - Jean-Paul Sartre

*

Introduction

The aim of this study was to explore the phenomenon of resilience in undergraduate students who have a history of psychological trauma and who perceive themselves as thriving in the college experience. The purpose of this phenomenological inquiry was to explore with a sample of students in psychology-related majors their perceptions of personal thriving and the factors they believe have contributed to it. It was anticipated that the knowledge generated from this study would afford new insights into the resilience of emerging adults in general, and of students in these majors specifically, and thus inform higher education practice. This study employed qualitative interviewing methodology within the phenomenological tradition to explore the phenomenon under examination. Participants of this study included a group of seven emerging adult students in psychology-related majors who reported a history of at least one traumatic event prior to their arrival at college and who saw themselves as thriving in college.

This chapter begins with an overview of the context and background that frames the research study. Following is the problem statement, the statement of purpose, and related research questions. This introduction to the study also includes a discussion of the research approach and of the researcher's perspectives and assumptions. The chapter

concludes with the rationale and significance of this research study, and with operational definitions of the key terms used throughout.

Background and Context

Historically, researchers in the field of psychology strived to identify factors that place individuals at risk for poor adjustment and negative developmental outcomes (Farina, Garmezy, & Barry, 1963; Garmezy, 1971). Through their study, researchers now understand that not all individuals with such risk factors exhibit an associated negative adjustment; in fact, some of these individuals thrive despite the odds (Mancini & Bonanno, 2006). Researchers Anthony Mancini and George Bonanno (2006) report that most people who experience trauma do not develop Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. However, they note that the capacity for resilience decreases with higher levels of traumatic exposure. Despite this, Mancini and Bonanno report that resilience can still be observed in up to 50% of people who experience trauma (2006), which begs the question of why some individuals exhibit resilience in response to trauma and others do not.

In order to appreciate the current state of resilience research, it is important to note the focal shift from risk to resilience that has occurred within the research community. Originally, resilience was perceived as a fixed trait (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000), thus the focus of resilience research was on exploring the individual makeup of resilient children. However, as we now understand that resilience is malleable and can in fact be grown (Luthar et al., 2000), researchers have moved in the new direction of striving to identify the characteristics of resilience later in the lifespan and the factors that influence its growth.

Researchers now believe that resilience generates via individual characteristics, family support, and community factors (Werner & Smith, 1992). In exploring children's resilience, researchers Emmy Werner and Ruth Smith (1992) identify the influential role of positive social orientation, self-esteem, educational strengths, faith in the sensibility of life, and personal ability to overcome negative life events.

Researcher Glenn Richardson (2002) expands on the construct of resilience by describing it as a life-enriching process in which adversity and change provide an individual with the opportunity to achieve growth and adaptive behavior. The fundamental shift in the way researchers conceptualized resilience over time is well-observed here. While earlier studies focused on the poor developmental outcomes of trauma and adversity, later studies focused on positive adjustment despite these experiences. In addition, Richardson's conceptualization of resilience demonstrates researchers' current view of it as a developmental process that is malleable, and not as a fixed personal trait (Luthar et al., 2000).

As previously noted, when the belief in resilience shifted from it being fixed to being malleable, researchers increased their efforts to understand the presence and development of resilience later in the lifespan (Arnett & Tanner, 2006; O'Connell Higgins, 1994; Masten et al., 2004; Masten, Obradovic, & Burt, 2006; Stouthamer-Loeber, Wei, Loeber, & Masten, 2004; Werner & Smith, 2001). In addition to exploring which factors contribute to a resilient orientation, researchers sought to examine the underlying protective processes of resilience and how exactly individual, family, and community factors promote positive outcomes for individuals who have experienced

trauma (Luthar et al., 2000). Community, defined here to include social groups, school/ work environments, and religious organizations, holds a great potential for shaping and promoting positive developmental outcomes, whether or not trauma is present (Werner, 1990).

What does this mean for communities and their role in fostering resilience? For children, friends can supplement close interpersonal relationships and school environments can provide ample opportunities for enhancing self-esteem and developing positive relationships (Werner, 1990). In addition to highlighting the nurturing effect that positive academic experiences have on resilience, researchers Warren Allen Rhodes and Waln Brown (1991) note the important role that socialization and extracurricular activities have on promoting resilience by virtue of strengthening children's interests and talents. Researchers Sue Howard, John Dryden, and Bruce Johnson (1999) discuss the important function of schools in the development of children's resilience; schools can provide attentive and caring teachers, structured activities for success, and positive role models. In addition to providing nurturing support, schools can serve as a buffer between difficult personal experiences and trauma occurring outside of the school (Short & Russell-Mayhew, 2009).

Howard et al. (1999) argue that schools can build social competence, improve problem-solving skills, enhance autonomy, promote critical consciousness, and contribute to a sense of purpose in children by setting high expectations for students, providing them with opportunities for positive relationships, and also with opportunities for participation within the school and larger community.

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Though similarities may exist between protective factors in children, adolescents, and adults, the developmental stages following childhood warrant their own branch of resilience research. Psychologist and researcher Gina O'Connell Higgins (1994) describes the developmental processes of resilient adolescents. She notes that these adolescents form and internalize attachments with peers and adults, and that these relationships contribute to the adolescents' positive outlook. O'Connell Higgins also explores factors which seem to contribute to resilience in adulthood. These include faith, activism, and ability to make meaning of experiences.

It is important to introduce here the theory of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000), a new conceptualization of the period between 18 years of age and the mid-to-late twenties, which provides a unique developmental lens through which to understand these years. Researcher Jeffrey Arnett (2004) identifies the following characteristics of emerging adulthood: identity explorations, especially in the areas of love and work; instability, especially in living arrangements, finances, relationships, and employment; self-focus; a feeling of being in-between and in transition; and hope and belief in life's possibilities.

Since the emerging adulthood framework is relatively new, there is understandably a significant gap in the literature in terms of what is known regarding resilience in this developmental period. Even some of the more recent studies that explore resilience in the college years do not incorporate the emerging adulthood perspective (Banyard & Cantor, 2004; Pepin & Banyard, 2006).

As emerging adulthood is the age of possibilities and belief in one's future success (Arnett, 2004), this developmental period provides the individual with the chance to change one's life, to pursue a different path from one's parents, and with the opportunity (especially for those who have experienced trauma) to transform one's life (Arnett, 2004).

How exactly, then, does transformation occur? One important way in which transformation can occur during emerging adulthood is through shifts in knowledge. Sociologist and adult learning theorist Jack Mezirow and his Associates (2000) explain that such transformation occurs in an individual's way of knowing, versus the content of their knowledge. Further, transformations in perspective may lead to increased sense of autonomy and gains in the identity formation process (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978). This transformative learning is widely recognized as an important function of postsecondary education. In transformative education, learners utilize critical reflection to assess their taken for granted assumptions and to develop more integrating perspectives (Mezirow & Associates, 2000).

Transformative learning theory (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978) provides one framework to inform postsecondary education. This theory of transformation frames learning as a meaning-making activity in which learners experience changes in their meaning schemes. Such transformations in perspective may be experienced as liberations from previously held distorted values and beliefs (Merriam, 2005). Arnett (2000) asserts that a central task of emerging adulthood is the restructuring of world-views through a shift in external authority as the source of knowledge to a reliance on self as authority. It

is through explorations in love and work, specifically, that emerging adults are exposed to challenging new perspectives, and in which they can experiment with new roles and ways of perceiving themselves and their worlds (Arnett, 2004). For emerging adults in college, the opportunities for encountering contrasting perspectives are manifest in both social and academic circumstances (Arnett, 2004). The need for inquiry into resilience in emerging adulthood is evident. As we learn more about what resilience looks like beyond childhood, we will be in a more informed position to identify ways to promote it in general and in the college experience specifically.

Problem Statement

Research indicates that the period of time between age 18 and the mid-to-late twenties is characterized by unique developmental tasks and hallmarks that are distinct from those of adolescence and adulthood (Arnett, 2000). A central aspect of this developmental period, known as emerging adulthood, is that it is a time of personal growth and transformation (Arnett, 2004); the period of emerging adulthood is a ripe opportunity for resilience. While the phenomenon of psychological resilience has long been studied in children, there is a marked gap in knowledge of both how resilience is observed and how it can be promoted later in the lifespan.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological inquiry was to explore with a sample of undergraduate students in psychology-related majors their perceptions of personal thriving and the factors they believe have contributed to it. It was anticipated that the knowledge generated from this study would afford new insights into the resilience of

emerging adults in general, and of students in these majors specifically, and thus inform

higher education practice. To explore the phenomenon of resilience in emerging adults,

this study addressed the following research questions:

<div align="center">**Research Questions**</div>

1. How do emerging adult students perceive their resilience?

2. What factors do they identify as contributing to their resilience?

3. To what extent do they feel their psychology-related program is related to their

    resilience?

<div align="center">**Research Approach**</div>

Design Overview

As I was interested in understanding the phenomenon of college student resilience

and the factors that students perceive as contributing to their post-traumatic resilience,

my research focused on qualitative research generally and transcendental

phenomenological inquiry specifically. This qualitative methodology is most

appropriately suited for instances in which a researcher seeks to develop a deeper

understanding of a particular phenomenon, for the sake of generating knowledge or for

developing relevant policies. Transcendental phenomenology seemed an appropriate

approach for my study of the phenomenon of psychological resilience in college students.

Through my professional work as both a therapist and educator, I have come to

appreciate the complexity of human experience. In accordance, it seemed most fitting to

explore the phenomenon of psychological resilience via this qualitative approach in

which rich description of complex phenomena is so highly valued.

Research methodologist John Creswell (2007) provides the following description of phenomenological inquiry. Phenomenological research seeks to gain an understanding of how people make meaning of a lived experience. In this form of inquiry, researchers gather several individuals who have a shared experience into which the researchers would like to gain insight. Phenomenological research provides rich descriptions of individuals' lived experiences and can thus provide detailed information about a phenomenon and its essential meaning. Further, phenomenology is a process through which researchers form an interpretation of the meaning of participants' lived experiences according to the participants' descriptions, and without making abstract explanations about the participants' conscious experiences (Creswell, 2007; Giorgi, 2009).

Psychologist and scholar Clark Moustakas's (1994) adaptation, transcendental phenomenology, focuses on the search for essences and meaning of human experiences through the intentional relation of objects in nature and objects as they exist in consciousness. For him, the approach is "transcendental" in that "everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time" (1994, p. 34). Moustakas draws inspiration from philosopher Edmund Husserl's (1931) epoché concept, or the bracketing of researchers' conceptions of self and world to the greatest possible extent, in an effort to engage in a new perspective of the phenomenon under scrutiny. For Moustakas, the aim is to bracket out personal views in an effort to minimize researcher bias before engaging in others' experiences. Moustakas's approach reflects one reading among many of Husserl's work. I chose to ground my research in Moustakas's work since its humanistic appropriation of Husserlian philosophy seemed fitting for the study of psychological resilience.

In this approach (Moustakas, 1994), data is often gathered through in-depth interviews and sometimes in the form of written responses, art, and observations. Participants are asked about their experience of the identified phenomenon as well as about situations/contexts that have influenced their experience of the phenomenon.

Researcher Process

I obtained approval of Lesley University's Institutional Review Board to conduct this study of seven students' perceptions of personal resilience [scholar Donald Polkinghorne (1989) suggests 5 to 25 participants]. This investigation represented a phenomenological study using qualitative research methodology, with in-depth interviews serving as the primary method of data collection. Interested students completed an initial screening questionnaire to determine their appropriateness for the study and were included in the sample based on their compatibility with selection criteria. Selection criteria required that students be within the 18 to 25 year age range, be enrolled in a psychology-related major, have experienced at least one traumatic event prior to college, and perceive themselves as thriving in their college experience. Once individuals completed the initial screening questionnaire, I conducted both telephone and in-person interviews in order to further determine their appropriateness for the study based on report of post-traumatic resilience.

The information obtained through seven individual interviews formed the basis of the overall findings of this study. Following Moustakas's (1994) guidelines, I asked participants what they have experienced in terms of the phenomenon (here, psychological resilience) and also what situations/contexts influenced their experience of it. In addition,

I asked participants to provide, if they were willing, any reflective writing or art they have produced which either illustrates or reflects their growth experience.

In utilizing Moustakas's (1994) approach to transcendental phenomenology, I proceeded along systematic data analysis steps, and followed his guidelines for producing textural and structural descriptions. Data were reduced to significant statements and then grouped by theme and developing clusters of meaning, from which the overall essence of participants' experience of psychological resilience was obtained.

Each participant and their associated data was identified by number, and all interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. A thorough review of the relevant literature served to both shape and refine the method of data collection. Guided by the conceptual framework of the study, I developed and refined coding categories and themes on an ongoing basis. Participants were asked to engage in member-checking (respondent validation) in order to ensure that the analysis accurately reflected the essence of their experiences.

Rationale and Significance

The rationale for this study stemmed from my desire to explore the ways in which the college environment can serve to promote students' psychological resilience, particularly those who have experienced trauma. Despite my focus on students in psychology-related majors, I believe this study will have implications for the larger college student population. While much research has been conducted to explore the psychological resilience of children, in comparison, there has been little inquiry into resilience later in the lifespan. Further, as the theoretical framework of emerging

adulthood is relatively new, it is possible that many existing studies of college student wellness are limited in their perspective and implications since they lack this current developmental framework. It is crucial to understand the specific ways in which the college experience can promote emerging adults' resilience.

Increased understanding of the unique developmental issues affecting these students may improve our ability as educators, administrators, and mental health clinicians, to promote student resilience, particularly for those students who arrive with a history of trauma. I hope my study will shed light on the potential for the college experience to contribute to the psychological healing of young students who find themselves in college during the aftermath of traumatic experiences, and that it will lend to practical implications for how we may facilitate this.

The Researcher

Fifteen years ago, as a junior in high school, I acquiesced to the urgings of a friend to attend a college fair. I recall little from the fair itself. What I remember is being bored, as if I were a young child stuck in a department store with her parent. Amid my ennui, I happened across the information booth for Lesley College, and though I can tell you little about that moment, Lesley immediately became my top choice for college. When I sent my application the following year in hopes of becoming a counseling student, I told my mother, "If I don't get into Lesley, I'm not going to college!" Seventeen-year-olds are not known to be the most rational of individuals, and I was no exception.

When I opened my acceptance letter, I was overcome with a sense of liberation. In an instant, I shifted from feeling suffocated by the weight of past traumas to a faith in my future. Suddenly, the image of my mother overcome with hopelessness and fear as she took out the kitchen knife and cut her wrist began to fade. I was starting to understand, though could not put into words, why this school and its counseling program was the right choice for me.

That August, I attended orientation with over a hundred of my peers. Sitting among the rowdy crowd I told myself, Listen, now that you're here, you've got to really do this. This is your chance. Don't let it go. Half promise, half prayer, I sensed that college would be my second-chance opportunity, though it would be years until I would articulate it as such. I could make something of myself, despite external claims to the contrary. I would make something of myself. This was my chance.

Nearly 13 years have passed since that August afternoon, and I continue to explore the bounds of my promise. All that I have learned from my experience, my students' and clients' experiences, and my exploration into the area of resilience, has contributed to my scholarly assertion that college communities have a crucial role to play in the promotion of holistic student growth. Colleges have the opportunity to promote transformative learning.

As a first-year college student over a decade ago, I learned the liberating force of education is a vehicle through which one's life course can change. I, among many others, experienced the transformative power of combining theory with practice and reflection in higher education. Before beginning my undergraduate studies, I had no understanding of

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transformative learning nor could I intelligently explain my choice of college. Sometimes though, even 18-year-olds know what feels right. Why shouldn't college help them explain it?

My personal perspectives and beliefs regarding psychological resilience stem from my own experience as an undergraduate student. I believe that my college experience was pivotal in my growth in that I not only found my way professionally, but I used it to make meaning of my traumatic experiences. As a licensed mental health clinician, the majority of my clinical work has been with traumatized populations. I have always enjoyed working to help individuals and families who have experienced the uprooting of traumatic events regain their footing. It is through this work that I have had the opportunity to observe the tremendous courage and determination of many individuals.

No doubt, my clinical work has played an important role in shaping my research interests. However, as an educator in an undergraduate psychology program, I have also had the opportunity to work academically with students who have a prior history of psychological trauma. While many of my students understandably struggle with emotional aftermath from traumatic experiences, it is also true that many of my students have found themselves thriving in their college experiences.

This thriving has been the focus of my doctoral research. I have been curious to explore how, for these students in the psychology-related majors, the college experience bolstered their resilience. I acknowledge that my personal and professional experiences, which so valuably contributed to my insight regarding resilience, may have served as a

liability biasing my interpretation of the findings. To the extent that was possible, I set aside my own beliefs about how the college experience fosters psychological resilience. An important aspect of my research process was the suspension of personal beliefs and assumptions for the sake of studying the phenomenon of resilience as objectively as possible. In addition, in order to address my subjectivity and enhance the credibility of this study, I remained committed to ongoing critical self-reflection, discussion with colleagues, and member-checking throughout my analysis.

Assumptions

A central assumption of this study was that humans strive toward personal growth and wholeness. This assumption was guided by humanistic psychology theorist Abraham Maslow's claim that human behavior is motivated by the desire to satisfy personal needs (1943). In humanistic theory, learning is driven by the human need for growth and moving beyond the self, and one way to accomplish this is by focusing on problems that exist outside of the self. In this study, I made the assumption that students move in the direction of growth.

While I assumed that students work in this direction, I also assumed that not all students thrive in their college experiences. This assumption was based on my personal experiences with resilience, observations of my college student peers, and my work in higher education. Several of my peers left school prematurely, and many found college to be a time of great stress and floundering. In my role as an educator and advisor, I have observed that while many of my students negotiate college successfully, many find themselves struggling academically and/or emotionally.

Another assumption steering this research was that some aspects of the college experience contribute to students' resilience. I borrowed from contemporary thinker in educational psychology, John Keller's (1983) assertion that the purpose of learning is to help people develop to their fullest potential. In this sense, the teacher works jointly with the student in an effort to uncover and sharpen the student's strengths and skills. Insofar as educational settings are concerned with the opportunity to promote resilience in students, the best practices by which to promote resilience coincide with effective teaching practices (Howard, Dryden, & Johnson, 1999). Further, the cognitive skills that are related to a resilient orientation are ones that can be taught: coping skills, autonomy, future orientation, planfulness, and problem-solving (Masten et al., 2006).

The assumption that college contributes in some way to students' resilience informed my final assumption in this study, that for students in psychology-related majors, the college experience may serve as a time for resilient growth. Many psychology-related programs demand praxis of students, that is, that students put academic theories about human development and behavior into practice (in themselves as well as in their internship experiences) while engaging in ongoing personal reflection. Both academic and professional work may serve as second-chance opportunities for students to reflect and act upon their lives, and often traumas, through personal growth efforts (Banyard & Cantor, 2004).

Definitions of Key Terminology

In my study, I explored the phenomenon of psychological resilience in college students. For the purpose of clarifying my sample, I define *college students* as students

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between the ages of 18 and 25. While Arnett (2000) suggests that emerging adulthood

(discussed below) spans from age 18 to the mid-to-late twenties, I limited my sampling

criteria to students ages 18 to 25.

The following are some examples of the programs of study which I include under

the umbrella term *psychology-related majors*: counseling, human services, psychology,

holistic psychology, art therapy, expressive arts therapy, and child studies. It is important

to note that varying degrees of informative and reflective learning exist across these

majors. While the curriculum of each of these majors warrants some degree of

introspection and reflective learning, majors vary notably in their degree of incorporating

transformative pedagogy (see transformative learning definition below).

I define the *college experience* as encompassing these areas of student life:

cognitive, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual. While the formal knowledge gained

in a classroom environment is a central component of college, I believe that it is

important to consider the ways in which other factors related to the college experience

might influence perceptions of growth and learning. This includes but is not limited to

mentor relationships, peer socialization, physical and emotional wellness, and internship

experience.

Trauma is defined as "a range of events that overwhelm an individual's coping

capacities and involves threats of serious injury or death to self or someone close to the

individual" (Banyard & Cantor, 2004, p. 207).

Resilience is defined as "the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful

adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances" (Howard et al., 1999, p.

307). Resilience indicates an individual's ability to manage negative life events so that

they do not impair functioning (Mancini & Bonanno, 2006). Further, it should be

explicitly noted that resilience is not observed merely by the absence of negative

behaviors, but by the presence of protective factors and healthy development (Short &

Russell-Mayhew, 2009). It is important to note that the terms *resilience* and *thriving* are

used interchangeably throughout the literature. For the purpose of this study, they will be

used in this manner as well.

For many survivors of traumatic events, one way in which meaning is constructed

and a sense of new purpose achieved, is through second-chance opportunities in which

they can develop a cohesive sense of self, see meaning in suffering, and find new

meaning as active agents in their own lives (O'Connell Higgins, 1994). O'Connell

Higgins adds that these opportunities often take the form of advocacy for, activism on

behalf of, and direct work with vulnerable populations or other survivors of traumatic

events. In the service of providing a working definition for *second-chance opportunities*,

I borrow from O'Connell Higgins' (1994) discussion of the construct.

Emerging adulthood is a unique developmental period, spanning roughly from

age 18 to the mid-to-late twenties, and is separate from both adolescence and adulthood

(Arnett, 2000). Emerging adult development theory can be viewed as a corollary to

theorist Erik Erikson's (1950) conceptualization of psychosocial development. While

Erikson suggests that the developmental tasks of forming an identity and achieving

intimacy are reached by late adolescence and early adulthood, Arnett (2000) suggests that

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many individuals in modern industrialized societies and cultures experience a longer path of exploration between adolescence and adulthood.

Transformative learning is a change in the way people see themselves and their world; it is always an epistemological change versus a behavioral change (Mezirow & Associates, 2000). Transformative learning results in knowledge that reconstructs a person's way of knowing, as compared to informative learning, in which new funds are simply added to existing ways of knowing (Kegan, 2000).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

*

"The only way to deal with an unfree world is to become so absolutely free that your very

existence is an act of rebellion." - Albert Camus

*

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological inquiry was to explore with a sample of

undergraduate students in psychology-related majors their perceptions of personal

thriving and the factors they believe contribute to it. To carry out this study, it was

necessary to complete a review of the relevant literature. Though it formally appears here,

this review was ongoing throughout the other phases of my study: data collection, data

analysis, and synthesis.

This literature review explored the interconnectedness of human development and

resilience in the context of the contemporary college experience. To this end, I reviewed

three major areas of literature: learning and development in emerging adulthood, mental

health in the contemporary college experience, and psychological resilience.

My review of the emerging adulthood literature revealed the unique

developmental period between age 18 and the mid-to-late twenties, and the

transformative epistemological shifts that accompany it. My review of the literature

concerning students' mental health in the contemporary college experience provided a

conceptualization of mental health concerns existing on American college campuses

today. Finally, my review of the resilience literature provided background and context for

inquiry into the phenomenon of psychological resilience, and shed light on researchers'

current thinking about how it can grow across the lifespan.

This literature review begins with an introduction to mental health issues in the

contemporary college experience, and a discussion of why these problems exist

disproportionally for emerging adult students. This is followed by a comprehensive

review of the literature on how resilience is both perceived and grown in efforts to

facilitate students' positive adjustment during emerging adult years generally, and within

the college experience specifically. I conclude with an interpretive summary to highlight

important gaps in knowledge, contested issues within the literature, and implications for

research. The interpretive summary illustrates how the literature has both informed my

understanding of these relevant concepts and contributed to the development of my

study's conceptual framework.

The Contemporary College Experience

Introduction

In 2011, 30% of college students reported feeling so depressed that they found it a

struggle to function and about 6% reported seriously contemplating suicide (American

College Health Association, 2012). In 2012, 88% of college counseling centers

nationwide reported a continued increase in the prevalence of severe psychological

problems among their students, with particular increases in crises, self-injury, and alcohol

and drug use (Gallagher, 2012). Traditional-aged college students, classified as emerging

adults (Arnett, 2000), fare quite differently than those in other age groups in rates of

injury, homicide, and substance use. This is likely related to a range of contextual factors

that shape their physical and psychological health (Park, Mulye, Adams, Brindis, &

Irwin, 2006). Understanding emerging adult students' mental health requires utilization of

a developmental approach which considers both their mental health history and how

unique developmental needs are complicated by mental health issues (Leavey, 2005).

Emerging Adulthood

The theory of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000) provides a new developmental

framework for the years between age 18 and the mid-to-late twenties, and serves as a

corollary to Erikson's theory of psychosocial development. Erikson (1968) suggests that

the developmental tasks of forming identity and achieving intimacy are reached by late

adolescence and early adulthood, respectively. Though he does identify a prolonged

adolescence in industrialized societies, during which individuals find their societal niche

through engaging in role explorations, Erikson's theory suggests that individuals enter

early adulthood around age 20. In contrast, Arnett's theory of emerging adulthood (2000)

asserts that individuals enter an in-between developmental stage following adolescence,

and do not enter adulthood until around age 30.

If emerging adulthood precedes and is distinct from adulthood, it is important to

understand the characteristics of each developmental period. To delineate between

emerging and full adulthood, Arnett (2004) identifies the following hallmarks of the latter

developmental stage: responsibility for oneself and one's choices; the ability to make

independent decisions; and financial independence.

What accounts for this shift in perspective of the age range between 18 and the

mid-to-late twenties? Arnett (2000) suggests societal changes in industrialized societies

are the main factor in the extended period of identity exploration. Specifically, he claims

that increases in the mean ages of marriage and parenthood have allowed people in this

age bracket to engage in role exploration without the responsibility of long-term

commitments and obligations. As a result, Arnett (2004) asserts, identity explorations in

the areas of love, work, and world-views may begin in adolescence, but generally take

full form during emerging adulthood.

Identity explorations in college.

One of the ways in which emerging adults engage in identity explorations is

through their pursuit of higher education. They enter college with world-views formed

during childhood and adolescence, based on authoritative influences such as parents,

teachers, and religion (Arnett, 2000). Following their exposure to other, and often

contrasting perspectives in college, emerging adults begin to question existing world-

views, and ultimately settle on those that are personally constructed (Arnett, 2000). Shifts

occur not only in what emerging adult students know, but in how they view themselves

and their world.

In addition to emerging adult students' shifting world-views, Arnett's (2004) study

of the population suggests that these students are in regular transition between different

student subcultures. Sociologists Burton Clark and Martin Trow observed in the 1960s

four student subcultures that Arnett (2004) claims are still relevant today. These

subcultures illustrate students' perceptions of themselves and their surrounding worlds.

According to Clark and Trow (1966), the typologies are: the collegiate, who focuses on

fun and socialization, and sees classes as secondary; the vocational, who focuses less on

ideas, and more on gaining practical skills and obtaining a degree; the academic, who focuses on obtaining knowledge and is drawn to the ideas; and the rebel, who is selectively studious, and focuses mainly on establishing a strong and independent identity. Arnett (2004) notes that students vacillate between the subcultures, as opposed to remaining exclusive members of a particular group. Students are in regular transition between different subcultures and combinations of subcultures, providing evidence to support Arnett's (2004) assertion that emerging adulthood is a time of instability and transition.

Arnett (2004) adds it is also during college years that emerging adults are able to experiment with different fields of study. For example, he notes, students explore interests and strengths, and seek to answer questions of identity: Who am I? What do I like to do? What am I good at? Arnett (2004) asserts that students' explorations in anticipated work reflect efforts toward identity formation. Further, he explains the opportunity for such explorations comes relatively easily for students in the American higher education system, as they can switch career paths through a simple change of major.

Cultural considerations.

While the theory of emerging adult development can help to explain identity development for some, it should be noted that emerging adulthood only exists in cultures which allow for extended identity explorations, namely industrial and postindustrial cultures (Arnett, 2000). According to Arnett (2000), industrialized countries require advanced education for well-paying work, so the choice is often made to pursue higher

education. He adds that this results in delayed marriage, and subsequently parenthood, thereby increasing the opportunity for identity and role explorations. Arnett suggests that due to value placed on individualism in industrial and postindustrial cultures, this extended period of exploration is considered acceptable. Arnett (2004) adds there are less opportunities for exploration in minority cultures and lower classes, so these groups are less likely to experience a distinct period of emerging adulthood. While emerging adulthood can provide transformational opportunities for many, it cannot be assumed that all traditional-aged college students experience a distinct period of emerging adulthood. As a result of cultural values and/or limited opportunities for exploration, some are instead propelled into full adulthood through external circumstances such as early parenthood (Arnett, 2004).

The Problems

While college plays an important role in the lives of emerging adults as they strive towards identity formation and achieving intimacy (Arnett, 2006), variations in functioning and adjustment exist. This branch of the literature reveals a range of issues that disproportionately affect emerging adults in general, and emerging adult students specifically.

Mortality rates during emerging adulthood are more than double the rates found in adolescence and young adulthood. Rates of homicide and motor vehicle injuries peak during these years (Park et al., 2006). A striking 75% of lifetime psychological disorders have onset by age 24, and mental health is generally at its poorest during these years (Kessler et al., 2005). Emerging adults face the highest risk among any age group for

onset of schizophrenia, bipolar disorders, major depressive disorders, and borderline

personality disorder (Schulenberg & Zarrett, 2006). Researchers have found increased

rates of depression, anxiety, sexually transmitted infections, and substance use in

emerging adults, as compared to other age groups (Boden, Fergusson, & Horwood, 2007;

Eisenberg, Gollust, Golberstein, & Hefner, 2007; Kuwabara, Van Voorhees, Gollan, &

Alexander, 2007; Park et al., 2006; Read, Beattie, Chamberlain, & Merrill, 2008;

Schulenberg & Zarrett, 2006; Tanner et al., 2007; White et al., 2006). Suicidality, self-

injury, and overall risky behaviors (including risky sexual behavior) are highly prevalent

among emerging adult student population specifically (Eisenberg et al., 2007; Kuwabara

et al., 2007; Serras, Saules, Cranford, & Eisenberg, 2010; Ven & Beck, 2009).

Why Problems Exist

While emerging adults appear to experience high rates of mental health problems,

varying developmental trajectories exist (Tanner, 2006). A multitude of variables exist

both earlier in life and at age 18, which affect psychological functioning and adjustment

during college years (Galambos, Barker, & Krahn, 2006). Here I provide an examination

of the literature regarding why problems may occur for emerging adults in general, and

for those who transition to college specifically.

Varying trajectories.

Developmental researcher Jennifer Tanner (2006) notes there are significant

variations in individuals' adjustment during emerging adulthood, adding that previous

developmental history directly relates to the resources they bring to this developmental

stage. It is important to consider that the very transition into emerging adulthood can

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trigger a range of mental health trajectories (Schulenberg & Zarrett, 2006). Individuals'

ability to manage transitional changes that occur in emerging adulthood is directly

influenced by their mental health (Burris, Brechting, Salsman, & Carlson, 2009;

Schulenberg & Zarrett, 2006). Researchers John Schulenberg and Nicole Zarrett (2006)

assert that major life transitions of emerging adulthood magnify individuals' strengths

and weaknesses, resulting in a continuity of the quality of development that previously

existed. However, these developmental transitions can also serve as proving grounds for

emerging adults to choose drastically different paths than those taken during adolescence,

resulting in a discontinuity of their mental health trajectories (Schulenberg & Zarrett,

2006).

Schulenberg and Zarrett (2006) suggest, for those who struggled during

adolescence due to a poor match of resources to needs, emerging adulthood can serve as

an opportunity for a new life that is more replete with resources. In contrast, Schulenberg

and Zarrett note, for those whose needs were met with appropriate resources in

adolescence, emerging adulthood and college may present new psychological issues, as

individuals may feel as though they have lost their way in a larger and unstructured

world.

For those who transition to college as trauma survivors, researchers Victoria

Banyard and Elise Cantor (2004) suggest that increased levels of trauma result in poorer

adjustments to college. Individuals' capacity for resilience decreases with greater levels

of exposure to trauma (Mancini & Bonanno, 2006).

College-related stressors.

Emerging adult students face unique challenges in the contemporary American college experience. Former Chief of Mental Health at Harvard University, Dr. Richard Kadison and author Theresa DiGeronimo (2004) assert that in addition to providing opportunities for enrichment, the college environment can serve as a stressful and anxiety-inducing setting for many students. They add that potential issues which arise in college years are often related to identity development, intimacy, sexuality, social relationships, academic stress, as well as conflict with family values/expectations. Researchers Jessica Cronce and William Corbin (2010) explain further that academic, occupational, interpersonal, and financial stressors can be particularly challenging for emerging adults since they may present as novel challenges, never before negotiated.

Emerging adults may internally respond, often with depression and anxiety, as they attempt to negotiate school expenses, credit cards, time management, and demands of work and school (Cronce & Corbin, 2010). College-related stressors can also contribute to concentration difficulties and fatigue (Burris et al., 2009). Students' external responses to such stressors are often in the form of risky and self-injurious behaviors such as alcohol and illicit drug use, promiscuity, unprotected sexual activity, and disordered eating (Kadison & DiGeronimo, 2004; McCabe, West, & Wechsler, 2007; Ven & Beck, 2009; Wechsler, Lee, Kuo, & Lee, 2000).

Researchers Sharyn Zunz, Sandra Turner, and Elaine Norman (1993) identify empathy as a potential risk factor for unhealthy behaviors, such as substance abuse. They argue that an empathic orientation may overwhelm an individual's capacity to positively manage stress. It is worthy to note the increased potential for students in psychology-

related majors to be overwhelmed in their capacity to manage personal stress due to their professional expenditure of empathy; indeed, there is a heavy reliance on empathy in the helping professions (Stebnicki, 2008). I argue it is important to consider this as a factor that may exacerbate the transition to college for students in these majors.

Substance use.

It comes as little surprise that emerging adults consume as much alcohol as they do, given increased exposure to drinking and access to alcohol (Schulenberg & Zarrett, 2006). Despite the obvious role of exposure and access in emerging adults' rates of drinking, Arnett (2005) asserts this behavior can be more appropriately conceptualized through a developmental lens. He provides the following developmental conceptualization of emerging adult substance use (including both alcohol and illicit drugs).

Arnett (2005) argues that emerging adults seek a wide range of experiences, which may include experimentation with substances, particularly for those high in sensation-seeking. In addition, he asserts substance use may serve as a mechanism for alleviating the confusion of identity exploration and formation. Throughout the period of instability characteristic of this developmental stage, emerging adults may self-medicate their related anxiety and sadness. Since they are self-focused, emerging adults experience less need for social approval than during adolescence. Thus, Arnett claims, they may engage in behaviors which violate social norms, including substance use. While in-between developmental periods, emerging adults may experience a desire to engage in behaviors that will be unacceptable or unavailable to them during adulthood. Lastly

Arnett states, since emerging adulthood is a time of belief in life's possibilities and unparalleled optimism, emerging adults may not perceive the negative consequences that are likely to occur from their substance use.

Arnett (2005) provides a thoughtful framework for conceptualizing substance use among emerging adults. Given the added stressors and challenges inherent in the college experience (Kadison & DiGeronimo, 2004), emerging adult students may face even greater risks for engaging in substance use than non-student emerging adults (Cronce & Corbin, 2010).

Increased freedom.

According to Arnett (2005), emerging adults experience increased freedom due to a marked decrease in parental and institutional control following graduation from high school. While this is especially true for those emerging adults who move out of their parents' homes, Arnett claims it is also true for those who remain with their parents. He contends that the new freedom associated with emerging adulthood may be liberating for some, but overwhelming for others.

In addition to gaining social freedoms, researchers Jane Park, Tina Paul Mulye, Sally Adams, Claire Brindis, and Charles Irwin (2006) note that emerging adults achieve adult legal status at age 18, despite the fact that many have not yet assumed adult roles and responsibilities. They assert those adolescents who rely more heavily on institutional structure are in special need of attention during emerging adulthood. This includes youth in foster care and juvenile justice systems, those with mental health issues, and those with special needs (Park et al., 2006). For these emerging adults, the sudden drop in

institutional structure can overwhelm their coping capacity; incongruence between individuals' needs and the contextual support available to meet those needs may influence the quality of the transition to emerging adulthood (Schulenberg & Zarrett, 2006).

Role changes.

Researchers Robert Aseltine and Susan Gore (1993) note that individuals experience multiple and simultaneous role changes upon graduating from high school; the ability to manage these changes reflects the individual's coping capacity, and thus varies person to person. They suggest the transition from high school is one of stress *and* potential growth, as individuals negotiate occupational, educational, and relational issues. For some, the transition shapes their vulnerability to life stresses; for others, the changes in social roles and functioning mediate the stress of the transition (Aseltine & Gore, 1993).

Resilience As a Construct

So far in this literature review, I have examined the perceived role college plays in the lives of emerging adults. In addition, I have explored the unique challenges and stressors facing emerging adults in general, and in their college transition specifically. While many emerging adults struggle with this particular transition, there are others who thrive (Masten et al., 2006). This thriving can be understood as a function of resilience. In order to understand why such variations exist, I provide here a review of the resilience literature.

From Risk to Resilience

Initial explorations in the 1960s and 1970s serve as the basis for the construct of

resilience (Rhodes & Brown, 1991). It was during this time researchers began to identify

conditions that often resulted in adverse developmental outcomes. These conditions

include child maltreatment, unstable parental mental health, violence, low socioeconomic

status, and other stressful life events (Farina et al., 1963; Garmezy, 1971). In the 1970s,

researchers shifted focus to identifying negative developmental effects which occurred in

response to stressful life events and trauma, such as parental mental illness, childhood

neglect, and war (Garmezy, 1975, 1983; Rolf & Garmezy, 1974).

As a result of studies that explored stressful life events and psychopathology

(Farina et al., 1963; Garmezy, 1971, 1975, 1983; Rolf & Garmezy, 1974), researchers

came to view resilience as an innate and personal quality that was either possessed or not.

Despite the initial focus on deficits and psychopathology, a small subsection within the

research community began to focus on strengths and assets, such as protective factors, as

early as the 1950s. These researchers began to examine the personal qualities of

invulnerability by studying resilience in children who were identified as being at risk for

poor outcomes in response to stressful life events (Cowen, Wyman, Work, & Parker,

1990; Garmezy, 1989; Garmezy & Masten, 1990; Garmezy & Rutter, 1983; Masten, Best,

& Garmezy, 1990; Masten et al., 1988; Werner & Smith, 1982). Arguably, the most

influential of these works was Werner and Smith's Kauai Longitudinal Study (1982).

In pioneering research, Werner and Smith (1982) conducted a longitudinal study

of over 600 people in Kauai, Hawaii who had not succumbed to traumatic life events but

rather, had survived quite well. This study reflects an important focal shift from one of

poor outcome to one of prevention and resilience. Based on the study's findings, Werner

and Smith assert that most children possess some innate tendency toward healthy

developmental outcomes. In addition they suggest that although odds may differ based on

the nature and extent of adversity, positive relationships play a more significant role on

outcome than risk factors. The then-revolutionary notion that resilience is more than just

an innate quality is well-observed here.

A Broader Perspective

In addition to Werner and Smith (1982), other researchers began to acknowledge

the role of external factors in building resilience (Garmezy & Devine, 1984; Garmezy,

Masten, & Tellegen, 1984). Throughout the 1990s, researchers worked to identify and

explore factors that contribute to resilience. It was during this time that researcher

Norman Garmezy (1994) added to Werner and Smith's (1992) conceptualization of

resilience as a feature shaped by individual characteristics, family support, and

community factors. According to Garmezy, an individual's sense of agency (defined here

as power in one's life), and a sense of responsibility/accountability for one's choices, also

contribute to a resilient orientation.

In recent years the Developmental Assets Framework, a model of childhood

resilience developed at the Search Institute by researcher Peter Benson in 1997, has

served as the prevailing resilience model. To further illustrate the shift in research from

risk to resilience, it is worthy to note that Benson's work on fostering youth's thriving

first emerged during a time when the focus of youth development work was on mitigating

risk, not on building success.

In his ground-breaking conceptualization of resilience, Benson (1997) identifies external factors that enhance relationships between adults and youth, and internal factors which contribute to the youth's capacity for resilience. These internal factors include values, skills, and self-perceptions. According to Benson, the more assets the individual holds, the more the individual thrives. His framework distinguishes eight categories of assets related to resilience. There are four external categories: support within the family and community; empowerment via interaction within the community; appropriate and effective boundaries with adults in the school and larger community; and constructive use of time. There are also four internal categories: commitment to learning; positive values, such as caring and honesty; social competencies, such as problem-solving and decision-making skills; and a positive identity, which includes sense of personal power and future orientation.

Researchers Robert Brooks and Sam Goldstein (2001) add to Benson's (1997) assets the presence of self-worth and problem-solving skills which focus energy on things that are changeable. They explain this type of problem-solving ability reflects the tendency to view mistakes as challenges that should and can be personally managed.

Even more recently, and in contrast to the emphases described above, researchers Roberta Greene, Marilyn Armour, Shira Hantman, Sandra Graham, and Adi Sharabi, in their study of holocaust survivors' resilience (2010), describe resilience as a mere component of a much larger survivor profile. They assert that this survivor profile contributes to one's ability to persevere in the presence of tremendous suffering. Using scholar Robert Lifton's concept of the ever-shifting psychological landscape (1993),

Greene et al. conceptualize this survivorship as the dynamic interaction of internal and external factors which allows one to overcome adverse life experiences and trauma. This newer framework of resilience takes into account one's abilities to adapt to extraordinary circumstances and maintain consistent competence over the lifespan.

Resilience Throughout the Lifespan

While resilience from childhood to adulthood is often stable, some individuals become more, or less vulnerable throughout the lifespan (Masten et al., 2004; Rutter, 2006). For example, in the Kauai Longitudinal Study, about one-third of children who exhibited poor adjustment in adolescence were observed as highly functional later in adulthood (Werner, 1993). However, compared to the abundance of knowledge related to childhood resilience, relatively little is known about resilience later in the lifespan or the contributing factors. Researcher Michael Rutter (2006) suggests that in an effort to better understand resilience across the lifespan, researchers should conceptualize it as a process that progresses through the lifespan. I include here a brief discussion of research that takes into account this developmental perspective.

In addition to factors that contribute to resilience in children, researchers identify the ability to self-regulate, or the ability to monitor and manage one's emotions and behaviors, as a contributor to adolescent resilience (Gardner, Dishion, & Connell, 2008). O'Connell Higgins (1994) also notes the importance of forming attachments with peers/ adults and subsequently internalizing these attachments. She asserts that the cumulative effect is that adolescents carry these relationships with them even when those people are not present, and that these relationships contribute to their positive outlook on life.

Beyond adolescence, researchers are beginning to explore which of Benson's (1997) developmental assets might also contribute to resilience in emerging adulthood. Pilot testing of the Search Institute's Young Adult Developmental Assets Survey (YADAS) by researchers Travis Pashak and Paul Handal (2011) revealed some overlap of assets across categories. A refined and consolidated psychometric was developed to address this issue, the College Assets Measurement Profile for Undergraduate Students (CAMPUS; Pashak & Scales, 2012). A recognized theoretical framework of assets that contribute to emerging adult resilience has not yet been published (Luecken & Gress, 2010), though initial findings indicate that the CAMPUS measure provides a statistically significant determination of resilience in emerging adults (Pashak & Handal, 2013).

While not under specific examination in my research study, a brief mention of adult resilience is warranted here to further contextualize the state of resilience research. Given that individuals are living longer than in previous generations, and that researchers now view resilience as a process that progresses throughout the lifespan (Rutter, 2006), it comes as little surprise that researchers are looking to explore resilience further in the life cycle.

O'Connell Higgins's work on resilient adults (1994) sheds light on the importance of resilient faith in their lives. She defines resilient faith as a process of meaning-making and finding significance in one's life and experiences. O'Connell Higgins includes in this process: a belief in the importance of loving; faith as an underlying foundation of other beliefs; faith in interpersonal relationships; and the presence of master stories — paradigms that are used to make meaning of life. She asserts that activism also

contributes to resilient adults' personal growth as another way to make meaning. Further, O'Connell Higgins identifies several inner dynamics observed in her sample of resilient adults: giving to others what one did not receive; experiencing gratification through this giving; experiencing a symbolic correction or neutralization of damage; mourning personal loss; and being thankful for what one did receive.

In more recent years since O'Connell Higgins's research (1994), adult resilience has become a new area of study as researchers attempt to identify markers of resilience in adulthood and its contributing factors (Friborg, Hjemdal, Rosenvinge, & Martinussen, 2003; Gralinksi-Bakker, Hauser, Stott, Billings, & Allen, 2004). However, much of the research that informs scholarly perceptions of adult resilience has been based on samples of individuals who experienced significant distress and thus sought clinical intervention (Bonanno, 2004). Consequently, researchers have not yet achieved a consensus in their conceptualization of adult resilience (Roisman, 2005), and it is possible that other, and perhaps more resilient, ways of dealing with trauma have been overlooked.

Promoting Resilience

By exploring researchers' conceptualizations of resilience, I have elucidated the inner dynamics, mental processes, and external factors that contribute to a resilient orientation. I now turn to examine the literature regarding the promotion of resilience across the lifespan. This includes discussions on promoting resilience within communities in general, and in educational environments specifically.

In Childhood and Adolescence

Researchers Stevenson Fergus and Marc Zimmerman (2005) assert that youth resilience is most accurately conceptualized within an ecological context which takes into account both internal factors and external resources. In this conceptualization, the child is seen as the center of the system, while parents, families, schools, community, and non-family adults are seen as having the capacity to profoundly impact the individual's development.

In this model (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005), each part of the system has an important role to play in promoting the youth's positive development. Empathy is taught by parents, teachers, and other adults. Communication within the system allows for people to develop positive interpersonal relationships. Routines and traditions within the family, school, and community provide stability and positive interactions for members of the system. Researchers Jennifer Short and Shelly Russell-Mayhew (2009) add that each part of the system works to foster the youth's resilience by providing affirmation, respect, trust, attention, and understanding.

Academic environments.

Werner (1990) enumerates specific ways in which schools can promote youth resilience: maintaining high academic standards; providing incentives and rewards for efforts; offering effective feedback; creating opportunities for student involvement and responsibility; providing structure; and utilizing teachers who serve as instructors, confidants, and role models. Howard et al. (1999) identify additional resilience-building practices: creating opportunities for students to develop positive relationships with faculty and staff; utilizing strength-based approaches to build on students' innate

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strengths; creating opportunities for students to take on important roles both in and out of the classroom; and being a part of a collaborative support process for students.

In addition to identifying ways to promote resilience in schools, researchers look at utilizing the school environment as a forum for promoting social competence (Consortium, 1994). Given that schools influence social, intellectual, moral, and behavioral development, the Consortium on the School-Based Promotion of Social Competence (1994) argues that schools also promote resilience by teaching social competence. The Consortium asserts, "A capacity for thoughtful reflection and appropriate interpersonal behavior in a context of positive relationships with competent individuals within a social structure filled with possibilities for valued roles and involvement is a healthy antidote to risk" (1994, p. 290). Further, the Consortium asserts that in order to provide an effective buffer, intervention should occur within classrooms, the school environment, and the surrounding community.

Drawing on this idea of intervention occurring throughout ecological contexts, scholars Adina Davidson, Sarah Schwartz, and Gil Noam (2008) offer guidelines for those working in educational settings. They argue that not only is it important to provide a rapid response with appropriate resources for individuals who appear to be at risk, but schools should also work collaboratively and combine resources with community partners. In addition, Davidson et al. suggest that promoting students' reflection can help them form or restore positive identities, and thus foster their resilience.

Scholars Tina Malti and Gil Noam (2008) discuss the important connection between student mental health and academic success. Their research indicates a positive

correlation between resilience and academic outcome. Malti and Noam assert that in order to promote optimal developmental outcomes, schools ought to emphasize both academic success and resilience. They suggest schools can achieve this by creating safe, structured, and caring academic communities which promote opportunities for students and teachers to develop positive relationships. Malti and Noam argue for focusing on resilience across the varying disciplines of mental health, community work, and education, thereby offering an integrated approach "to reintroduce the 'whole child' rather than only the 'academic child'" (p. 23).

As far as educational settings are concerned with the opportunity to promote students' resilience, the best practices by which to promote resilience coincide with effective teaching practices (Howard et al., 1999). These practices include: teaching for mastery; developing a curriculum relevant to students' needs; utilizing honest and fair assessment practices; promoting student contributions to the school community; and being a caring and approachable teacher (Nuthall & Alton-Lee, 1990; Porter & Brophy, 1988).

Later in Life

The capacity for successful adaption beyond childhood is influenced by a variety of factors (Arnett, 2006; Masten et al., 2006; Tanner, 2006). For emerging adults specifically, Tanner (2006) notes that successful adaptation during these years is influenced by ego development and the separation-individuation process. She asserts that successful individuation in adolescence results in increased self-sufficiency and positive intimate relationships in emerging adulthood. Tanner argues that skill acquisition

(including agency, mastery, self-regulation, and impulse control) equips the individual with greater resources for negotiating work, school, and social issues upon entering emerging adulthood.

Arnett (2006) asserts the self-focus, increased personal freedom, and decreased social constraint that are characteristic of emerging adulthood create opportunities for positive change. Further, Arnett (2006) and others (Masten et al., 2006) suggest the following adaptive resources for successfully negotiating the many twists and turns of emerging adulthood: coping and stress management skills; autonomy; planfulness; future orientation; and adult support.

O'Connell Higgins (1994) provides an overarching recommendation for fostering adult resilience. She suggests it is most important to perceive the process of nurturing resilience as an orientation, and not as a specific intervention. To promote resilience, one must fundamentally believe in the human capacity for it. O'Connell Higgins explains such an orientation requires the following: (a) belief in the human capacity for and motivation to successfully overcome adversity; (b) a broad developmental view of growth; (c) belief in the value of relational processes; and (d) a focus on individuals' strengths, so as to "not overlook the phoenix for the ashes" (p.323).

The Role of Community

To provide a general understanding of the way that healthy communities promote their members' well-being, I offer a brief look at the literature on this topic. In her discussion regarding the positive effects of restorative practices on resilience, scholar Beth Rodman (2007) builds on criminologist John Braithwaite's (1989) work concerning

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the characteristics of healthy communities. Rodman stresses the important role of communities as environments that foster interdependency and communitarianism, which Braithwaite identifies as characteristics of a healthy community.

Braithwaite (1989) describes interdependency as a way to empower the growth of members and encourage their contributions to the community. He describes communitarianism as a combination of concern for the group's wellbeing, with efforts to create strong communities. Thus, healthy communities exhibit increased concern for the individual as well as the group, and focus on setting high expectations for the community in order to create a strong group of diversely skilled individuals (Rodman, 2007). Rodman (2007) asserts that in order to serve as nurturing environments, communities must establish norms that are consistently clear, supported, and defended. Communities must take seriously any violation of community norms, reestablish safety, and convey worthiness of and respect for members.

Debate: Post-Trauma Interventions

Though the revelation that resilience can be grown is significant in its own right, it also carries important implications for the development of resilience-building efforts generally, and post-trauma interventions specifically. While communities can work to promote resilience in trauma survivors, researchers do not agree on what the specific nature of these interventions ought to be, or whether these efforts are even necessary.

Mancini and Bonanno (2006) argue that formal treatment should not be recommended for all individuals who disclose trauma, and that trauma therapy is best reserved for those individuals who exhibit severe post-traumatic symptoms. In addition,

they state that resilient responses — that is, a lack of negative feelings — should not be pathologized. Mancini and Bonanno assert that it is important to acknowledge the continuity of an individual's identity, as it is this continuity that is linked to the capacity for flexible and adaptive responses to trauma.

Further, Mancini and Bonanno (2006) suggest that trauma survivors should be encouraged to appropriately express their positive emotions, since expressing negative emotions may not be necessary for all. They claim that individuals can benefit from the opportunity to explore the full range of their emotional and cognitive experiences, which also includes what theorist Carl Jung (1959) refers to as the shadow archetype. This archetype includes the latent components of the human being which are not acknowledged within human awareness. According to Jung, "The shadow personifies everything that the subject refuses to acknowledge about himself" (p.284). The shadow may also be understood as the dimension of human existence which comprises the dark side of human nature, and which is often hidden or neglected (Daniels, 2005).

According to Mancini and Bonanno (2006), it is crucial that trauma survivors be allowed space and opportunity to non-judgmentally acknowledge their experiences, however difficult or socially misunderstood those experiences might be. To convey a safe and receptive environment, those initiating trauma interventions should promote survivors' ability to flexibly manage their emotions, and encourage opportunities for their appropriate self-disclosure (Mancini & Bonanno, 2006).

In contrast to Mancini and Bonanno's (2006) approach to post-trauma intervention, military trauma expert Brett Litz (2008) suggests Psychological First Aid

(PFA). PFA is based on the assertion that people need to feel safe and connected

immediately following a trauma. PFA is designed to straightaway connect with survivors

and provide them with information and resources they may later need. According to Litz,

various government and public health agencies recommend PFA to provide support,

interpersonal connection, resource information, and comfort to trauma survivors. Though

PFA may indeed be a helpful intervention, this model poses a notable challenge: a one-

size-fits-all approach to trauma intervention will not work for all. Traumas, and perhaps

most importantly, personal responses to them, vary considerably (Mancini & Bonanno,

2006).

Another area of debate concerning trauma intervention, is whether working

through a trauma is necessary and/or helpful. Researchers George Bonanno, Dacher

Keltner, Are Holen, and Mardi Horowitz (1995) explore the relationship between

emotional avoidance in response to traumatic grief, and the degree and extent of grief

symptoms experienced. They tested previous assumptions (Stroebe & Stroebe, 1987) that

(a) emotional avoidance increases grief symptoms early in the bereavement process, and

(b) that avoidance does not reduce symptoms over time. Their findings suggest emotional

avoidance may actually be adaptive, and that emotional avoidance could be especially

helpful in individuals' efforts to remain functional, especially immediately following

trauma. Grief researchers Camille Wortman and Roxane Silver (2001) warn that

confrontative strategies to explore a traumatic event may actually lead to a negative

outcome if the individual does not exhibit initial signs of distress. In addition, they assert

that avoidant strategies are, in themselves, not maladaptive in nature unless they are self-injurious.

In sum, researchers continue to disagree regarding whether trauma need be worked through at all. Further, if trauma is to be addressed, researchers have yet to arrive at a consensus regarding the classification of normative versus pathological responses to traumatic events.

Resilience in College

The preceding portion of my review shed light on researchers' varied perspectives regarding the manner in which systems, such as educational environments, can both mediate the negative outcomes of traumatic experiences and promote resilience. I now address the literature regarding the role college can play in promoting emerging adults' resilience.

As previously noted in this review, upon turning 18 years old, emerging adults are suddenly faced with being solely legally responsible for themselves and their behavior (Park et al., 2006). College may serve as a source of scaffolding for emerging adults following their newfound legal status (Arnett & Tanner, 2006). By providing a moderate degree of structure (though it may not be the optimal degree that many require), college can help ease the transition from adolescence to adulthood (Masten et al., 2006). Further, the decreased social control and increased personal freedom of emerging adulthood and college can provide opportunities for experimentation and resilient growth during the journey into adulthood (Arnett & Tanner, 2006).

In addition to providing a scaffolding (Arnett & Tanner, 2006), college offers students organized activities that can facilitate social adaptation throughout their transition to emerging adulthood (Bohnert, Aikins, & Edidin, 2007). Researchers Amy Bohnert, Julie Aikins, and Jennifer Edidin (2007) suggest that emerging adults may experience increased loneliness due to changes in previously established social networks and challenges in forming new networks. Cronce and Corbin (2010) note that organized activities provide opportunities to meet peers, develop new friendships, and feel socially accepted. Bohnert et al. add that organized activities can provide a smaller, structured social context within the larger college setting, in which students can become more closely familiarized with their peers. These opportunities are especially important for students who were previously socially unsuccessful, or who lost close friends upon graduating from high school (Bohnert et al., 2007).

A Turning-Point Opportunity

College may serve as a turning-point opportunity during which emerging adults change their life course (Masten et al., 2006). The increased freedom, self-focus, and lack of social constraint that are characteristic of emerging adulthood can lead to a clearer sense of identity and an increased ability to make life changes (Arnett & Tanner, 2006). With time and opportunity to focus on themselves, emerging adults can determine and execute a personally developed path (Arnett & Tanner, 2006).

Several important factors contribute to resilience in those who utilize the college experience as a turning-point opportunity: a sense of agency; adult support; opportunities for enacting change; and cognitive skills (Masten et al., 2006). It is worthy to note that

the cognitive skills related to a resilient orientation are ones that can be taught: coping

skills; autonomy; future orientation; planfulness; and problem-solving.

Researchers Victoria Banyard and Elise Pepin (2006) assert that for those who

transition to college as trauma survivors, their resilient adjustment to college is not

necessarily linked to lower levels of trauma, as might be assumed. Rather, they suggest

that trauma survivors' successful adjustment to college appears to stem from internal

locus of control, high levels of perceived social support, and a tendency toward meaning-

making of trauma. Despite students' additional burden of trying to negotiate

developmental tasks while dealing with past abuse, social support appears to have a

significant mediating effect on developmental outcome, according to Pepin & Banyard

(2006). They suggest when students perceive social support, they exhibit more positive

developmental outcomes in general, and are more successful in their ability to form

identity and achieve intimacy specifically.

Transformative Learning

Adult learning programs, compared to primary and secondary education

programs, promote new ways of knowing by encouraging learners' engagement with

multiple perspectives (K. Taylor, 2000). One way to accomplish this is by promoting

transformative learning so learners revise *how* they know, rather than focus on *what* they

know (Mezirow, 2000). The core elements of transformative learning are individual

experience, critical reflection, and dialogue (E. W. Taylor, 2009). According to Mezirow

(2009), individual experience includes classroom experience and prior life experiences.

He explains that individual experience is value-laden content that can serve as both the

basis for and subject of critical reflection. As such, critical reflection on individual

experience can promote transformative learning (Mezirow, 2009).

Mezirow (2000) provides the following summary of transformative learning.

First, a disorienting dilemma must occur, then the individual must engage in critical

reflection of his/her taken-for-granted assumptions. It is not sufficient to critically assess

individual experiences in order to achieve transformation, however. This reflection must

also be done through the additional task of engaging in dialogue, or as Mezirow (2000)

refers to it, discourse. Discourse enables learners to reflect on individual experiences

within a supportive, trusting, and challenging space (Mezirow, 2009). Mezirow (1995)

identifies three types of critical reflection: content, concerning *what* people think, feel,

and do; process, concerning *how* they perceive; and premise, concerning *why* they

perceive. As it requires learners to examine the basis of knowledge, premise reflection is

crucial to transformative learning (E. W. Taylor, 2009).

Reflection occurs in the context of discourse and results in a new course of action,

one that reflects a change in *how* people knows versus *what* they know (Mezirow, 2000).

According to Mezirow and Associates (2000), in order to engage in critical reflection,

learners must be emotionally mature; they must be able to monitor and control their

emotions, exhibit empathy, and perceive others' emotions. They add that, to engage in

discourse further requires a shift from the culture of dichotomous thinking, to one of

empathic listening and engagement in other perspectives. In the latter orientation,

learners withhold judgment until all information is available. Simply stated, learners

move from belief in The Truth to the pursuit of a "best tentative judgment" (Mezirow & Associates, 2000, p.12).

Mezirow (2009) suggests educators incorporate the following recommendations in order to encourage learners' transformative learning. First, educators need to encouragingly provide learners with opportunities to question personal assumptions and beliefs regarding their experiences. Second, in order to create an environment conducive to discourse, it is crucial for the educator to take into account the learners' attitudes and feelings.

The transformative process.

Mezirow and Associates (2000) explain that transformation occurs in learners' frames of reference so they become truer and more capable of change; this shift can be achieved by trying on another point of view. Mezirow (2000) defines frame of reference as a way of knowing, or an epistemology. Frames of reference are composed of habits of mind, or assumptions concerning interactions with the self and the world. These habits of mind are expressed as points of view (Mezirow & Associates, 2000). Thus, frames of reference result from interpretations of personal experiences.

The goal of transformative learning is to challenge existing frames of reference, which differs from that of informative learning or banking, in which the goal is to add compatible ideas to existing units of knowledge (Mezirow & Associates, 2000). Transformative learning can occur through (a) objective reframing, during which learners critically reflect on others' assumptions, often in the form of a problem; and (b) through subjective reframing, during which learners critically reflect on their own assumptions

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(Mezirow, 2000). Transformations may be epochal, during which learners experience a sudden insight; they may also be incremental, occurring through a series of transformations in related perspectives (Mezirow & Associates, 2000). Meaning structures (which are distinct from general, primary learning concepts mastered in childhood) can only be revised after they are clearly formed (Mezirow, 2000). This generally occurs by late adolescence, perhaps making transformative learning unique to the developmental stages following adolescence (E. W. Taylor, 2000).

The process towards transformative learning is triggered by a disorienting dilemma in the form of a crisis or major life transition, such as acute onset of illness, job loss, or transition to college (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978). This concept of a disorienting dilemma has been criticized for failing to incorporate long-term and ongoing circumstances. According to adult educator Edward W. Taylor (2000), the disorienting dilemma may be a cluster of integrating circumstances which occur over time, during which an individual consciously or unconsciously looks for something missing. He explains that integrating circumstances result in transformations in meaning schemes that occur over time. The disorienting dilemma is more completely conceptualized as an internal crisis, a cluster of integrating circumstances, or an external event that triggers an internal conflict (E. W. Taylor, 2000; Mezirow & Marsick, 1978).

Mezirow (2000) asserts that, in the process towards transformative learning, the following steps of critical reflection occur in response to a disorienting dilemma. First, one engages in self-examination and experiences feelings of fear, anger, shame, and/or guilt. This is followed by critical assessment of one's assumptions and recognition of the

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shared nature of one's experience. New roles, relationships, and choices are then explored. A plan is developed for a new course of action, and the skills and knowledge necessary for the new plan are acquired. As new roles are tried on, one experiences an increased self-confidence and sense of competence. Finally, reintegration occurs, as one begins to live through the new perspective. While Mezirow suggests the process towards transformation occurs relatively linearly and sequentially, E. W. Taylor (2000) asserts that several phases may be repeated throughout the transformation process. Thus, the process may be recursive and spiraling, versus linear and sequential.

According to adult educator Sharan Merriam (2005), not all disorienting experiences trigger transformative learning, since these transformative epistemological shifts occur only when the individual is both unable to respond to new experiences with existing meaning perspectives, and is developmentally capable of engaging in discourse. She explains that congruent experiences are easily integrated into an existing meaning structure, while incongruent transitions carry the potential for learning. Thus, the stress of a disorienting dilemma carries increased potential for learning. In a disorienting dilemma, circumstances may be beyond the individual's control. However, even in these situations, the individual maintains the freedom to choose how to respond, and can find meaning in the face of personal challenges (Frankl, 1985). One may disregard a disorienting dilemma as an incongruent experience, or choose to critically reflect on personal assumptions and perspectives (Merriam, 2005). Thus, the potential for learning is determined by the meaning one makes of an experience.

The psychology-related majors.

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So far in this literature review, I have explored emerging adult development, transformative learning theory, and the role college can play in providing opportunities for resilience and transformation during this developmental period. I will now examine literature concerning the role of transformative learning during post-secondary education of students in psychology-related majors.

Counseling educators Marianne Schneider Corey and Gerald Corey (2011) stress that the most important element in the education of psychology-related students is to know oneself. They explain the primary reason for this standard is that a psychological professional's perceptions of clients are influenced by personal experiences. Thus, in order to effectively engage clients, students in psychology-related majors need to understand the effect of their personal experiences on their inter- and intra- personal dynamics. Reflection helps students develop the ability to critically assess personal assumptions that might negatively impact their work (Griffith & Frieden, 2000). The educator's role is to develop safe but challenging relationships with students in order to foster an appropriate climate for transformation (Gere, Hoshmand, & Reinkraut, 2002). In addition, through facilitating reflective practices, the educator encourages students' discernment and critical thinking (Gere et al., 2002).

In psychology-related majors, professional development is inextricably linked to personal development; the ability to facilitate others' healing is based on one's ability to experience pain and heal oneself (Corey & Corey, 2011). Though distinct from one another, Corey and Corey (2011) note many parallels between psychotherapy and training in psychology-related majors. Therapy provides clients with a reparative discourse, in

which the goal is to return to learning from experience, instead of through distorted

perspectives (Rose, Loewenthal, & Greenwood, 2005). In this sense, the goal of therapy

is transformation of meaning perspectives (Rose et al., 2005). This is also true of

students' training in psychology-related majors (Gere et al., 2002).

E. W. Taylor (2000) suggests that the ability to recognize and process feelings

serves as a prerequisite for critical reflection, as feelings can trigger reflective learning

and changes in meaning structures. In empathically perceiving others' perspectives

through discourse, students in psychology-related majors engage in both critical

reflection and affective learning. Training in psychology-related majors thus encourages

the growth of the *person* of the professional, through efforts toward self-understanding

and use of self in the professional role (Hoshmand, 2004). This approach promotes

students' personal growth, a growth not just in *what* is known, but a shift in *how* one

knows; it also carries the intended outcome of gains in both cognitive and affective

knowledge (Hoshmand, 2004).

This type of education bears striking resemblance to transformative learning.

Training in the psychology-related majors requires students to engage in critical

reflection of their assumptions, in an effort to become self-aware and work effectively

with clients (Corey & Corey, 2011). In order to accomplish this, psychology-related

majors provide students with opportunities to reflect and revise meaning perspectives

(Griffith & Frieden, 2000). Through curriculum related to culture and identity, students

are encouraged to critically assess their taken-for-granted assumptions, which may result

in transformative learning (Hoshmand, 2004). Among the reflective practices used in the

psychology-related majors, counseling educators Brian Griffith & Gina Frieden (2000) highlight two that illustrate goals of self-awareness and critical assessment of values: Socratic questioning and journal writing. In Socratic questioning, students are asked to reflect on how their personal values and beliefs affect their professional decisions. In journal writing, students reflect on their experiences in order to promote self-discovery and shifts in meaning perspectives.

Training in psychology-related majors can promote transformative learning by encouraging students to critically reflect upon their experiences and values. Further, it may appear that these programs expect that some degree of transformation occurs. It is important to note, however, that although transformative learning may be well-suited to the psychology-related majors, it provides only one paradigmatic training approach. Certainly, there are other possible educational approaches which may be equally effective, including but not limited to, the objective empiricist approach. The intention here is not to suggest a dogmatic approach to psychology-related training, but rather to explore the potential benefits of fostering transformative learning in these programs.

Fostering Resilience in College

Promoting transformation.

Given that emerging adulthood is characterized in part by focus on the self, instability, and a belief in possibilities, it may be that this developmental period is a ripe opportunity for epistemological shifts (Arnett, 2004). Arnett (2004) suggests that individuals start to question their assumptions and perspectives during emerging adulthood, and are frequently presented with opportunities to challenge these both in

social settings and within the classroom. This combination of factors may create a ripe opportunity for transformation. Further, postsecondary educators can actively promote students' transformative learning (E. W. Taylor, 2000).

There are important elements which must be present in order for educators to foster transformative learning. E. W. Taylor (2000) asserts the transformative educator must promote safety, trust, and openness in the learning environment. He explains that this encourages student autonomy and allows for multiple perspectives to emerge, since students are more likely to share personal beliefs and attitudes in a trusting and open environment. Educators should establish authenticity, emphasis on self-disclosure, and caring and effective feedback as hallmarks of the teaching relationship; it is within safe relationships that students feel comfortable enough to engage in critical reflection (E. W. Taylor, 2009). Further, a holistic orientation to teaching that includes cognitive, affective, and relational ways of knowing, encourages students to engage in critical meaning-making processes by drawing attention to their emotions (E. W. Taylor, 2009).

E. W. Taylor (2009) stresses that educators should not overlook personal and sociocultural factors which may influence transformative learning, such as factors which contribute to learning events, the learners' personal situations, and societal context in which the events occur. In postsecondary education specifically, it is necessary that educators support students in meeting goals, and take students seriously in pursuit of these goals (Merriam, 2005; K. Taylor, 2000). Post-secondary educators need to simultaneously validate students' experiences and structure challenging learning activities that promote epistemological shifts (Merriam, 2005; K. Taylor, 2000). These

recommendations are informed by learning theorist Malcolm Knowles's (1970) andragogy model of adult learning. The andragogy model, in contrast to classical educator-directed pedagogy, assumes an internal motivation to learn and a self-directed approach to learning.

Teaching skills.

Since college can be a source of great stress for many emerging adult students, teaching students stress- and time- management skills, encouraging prosocial activities, encouraging exercise, and promoting self-monitoring skills can help to buffer this stress (Cronce & Corbin, 2010). Further, since stress can be a risk factor for substance use, teaching stress-management skills may also help prevent substance use issues among emerging adult students (Hyman, Gold, & Sinha, 2010).

It is important to note that all adaptive resources which researchers recommend for successfully managing the transition to emerging adulthood, with the exception of adult support, are cognitive skills which can be taught (Arnett, 2006; Masten et al., 2006). For those adolescents who are not intrinsically equipped with such resources, efforts to teach these skills may prove very helpful in promoting successful adjustment during emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2006).

Summary, Conclusions, and Research Implications

In this review, I examined literature in the areas of emerging adulthood, the college experience, and psychological resilience. I now provide a summary of what is known about these specific areas, and identify existing gaps in knowledge. I close the

chapter with a description of my study's conceptual framework, which emerged in light of my literature review.

Emerging Adults' Mental Health and the College Experience

The developmental theory of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000) provides a contemporary framework for the years between age 18 and the mid-to-late twenties. Arnett suggests that instead of moving directly from adolescence to adulthood as Erikson (1950) claims, individuals in industrial and postindustrial cultures enter a transitional stage between adolescence and adulthood. Further, Arnett notes, the central developmental tasks of this period of emerging adulthood are forming identity and achieving intimacy.

There appears to be a range of mental health issues which disproportionally affect the emerging adult population, and lifetime mental health is generally at its lowest during the emerging adult years (Kessler et al., 2005.) Further, the additional stress of transitioning to college plays an interesting role in students' mental health. For some emerging adults, this transition exacerbates their poor mental health; for others, it provides an opportunity for a positive turnaround (Tanner, 2006). A review of the literature reveals that college can play an important role in fostering students' resilience by providing a wide array of opportunities both in and out of the classroom (Bohnert et al., 2007), including transformative learning (E. W. Taylor, 2000).

Despite what is known about emerging adults' mental health, further research in this area is needed. There is a pressing need for more, as well as for more current, longitudinal research efforts to identify risk and protective factors for emerging adults'

risky behavior across a range of settings. Such studies may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the distinct developmental challenges which this population faces, as well as inform prevention and intervention efforts.

Much of the literature concerning emerging adults' mental health reflects quantitative research designs (Boden et al., 2007; Burris et al., 2009; Eisenberg et al., 2007; Gollust, Eisenberg, & Golberstein, 2008; Hingson, Heeren, Winter, & Wechsler, 2005; Murphy, Hoyme, Colby, & Borsari, 2006; Read et al., 2008; Serras et al., 2010; Tanner et al., 2007; White et al., 2006). While it is understandable that researchers employ quantitative methodology in initial exploratory studies, supplemental theoretical literature and qualitative studies may provide a more complete conceptualization of emerging adults' mental health.

Since the theory of emerging adulthood is relatively new, many researchers have not incorporated it into their conceptual frameworks (Boden et al., 2007; Costello, Swendsen, Rose, & Dierker, 2008; Daley & Hammen, 2002; Fergusson, Horwood, Ridder, & Beautrais, 2005; Gollust et al., 2008; Murphy et al., 2006; Perlick, Hofstein, & Michael, 2010; Read et al., 2008; Serras et al., 2010). It is possible these studies are limited in perspective and implications, since they lack a current theoretical framework.

Psychological Resilience

There has been a notable shift in the way researchers have conceptualized resilience over time. For many years, they conducted studies to identify adverse childhood experiences and ensuing pathologies (Farina et al., 1963; Garmezy, 1971, 1975, 1983; Rolf & Garmezy, 1974). Throughout the years, researchers began to take

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notice of individuals who not only exhibited a lack of pathology in response to these experiences, but actually thrived (Cowen et al., 1990; Garmezy, 1989; Garmezy & Masten, 1990; Garmezy & Rutter, 1983; Masten et al., 1988, 1990; Werner & Smith, 1982). Thus, they began to conduct studies to explore individual resilience.

Over time, study findings revealed that in addition to internal factors related to resilience, external factors also exist, which are instrumental to its growth (Werner & Smith, 1992). This revelation illustrates another shift in researchers' conceptualization of resilience. Though they initially believed resilience to be fixed, researchers now view it as a malleable quality that can be grown (Luthar et al., 2000).

Though written nearly 25 years ago, the following statement by resilience researchers Emory Cowen, Peter Wyman, William Work, and Gayle Parker (1990) reflects an important assumption that underlies current research. They suggest improved mental health "might be achieved by proactive, building steps, rather than by the sum of the most ambitious and effective measures to undo established deficits" (p.194). The aim of contemporary resilience research is to explore the factors, both internal and external, which contribute to a resilient orientation. Further, these factors are now studied across the lifespan to learn about resilience during various developmental stages.

Certain gaps in knowledge became evident in my review of the resilience literature. First, there is only a limited understanding of the relative degree to which mediating factors buffer effects of adverse experiences, a need which could be met by conducting statistical comparisons of the effects of mediating factors. Second, there is a lack of empirical evidence to support the role of protective factors across the lifespan;

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prevention research efforts could provide such evidence. Third, there is a clear lack of research that examines resilience and how to promote it beyond childhood, providing strong rationale for both comprehensive short-term and longitudinal studies that look at the developmental process of resilience across the lifespan.

Conceptual Framework

My review of the literature, in combination with my own experience and insights, contributed to the development of a conceptual framework for my research study's design and implementation. My conceptual framework continuously shaped and refined the study's research process by informing its design and data collection approach. It also provided the basis for my development and refinement of coding schemes. Thus, this framework functioned as an organizing structure for my report, analysis, interpretation, and synthesis of study findings. My conceptual framework is included as Appendix A.

I drew each category of the conceptual framework from my study's research questions. The first research question sought to explore how emerging adults perceive their resilience. Participants' responses to this question are reflected in the conceptual categories, "Trauma," "Shifts in Perception and Behavior" and "Big Picture Resilience." The second question sought to identify factors that emerging adults believe contribute to their resilience. Responses to this question are organized in the "Contributors to Resilience" category. The final research question sought to determine to what extent participants feel their psychology-related majors relate to their resilience. The conceptual categories "Motivation" and "Effects" capture participants' responses to this question.

To provide a more thorough explanation of the framework's categories, I drew from the literature and my own insights gleaned from experience into participants' potential responses to my research questions. As I proceeded through the data collection and analysis steps, I modified my descriptors as needed. Thus, I continually shaped and refined my study's conceptual framework.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

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"Et lux in tenebris lucet (And the light shines in the darkness)." - John 1:5

*

Introduction and Overview

Using a sample of undergraduate students in psychology-related majors, I explored students' perceptions of personal thriving and the factors they believe contributed to it. In seeking to understand the phenomenon of resilience in undergraduate students who have a history of psychological trauma and who perceive themselves as thriving in the college experience, my study addressed three research questions: (a) How did emerging adult students perceive their resilience? (b) What factors did they identify as contributing to their resilience? (c) To what extent did they feel their psychology-related program related to their resilience?

This chapter describes the research methodology of my study and includes discussions of the following: (a) rationale for research approach, (b) description of the research sample, (c) summary of information needed, (d) overview of research design, (e) data collection methods, (f) data analysis and synthesis methods, (g) ethical considerations, (h) issues of trustworthiness, and (i) study limitations. The chapter concludes with a brief summary.

Rationale for Research Approach

Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative research is concerned with how individuals experience, perceive, and make meaning of the surrounding sociocultural world, both within a specific context and at a specific point in time (Creswell, 2009). Thus, by attempting to enter into the experiences of others and discover meaning, qualitative researchers explore social situations. Creswell (2009) explains the aim of qualitative inquiry is to elucidate individuals' often complex experiences from a constructivist philosophical perspective, in contrast to reductionist quantitative research, in which the aim is to establish empirical knowledge.

The key elements of qualitative research include: (a) contextual understanding of how events and/or actions occur, (b) interaction between the researcher and study participants, (c) flexibility in research design, and (d) an interpretive, rather than reductionist, stance (Creswell, 2009). I asserted the fundamental assumptions and elements of qualitative research were a better fit for my study than those of quantitative methodology. By employing a qualitative research approach, I believed I would gather rich data regarding emerging adults' resilience that quantitative methods could not elicit.

Phenomenological Inquiry

Within the qualitative research approach, my study was most appropriately suited for a phenomenological design. According to Creswell (2007), the aim of phenomenological inquiry is to examine a particular phenomenon through the subjective lens of several participants who have experienced it. Thus, phenomenology elicits in-depth individual accounts of an experience. The focal point of the research is the shared experience of an event, and not the event itself.

Creswell (2007) discusses two types of phenomenology: hermeneutics and transcendental phenomenology. Hermeneutics, originally concerned with religious texts, focuses on the study of human action within context (van Manen, 1990). In transcendental phenomenology, researchers develop textural and structural descriptions of participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). This refers to what participants experienced, and the context/settings that influenced their experience. Researchers use a combination of textural and structural descriptions to uncover the overall essence of the experience under examination. According to Moustakas (1994), data is generally gathered through in-depth interviews and sometimes in the forms of written responses, art, and observation. Participants are asked about their experience of the phenomenon in question, as well as about the situations/contexts that influenced their experience of the phenomenon.

The phenomenological approach draws from Husserl's (1931) work, as well as thinkers who expanded on it, such as Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Spiegelberg, 1982). This is illustrated in the following philosophical perspectives, discussed by scholars David Stewart and Algis Mickunas (1990). First, phenomenology seeks richer and more robust explanations of human experience, versus the limited empirical explanations offered by scientism. Second, it emphasizes a suspension of judgment (epoché) until that judgment is able to be founded on a more dependable basis than the researchers's limited personal experience. Third, phenomenology is built on the premise that reality is linked to an individual's

consciousness of it. Finally, this qualitative approach rests on the premise that reality is perceived only within the context of the individual's meaning of the experience.

Rationale Summary

My research explored emerging adult students' perceptions of their resilience and the factors they believed influenced it. As such, my study fit appropriately within the tradition of qualitative phenomenological research. I aimed to bracket my personal experiences with resilience in order to understand participants' experiences of the phenomenon from a fresh perspective. Thus, my research fit well with Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenology.

The Research Sample

I utilized a purposeful sampling strategy to select my study's participants, a method characteristic of phenomenological inquiry (Patton, 1990). Since my aim was to gain insight into the phenomenon of college student resilience, I employed criterion sampling in order to select information-rich cases and ensure that all participants experienced the same phenomenon. My selection criteria required that participants:

- Were 18-25 years old.

- Were enrolled in a psychology-related major.

- Arrived at college with a history of psychological trauma.

- Perceived themselves as thriving in the college experience, by their own definition.

To focus on students whose ages fell within the emerging adulthood years, I decided upon a delimiting age range of 18-25. I selected my sample from among the

student population at Lesley University, where I am both enrolled in doctoral study and employed as adjunct psychology faculty. Lesley University is a private 4-year institution located in the Northeast region of the United States. Founded in 1909 to prepare women to teach kindergarten, Lesley has broadened its scope in becoming a coed multifaceted university that offers training programs in education, counseling psychology, environmental studies, the arts, and expressive therapies (Brown & Forinash, 2011). The Lesley University website describes the institution as one rooted in social justice and also highlights its use of transformative pedagogy (Lesley University, 2014).

Since my research interest developed as a result of my experiences at Lesley and because I was not interested in comparing Lesley students to others elsewhere, I chose to focus my research on students at this specific institution. Further, I studied only those students who were enrolled in psychology-related majors, because I was interested in exploring the extent to which they perceived their study of psychology as relating to their resilience.

I developed an informational flyer to attract potential study participants. I posted this flyer at several locations throughout the Lesley campus and also asked Lesley psychology faculty to share my study information with their students. The flyer included my email address, through which interested students contacted me for more information regarding the study design and participation details. Students completed an initial screening questionnaire to determine their fit with selection criteria. Since I teach on an adjunct basis in the college, only students with whom I had not worked were included in the study to avoid a conflict of interest.

Out of 11 students who contacted me, 9 met selection criteria. The final research sample included 7 students from within the psychology-related majors at Lesley University. Although participants were all unmarried 18 to 25 year-olds experiencing resilience despite histories of trauma, there were demographic differences among them in age, gender, race/ethnicity, major, academic year, GPA, living arrangements, and specific traumatic experience. All participants reported a sense of personal thriving, though there was some variation in their description. No participants withdrew from the study. The following information provides further detail of the sample's demographic data. A participant demographic matrix is included as Appendix B.

Age

Participants ranged in age from 18 to 24 years old. There were three participants aged 18, and the remaining were 19, 20, 21, and 24 years old. The average participant age was 19.7 years.

Gender

There was one male participant; all others were female. Thus, the final sample was ~86% female and ~14% male.

Race/Ethnicity

Six out of seven participants reported their race/ethnicity as Caucasian. One participant did not provide this information.

Marital Status

The majority of participants (n=5, ~71%) reported their marital status as single. Two participants (~29%) reported being partnered.

Major

Among the seven participants, four psychology-related majors were represented. These included: counseling (n=4, ~57%), expressive arts therapy (n=2, ~29%), and art therapy (n=1, ~14%).

Academic Year

Three participants were second-year students (n=3, ~43%). Two were in their first year (~29%), and two were of upperclass status (~29%).

GPA

Participants' grade-point average ranged from 3.2 to 4.0 The average reported GPA was 3.67.

Living Arrangements

The majority of participants were resident students who lived in campus housing (n=5, ~71%). One participant lived in an off-campus apartment, and another lived with parents.

Trauma

While the specific traumas experienced by participants ranged greatly, the majority of participants reported having experienced at least three traumatic incidents prior to college (n=4, ~57%). Three participants (~43%) reported experiencing two traumas.

The most commonly reported traumas were traumatic loss (n=4, ~57%). Traumatic experiences of domestic violence, bullying/hazing, and witnessing violence to others were next most common (n=3, ~43% for each type of experience). Sexual assault,

medical emergency, and neglect were each reported by two participants (~29% each). One participant reported experiencing a mechanized accident (~14%).

Thriving

All participants reported a sense of thriving in their college experience. However, the nature of thriving varied throughout the sample. The questionnaire responses to this particular question provided me with an initial look at how students perceived their resilience. I used the same coding scheme to categorize participants' responses to this question as in my interview and artifact analyses. The majority of participants identified thriving as having agency in their lives (n=4, ~57%). The other three participants each identified optimism, empowerment, and integrated experiences as evidence of their resilience (n=1, ~14% each).

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Information Needed to Conduct the Study

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This phenomenological study focused on seven students in psychology-related majors at Lesley University, a private four-year institution located in the Northeast region of the United States. In an effort to understand participants' perceptions of their resilience and the factors they believed contributed to it, I asked three research questions in the data collection process. The study's conceptual framework helped me to determine the information that was needed to answer these questions. This information fell into three categories: (a) demographic, (b) perceptual, and (c) theoretical. The information included:

- participants' demographic information, including age, gender, race/ethnicity, marital status, major, academic year, GPA, living arrangements, and specific traumatic experience;

- participants' perceptions of their resilience and the factors they believed
  contributed to it; and

- ongoing review of the literature to theoretically ground the study.

An overview of information needed to conduct my study and the methods I selected to obtain this information appears as Figure 1. Theoretical information is not included in the chart, since the literature review which I conducted to obtain this information is not a formal data collection method.

Type of Information	Information Needed	Method
(a) Demographic	Participants' descriptive information, including age, gender, race/ethnicity, marital status, major, academic year, GPA, living arrangements, and specific trauma experience.	Questionnaire
(b) Perceptual	Participants' perceptions of their resilience and the factors they believed contributed to it.	Interview, Artifact Review
Research Question 1. How do emerging adult students perceive their resilience?	Participants' perceptions of their resilience.	Questionnaire, Interview, Artifact Review
Research Question 2. What factors did they identify as contributing to their resilience?	Participants' perceptions of the factors contributing to their resilience.	Interview, Artifact Review
Research Question 3. To what extent did they feel their psychology-related program related to their resilience?	The extent of relationship between participants' resilience and their choice of study in a psychology-related major.	Interview, Artifact Review
Figure 1, Overview of Information Needed		

Overview of Research Design

The following is a description of the steps I used to carry out my research. More comprehensive discussions regarding my methods of data collection and analysis follow in the proceeding sections of this chapter.

Literature Review

Before engaging in any data collection, I conducted a review of selected literature to inform and theoretically ground my study. This literature review facilitated my study of other researchers' contributions in the following areas: learning and development in emerging adulthood, mental health in the contemporary college experience, and psychological resilience. My aim was to develop an understanding of how study participants perceived their resilience, which factors they believed contributed to it, and the relationship between the college experience (including their course of study) and their resilience. Thus, the literature review explored the interconnectedness of human development and resilience within the context of the contemporary college experience. The study's conceptual framework emerged from my review of the literature, and guided the processes of data analysis, interpretation, and synthesis.

Proposal Defense

In preparation for conducting my study, I developed a proposal which was approved by my dissertation committee. My proposal included the following components: background/context, aim of the study, literature review topics, proposed research methodology, and intended contribution to the field of educational studies.

IRB Approval

Following successful defense of my study proposal, I submitted an application to Lesley University's Institutional Review Board detailing my research design and procedures to ensure compliance with the standards for protection of human research participants. I subsequently obtained approval from Lesley's IRB to conduct my research.

Screening Procedures

I asked students interested in participating in the study to complete an initial screening questionnaire. I conducted initial interviews with those who met selection criteria based on questionnaire responses, in order to further determine their fit and discuss study/participation details.

Data Collection

I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with seven students in psychology-related majors at Lesley University. I obtained relevant artwork with descriptions from one student.

Data Analysis

Following data collection, I manually computed demographic statistics based on participants' responses to the screening questionnaire. I examined participants' interview responses and supplementary artifacts that I collected, using rigorous content and thematic data analysis methods.

Verification

I asked participants to engage in member-checking, or respondent validation, in order to ensure that my analysis accurately reflected the essence of their experiences. Each participant was provided with his/her coded transcript and was asked to check the

accuracy of my coding. tIn addition, I obtained inter-rater reliability of my coding scheme via peer review.

Data Collection Methods

Creswell (2007) asserts that, in an attempt to understand the phenomenon being studied, it is necessary to utilize multiple methods of data collection. In this study, I collected data through questionnaire, interview, and artifact review methods. I contended the multiple data collection methods would be useful for triangulation, in order to establish corroboration and convergence among the data sources (Denzin, 1970). I believed triangulation would enhance my study's credibility by guarding against the possibility that my findings were merely the result of a single data collection method.

Data Collection Phase I: Questionnaire

I developed a questionnaire to collect both demographic data and open-ended data regarding students' perceptions of personal thriving. Thus, 9 out of 10 questions collected demographic data, and the remaining question collected perceptual data. The questionnaire was approved within my IRB application. It appears as Appendix C.

An advantage of using a questionnaire in my data collection was that I was able to easily distribute it and gather information in a relatively unobtrusive manner (Fowler, 2002). Despite this advantage, the questionnaire was limited in its ability to explore complex social phenomenon, which is largely the focus of qualitative research (Creswell, 2009). In addition, I did not field-test my questionnaire in a pilot study. I aimed to overcome this limitation by triangulating the questionnaire, interview, and artifact review data.

In an effort to qualitatively explore participants' perceptions of their resilience, I included an open-ended question in addition to the close-ended profile questions. For the purpose of my study, the questionnaire served primarily as a screening tool for potential participants rather than a quantitative data collection method. Eleven students completed the questionnaire, and I determined, based on their responses, that nine met selection criteria.

Data Collection Phase II: Interviews

I selected the interview as the primary data collection method for my study. Following in the qualitative research tradition, it was necessary to collect rich data in an effort to understand participants' perceptions of their resilience. Interviews are useful tools for this, as they can elicit data that captures the essence of participants' experiences, and unlike questionnaires, they allow the opportunity to ask probing and clarifying questions (Creswell, 2007; Kvale, 1996). Further, since I had preconceived ideas about resilience that stemmed from my own experiences, it was important for me to explore others' perceptions of the phenomenon. I determined I could achieve this by using in-depth interviews as my primary data collection method.

With the guidance of my dissertation committee and faculty mentors, I developed interview questions by using my three research questions as a framework. Throughout ongoing review of the literature, I revised my interview questions as needed. The final protocol outlined open-ended questions for semi-structured interviews. This format allowed for organic conversations between me and the participants to evolve, as it was flexible to my wording and reordering of questions. Due to resource constraints

(including time and money), I did not pilot-test the interview protocol. The final protocol was approved within my IRB application and appears as Appendix D.

Interviews are advantageous because they can be used to understand participants' subjective experiences by capturing meaning in the individuals' own words (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Despite their inherent strength as a data collection method, interviews pose the following noteworthy shortcomings relevant to my study (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). First, despite my attempt to reduce bias as a researcher, it was impossible to remove the contextual interaction of researcher and participant from the interview process. Second, the interviews elicited data that varied in degrees of depth and insight, since not all participants provided the same quality of data.

I conducted brief preliminary interviews (approximately 15 minutes in length) with potential participants who, based on their questionnaire responses, appeared to fit my selection criteria. Interviews were conducted both in-person and by telephone, and covered the following information: study background, informed consent review, questions posed by potential participants, participants' right to not discuss topics beyond their comfort zone, their right to ask questions about the research process at any time, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time and for whatever reason. I was able to build an initial rapport with study participants in these contacts and foster an open, inviting environment in which participants could feel at ease. During these conversations, I scheduled individual in-depth interviews with participants and sent them confirmation e-mails with the details of our meeting date, time, and location.

Out of the nine students who were eligible to participate in the study, I conducted in-depth interviews with seven throughout October and November of 2013. All interviews were held individually in my campus office, and no one besides me and the study participants were present during the interviews. All participants were asked to sign an informed consent form prior to engaging in these interviews. I offered all participants a copy of the final dissertation upon completion. I conducted all interviews in person and digitally recorded them on my secure laptop. The interview audio was transcribed verbatim.

Data Collection Phase III: Artifact Review

In addition to interviews, I included artifact reviews in my data collection procedures. My rationale was this would provide supplementary data (Bowen, 2009), beyond what the interviews elicited. I submitted that this supplementary data would be useful for triangulation, and thus enhance my study's credibility.

As a data collection method, artifact review carries noteworthy advantages and disadvantages that were relevant to my study. In addition to being unobtrusive, artifact review is also generally efficient since it relies on using information that is available and accessible to the researcher (Bowen, 2009). However, it is often the case that artifacts provide insufficient detail, since they were likely not originally produced for use as data in the particular study (Bowen, 2009).

Following the completion of each in-depth interview, I asked study participants to share any creative work they had previously produced (such as journals and artwork) which they felt related to their experience of resilience. Out of seven participants, one

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provided digital copies of six pieces of artwork along with brief textual descriptions of each.

Safeguarding of Data and Participant Information

Once students sent an initial email expressing interest in the study, I assigned them a number. The students were immediately de-identified by name and instead, noted by their designated number. All e-mail correspondence with participants, including their expressed interest in the study, completed questionnaires, and interview scheduling was printed and filed. In addition, all informed consent forms were filed. All files were kept in a locked cabinet in my home office.

Because my sampling method required interested students to contact me by email, participants' involvement in the study was not anonymous. However, I detached participants' names from the data. All participants' names were changed in the writing of the dissertation, in order to protect their confidentiality. Data was used only for the purpose of this study. Lesley's IRB approved these procedures that I took to protect participant identity.

Methods and Procedures for Data Analysis and Synthesis

Overview

As is often the case in qualitative research, my data collection methods produced a large amount of information. After my data collection was complete, I had 212 pages of interview transcripts, six artifacts, 15 pages of interview notes, and 16 pages of participants' member-checking notes. My task was to reduce this mass of data by identifying meaningful patterns and developing an analytic framework. In order to avoid

collecting irrelevant or repetitive data, I engaged in collection and analysis procedures

simultaneously (Glesne, 2005; Merriam, 2009).

Polkinghorne (1989) and Moustakas (1994) describe the steps of

phenomenological data analysis. Guided by the study's conceptual framework, the

researcher continuously develops and refines coding categories and themes. In the

horizontalization step of analysis, the researcher reduces the information gathered into

significant statements, and then groups them by developing clusters of meaning. From

these clusters of meaning, the researcher develops textural descriptions of participants'

experiences (what they actually experienced) and structural descriptions of the context,

situations, and conditions surrounding the experiences. The combination of textural and

structural descriptions provides the overall essence of the experience of the phenomenon,

which the researcher presents by focusing on the underlying structure of participants'

experiences. My analysis in this study was multi-layered, in that I analyzed data to obtain

findings, and then interpreted the findings in order to produce a holistic and integrated

synthesis. The following is a description of my data analysis and synthesis process, which

I completed according to the steps outlined by Polkinghorne and Moustakas.

Analytic Approach

Questionnaire.

Though the initial questionnaire produced some demographic data, it primarily

served as a screening tool to assist me in determining students' fit with my selection

criteria. I manually computed sample statistics (see participant demographic matrix in

Appendix B), but did not triangulate the demographic data with the qualitative interview

data. The questionnaire contained one open-ended question aimed to capture perceptual data regarding participants' thriving. I coded participants' responses to this question using the same coding scheme and analytic approach which I applied to the interview and artifact data.

Interviews.

I transcribed the interviews shortly after their completion and began to reflect on them, drawing initial themes from the data. Once I completed interviewing all seven participants, I immersed myself in the data by reading through the 212 pages of transcripts, listening to the interview audio, reviewing my interview notes, reflecting, and jotting memos.

At this point, I began my formal process of data analysis and reduction by identifying and extracting excerpts that represented significant concepts. In sum, 308 significant statements were extracted from all data sources (questionnaires, interviews, and artifacts) and transferred into a word processing document. I then gleaned broad themes and categories which I noticed throughout the data, and grouped significant concepts into categories or clusters of meaning, which I began to code. As more concepts emerged throughout my immersion in the data, I began to identify more structured, as well as additional, categories. I coded the most salient themes in order to narrow my preliminary coding categories, collapsing or eliminating categories and themes as needed. In doing so, I identified emergent themes (analytic categories) and theme clusters (descriptors of each category). As my coding scheme evolved, I was able to define

themes, patterns, and relationships between the categories and determine any hierarchies that existed among them.

I created separate coding charts; each listed a category from the conceptual framework along with associated descriptors. As I proceeded along the coding process, additional themes emerged, and I revised the charts as needed. I used Dedoose, a qualitative software program, to help me organize, store, and manage data. While I manually developed coding charts, I used the software to code data. When I needed to revise a category or its descriptors, I was able to easily edit this information in Dedoose, and all related codes were quickly updated throughout the transcripts. After determining my final coding categories, I was able to use Dedoose to locate corresponding excerpts from the data for each code, which facilitated my report of findings (Chapter 4) and analysis/interpretation of them (Chapter 5).

In an effort to establish inter-rater reliability and enhance my study's trustworthiness, I asked two colleagues to code interviews. Though largely consistent, there were a few coding discrepancies across the various raters. In these cases, I carefully reviewed the data and refined my coding scheme to reconcile these differences. In addition, I invited all participants to comment on and critique my interpretation to ensure that I accurately conveyed the essence of their experiences, a measure which yielded 16 pages of participants' notes. While this verification process revealed no major misrepresentations of participant experiences, I did refine my analysis and interpretation of one participant's experience based on the feedback I received.

I developed the initial coding scheme in relation to my initial conceptual framework. The original coding scheme included 73 codes across seven categories. In my process of refining the coding scheme by collapsing themes and eliminating categories, I reduced the number of codes to 20 across six categories. These final six categories were: Trauma, Shifts in Perception and Behavior, Big Picture Resilience, Contributors to Resilience, Motivation, and Effects. The first three categories captured participants' responses describing their perceptions of resilience (focus of research question #1), the fourth category captured responses pertaining to factors which contributed to resilience (focus of research question #2), and the last two categories captured responses related to participants' perceptions of how their course of study related to their resilience (focus of research question #3). My final coding scheme is included as Appendix E.

Throughout the data analysis phase of this study, I created data summary tables which helped to organize participants' responses across each conceptual category. As I examined these tables and the patterns captured within, three key findings emerged. These three findings served to answer my three research questions. I examined these findings in an attempt to explain patterns and themes which I observed and to determine the degree to which the findings were consistent with the literature.

Artifact review.

My steps of artifact review included: finding, selecting, appraising, and synthesizing data (Bowen, 2009). Though I asked all participants to offer any relevant artwork or writing they felt comfortable contributing, I obtained data from only one participant, who provided me with six digitized pieces accompanied by brief descriptions

of each. These pieces were all produced as a result of the participant's first-hand experience with trauma and resilience.

Similar to interview analysis, my artifact review yielded data which I organized into themes and categories (Bowen, 2009). I coded this data using the same coding scheme and analytic approach as in my interview analysis. Thus, my appraisal of these pieces included content analysis (identifying meaningful and pertinent portions) and thematic analysis (coding to identify emerging themes related to the phenomenon in question).

Synthesis

The very nature of qualitative coding results in the fragmentation of information into distinct categories, and this requires the researcher to pay careful attention to detail (Creswell, 2007). The subsequent process of synthesis requires the researcher to put these bits of information together in a meaningful way in order to offer a cohesive and integrated explanation of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2009). Thus, my analytic approach required me to identify clusters of meaning, patterns, and themes within the data. Further, I had to identify the relationships and linkages between these separate categories, so I could thoughtfully describe the phenomenon of college student resilience. I accomplished this by examining any patterns that existed *within* the categories and also by comparing any connecting patterns that existed *across* the categories. I merged all emergent themes and extracted a comprehensive description of findings. In addition, I contextualized my study within the broader research that I explored in my literature review. Due to the

recursive nature of qualitative analysis (Creswell, 2009), I engaged in this process of thinking about data iteratively, rather than in separate steps.

Through the process of synthesizing separate bits of information gleaned from the data, I developed an overall description of the essence of college student resilience, as experienced by study participants. My analysis and synthesis of data allowed me to consider the broader implications of my research. In addition, it prepared me to generate thoughtful conclusions and formulate practical, research-based recommendations. In the following chapters of this dissertation, I describe participants' experience of resilience and of the overall essence of their experience, as well as offer study conclusions and recommendations.

Ethical Considerations

In order to ensure participants' protection, I took several cautionary measures throughout the research process. First, I personally reviewed the informed consent form with all participants and responded to any questions about their involvement or the study. I obtained written voluntary consent from all participants. Second, I respected participants' right to confidentiality by protecting their identities through the use of pseudonyms in the dissemination of my study data. Third, I secured all study-related information in a locked area, to which only I had access. Fourth, I acknowledged the sensitive nature of the topics explored in my study. I provided participants with a list of local resources, including both general mental health centers and agencies that delivered trauma-specific treatment. Fifth, participation was never coerced, as participants were

free to withdraw from the study at any point and for whatever reason. All procedures taken to protect participants were approved by Lesley's IRB.

<div align="center">**Issues of Trustworthiness**</div>

Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the researcher's ability to address issues similar to those inherent in quantitative study, such as validity and reliability. In this dissertation, I discuss issues of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability to demonstrate my attempts to control for potential bias in my study design, implementation, and analysis.

Credibility

The issue of credibility is a central component of a study's research design (Creswell, 2009). Creswell (2009) explains that credibility, similar to validity in quantitative research, refers to the accuracy of a study's findings from the researcher's, participant's, and reader's perspectives. In establishing credibility, the researcher is not verifying her conclusions, but rather attempting to validate them. In order to determine the validity of a study's conclusions, the researcher must establish methodological and interpretive validity (Mason, 2002). Thus, the research methods must be appropriate for the type of information sought, which is illustrated in alignment of study purpose, research questions, conceptual framework, and methods. In addition, the researcher's use of high-quality and rigorous data analysis methods lends to a study's validity.

I took various steps to enhance my study's credibility. First, I clarified my assumptions at the outset, and attempted to control for bias by acknowledging and bracketing beliefs that stemmed from my experiences. Second, my prolonged

engagement with the phenomenon of college student resilience (personally since 2001 and professionally since 2010) meant that I engaged in persistent observations in the field. Third, I collected data from multiple participants using multiple methods and compared the information obtained through triangulation in order to corroborate my conclusions. Fourth, I looked for discrepant evidence and negative instances to challenge my findings. Finally, I utilized member checks and peer review to minimize the influence of researcher bias on data analysis, interpretation, and synthesis.

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research refers to the ability to track a researcher's processes and procedures of data collection and interpretation, mirroring the quantitative concept of reliability (Creswell, 2009). While reliability, or the ability to replicate findings in future studies, is not a concern in qualitative inquiry, the researcher must produce consistent findings from the data she collected in order to demonstrate the study's dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

To enhance dependability in this study, I established inter-rater reliability as an attempt to reduce the potential bias of one researcher performing data collection and analysis procedures. I accomplished this by asking colleagues to code several interviews. Though coding was generally consistent across all raters, I resolved the few instances of coding inconsistency by refining my coding scheme to reflect raters' interpretations. Another step I took towards establishing dependability in the study was maintaining an audit trail. This meant that I kept a journal and recorded memos which documented my decision-making rationale and detailed my data analysis and interpretation methods. This

trail lends to transparency by offering comprehensive explanations of how I collected and analyzed data. It also provides a record of how my thinking shifted throughout the research process.

Confirmability

The issue of confirmability relates to the quantitative concept of objectivity, and implies that a study's findings have resulted from the research, versus from the researcher's subjectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Though objectivity is never achieved in qualitative research, the researcher must show how she made decisions throughout the research process; this is achieved through ongoing reflection and the use of an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

From the outset, I acknowledged the limitation inherent in the fact that I alone determined selection criteria for participation in the study. The journals and memos I recorded dually served my ongoing reflection and created an audit trail. I believed these activities, and my transparency around the research process, would enhance the study's confirmability.

Transferability

Though qualitative researchers are not concerned with the generalizability valued in quantitative inquiry, transferability requires the reader be able to determine to what extent the research context and phenomenon can be transferred to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

I attempted to address this issue by using rich, thick description of participants and their contexts (Geertz, 1973) and by clarifying my analytic framework, so the reader

could follow my logic and choices throughout the research process. I believed my use of thick description would allow the reader to separate details of the phenomenon from its analysis, and draw her own conclusions regarding the applicability of my findings to other situations.

Limitations of the Study

As with all research, my study contains certain limitations. With the assistance of my dissertation committee and faculty mentors, I carefully considered how I could account for these limitations and limit their impact on my research. Some of these limitations are common to qualitative research, while others are specific to my study's design.

Limitations that are inherent to qualitative research relate to its unique features as a methodology. Researcher bias is a major concern within qualitative inquiry, since the researcher's subjectivity is a factor in her interests, assumptions, and perceptions (Creswell, 2007). Because thinking in qualitative study is limited by the researcher's subjectivity, she must be careful to collect data that fit with the purpose of the study and the type of information sought (Creswell, 2007). Throughout this study, I took careful and deliberate steps to ensure alignment of study purpose, research questions, conceptual framework, and methods.

Qualitative research is also limited by the potential for participant reactivity, in that study participants may offer more or less candid responses based on their degree of comfort and/or willingness to cooperate. Despite the precaution I took in not recruiting students with whom I had previously worked, it is possible that participants tried to be

helpful to me because of my professional role within the university. To address this problem, I attempted to create an open and honest environment in which to work with study participants. I assured them their identities would not be revealed, and the data would be used for the sole purpose of my dissertation study rather than to inform any departmental agenda.

As a phenomenology, this study carried a high bias potential due to the subjectivity that resulted from my experiences with college and resilience. In phenomenological inquiry, researcher bias is accounted for through bracketing (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) stresses that a crucial component of phenomenology is the researcher's ability not only to acknowledge her beliefs and attitudes regarding the phenomenon under study, but to put them aside so that she can explore participants' perspectives as clearly as possible. From the outset, I acknowledged my assumptions and research agenda. Through ongoing journaling and consultation with colleagues, I engaged in continuous reflection to monitor how my subjectivity might influence the study.

Due to the nature of phenomenology as an exploration of the essence of a shared phenomenon, I needed to ensure that all participants experienced pre-college trauma and in-college resilience. I carefully selected my sample using a screening questionnaire and initial interview to determine students' fit with my selection criteria. In order to accurately convey the essence of college student resilience, I employed rigorous data analysis and interpretation procedures, including peer review and member-checking.

A final limitation of this study was my use of a restricted sample. This contributed to a significantly skewed sample of six females and one male. In addition, the sample was racially homogenous, with six of seven participants identifying as Caucasian. While my intention in this study was not to produce generalizable findings, as would be the case in quantitative research, I attempted to address the issue of transferability. I included detailed background and context information and made use of thick description, so that the reader could make her own assessment of my study's applicability to other contexts.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I discussed in detail my study's research methodology. I described how I utilized a qualitative phenomenological design to study college students' perceptions of their resilience and the factors they believed contributed to it. The purposefully selected sample consisted of seven 18 to 24 year-old students in psychology-related majors. I collected data through a screening questionnaire, individual interviews, and artifact review methods. My process of data analysis served not only to identify patterns and relationships among emergent themes, but to inform my framework for communicating the essence of what the data revealed. I employed specific strategies to enhance the study's trustworthiness, including member checks, peer review, triangulation, critical reflection, and thick description.

I conducted a comprehensive literature review to ground my study and inform its conceptual framework, which I used to shape the research design and my data analysis. I compared study findings to those I found in the literature in order to draw educated interpretations and conclusions, and offer implications for practice and future research.

My intention was for this study to contribute to the research community's knowledge of resilience beyond childhood and the factors that contribute to it. Further, I hoped the knowledge generated by this study would inform higher education efforts to promote resilience in students generally, and in those with prior histories of trauma specifically.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

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"One's life has value so long as one attributes value to the life of others, by means of

love, friendship, indignation and compassion." - Simone de Beauvoir

*

Introduction

In this phenomenological inquiry, I explored undergraduate students' impressions

of personal resilience and the factors they perceived as contributing to it. In an attempt to

answer my research questions from the data I collected, I identified three major findings

that emerged from the study:

1. All seven participants characterized their resilience by their ability to

successfully integrate traumatic experiences into the rest of their lives.

2. All seven participants indicated that action steps they took contributed to their

resilience.

3. The majority of participants indicated their healing was both a motivator in

choice of major and an outcome of their psychology-related studies.

In this chapter, I introduce my research participants by providing brief

descriptions of their demographics, traumatic experiences, and initial emotional reactions

to these experiences (see participant demographic matrix in Appendix B). Data summary

tables are included throughout the chapter to provide visual overviews as appropriate). I

then present key findings stemming from the emergent themes of seven in-depth

interviews, seven responses to an item on the screening questionnaire, and my review of

six artifacts obtained from one participant. In-depth interviews served as my primary data collection method. When appropriate and relevant, I interwove questionnaire and artifact data with interview data to enhance my discussion. A detailed account of my data collection and analysis methods appears in the preceding chapter.

I provide a comprehensive discussion of research findings along with participants' accounts which explain and support them. Through my use of thick description (Geertz, 1973), I document the range of participants' experiences and provide the reader with the opportunity to understand the reality of participants' lived experiences. As it was impractical to report all experiences in full, I incorporated relevant quotes to illustrate the multiple perspectives which emerged throughout my study. Further, I hoped to capture the complexity of the phenomenon of college student resilience by illustrating the range of participants' experiences.

The interpretations and synthesis in the remaining chapters of this dissertation hinge on my ability to record the patterns which emerged in the data analysis phase of my study. These are the patterns that I present here.

Participants and Their Experiences

Data summary tables of events experienced and emotional reactions are included as Appendices F and G, respectively.

Anna

Anna is a 24 year old Caucasian female. She is an upper-class Counseling student with a 3.8 GPA. Anna is in a long-term relationship with her boyfriend and lives in an off-campus apartment. Her experiences of trauma include: traumatic loss, sexual assault,

bullying which resulted in hospitalization and need to switch schools, and domestic

violence. Anna reported the following initial emotional reactions in response to her

traumatic experiences: confusion, shock, anger, powerlessness, self-loathing, and anxiety.

Becky

Becky is an 18 year old Caucasian female. She is a first-year Art Therapy student

with a 4.0 GPA. Becky is single and lives in an on-campus dorm. Her traumatic

experiences include: sexual assault, traumatic loss of biological parents resulting in her

adoption, and verbal threats/intimidation in the context of bullying. Becky reported

initially experiencing the following emotions in response to her traumas: confusion,

powerlessness, self-loathing, betrayal, hurt, and anxiety.

Charles

Charles is an 18 year old Caucasian male. He is a first-year Counseling student

with a 3.4 GPA. Charles is in a long-term relationship with his girlfriend. He lives in an

on-campus dorm. Charles struggled from depression in the past and his traumatic

experiences include traumatic loss and medical emergency in the context of a suicide

attempt. His initial emotional reactions to his traumatic experiences were hurt and self-

blame.

Deborah

Deborah is an 18 year old Caucasian female. She is a second-year Counseling

student with a 3.3 GPA. Deborah is single and lives off-campus with her parents. Her

experiences of trauma include: traumatic loss, a mechanized accident in which she

witnessed multiple deaths, severe hazing that resulted in her medical leave and

subsequent withdrawal from a previous university, and witnessing violence to others. Deborah had a history of multiple psychiatric inpatient admissions prior to her arrival at Lesley. She reported experiencing the following initial emotional reactions to her experiences: confusion, shock, anger, self-loathing, betrayal, self-blame, overwhelm, shame, anxiety, and fear.

Ellen

Ellen is a 19 year old Caucasian female. She is a second-year Counseling student with a 3.2 GPA. Ellen is single and lives in an on-campus dorm. Her traumatic experiences include domestic violence and neglect. Among many other instances violence in her family's home, Ellen witnessed her father attempting to choke her mother. Ellen's initial emotional reactions to her traumatic experiences were: confusion, self-loathing, self-blame, shame, anxiety, and fear.

Fiona

Fiona is a 21 year old female of unknown race/ethnicity. She is a second-year Expressive Arts Therapy student with a 4.0 GPA. Fiona is single and lives in an on-campus dorm. Her traumatic experiences include domestic violence and witnessing violence to others. In addition to experiencing domestic violence in her home, Fiona observed her father trying to choke another adult. Fiona's initial emotional reactions to her traumas were: confusion, self-blame, shame, and anxiety.

Grace

Grace is a 20 year old Caucasian female. She is a third-year Expressive Arts Therapy student with a 4.0 GPA. Grace is single and lives in an on-campus dorm. Her

traumatic experiences all occurred within approximately one year's time. They include:

multiple medical emergencies, neglect, and witnessing violence to others. Grace

struggled for several years with an eating disorder, which often resulted in forced medical

intervention. She reported initially experiencing the following emotional reactions to her

traumatic experiences: shock, powerlessness, overwhelm, anxiety, and fear.

Finding 1

All seven participants (100%) characterized their resilience by their ability to

successfully integrate their traumatic experiences into the rest of their lives.

My overarching research question in this study concerned how emerging adult

students perceived their resilience. The responses I obtained in the data collection process

regarding participants' perceptions of resilience and the characteristics they used to define

it, informed the primary finding of this study.

Big Picture Resilience (See Figure 2 below.)

Integrating experiences.

Though participants described their resilience in a variety of ways, they all

identified their ability to integrate their traumatic experiences as a hallmark of their

resilience. Given that 100% of participants characterized their resilience in such a way,

this finding is highly significant. In integrating their traumas, participants refused to see

themselves as defined by these experiences. Further, participants situated the traumas

within the broader context of their lives and felt that they had moved on from the past.

Participants expressed this integration in a variety of ways. Anna stated: "I've sort

of accepted that it's something that has happened to me and it doesn't change who I am

and… my ability to make judgments about my life." Grace's description of an art piece that she submitted as an artifact reflected an additional perspective of trauma integration: "My true self is looking out for me… it is okay to feel my emotions of sadness and loss and hurt."

		STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF RESILIENCE					
ID	Name	Integrating Experiences	Agency	Optimism	Empowerment	Learning/ Growth Experiences	Thankfulness
101	Anna	X		X		X	
102	Becky	X			X	X	X
104	Charles	X	X	X		X	
105	Deborah	X	X	X	X		X
107	Ellen	X	X		X		
108	Fiona	X	X	X	X	X	
110	Grace	X	X	X	X		X
TOTAL		7 (100%)	5 (~71%)	5 (~71%)	5 (~71%)	4 (~57%)	3 (~43%)

Figure 2, Data Summary Table: Finding 1

Agency.

The majority of participants (5 of 7 [~71%]) described their resilience in terms of their agency, or power in their lives. Charles saw himself as capable of ensuring that he did not regress: "I don't want to go back where I was. I do not want to go back to the way I was." Grace described her ability to live her life in a healthy and productive manner: "Now I can control myself in a *healthy* way… I am managing my time very well, and I have been able to manage most of my stress." Other participants spoke of agency in terms of reclaiming their lives:

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When I was at my worst with all my trauma, and having flashbacks all the time and not being able to be in public and isolating myself, you kind of think to yourself, When are you going to stop this? It's like, I can change it. And I did... I *had* to change. I *needed* to change. And with that, I was able to change. There is nothing so bad that you can't keep living... There were times where it was really hard to keep going... Why should you let that dictate your life and how it's going to end up? (Deborah)

I have had to make changes in who I am... in order to get past and survive what I've gone through, especially to be where I am right now, in a college environment... now I feel like I have control over my life... I finally am able to attain like, all the things that I've wanted. (Ellen)

Optimism.

In describing their resilience, five of seven participants (~71%) identified their optimism. One participant talked about the importance of looking for the good in life while another described her attitude towards survival:

It's given me a whole new perspective on life and why it's good. Because even though things can... get bad, maybe it isn't always happy I think, but there's good in life. And you just have to find it. (Charles)

Being able to say to yourself, well yes, this did happen, but I'm still here, is a remarkable thing. It's like, whoa, (LAUGHTER), that didn't get me, so maybe I can take the next thing. (Fiona)

Empowerment.

The majority of participants (5 of 7, [~71%]) included a sense of empowerment in their descriptions of personal resilience. Some participants perceived their empowerment in terms of being generally stronger as a result of their traumas, as Grace noted: "I feel like they've all made me stronger in some way." Others were more specific:

I think that it's helped in a way to learn about myself, but also to just not let other people's opinions of me like, hold me back… I see myself as a stronger and smarter person. (Becky)

It hasn't stopped me from getting a good education and being with great people. And just, I think I'm a good person, so it hasn't stopped me from doing that… I've never thought of myself as a resilient person, to go through what I've gone through and be where I am now. But now I'm starting to see myself more as that, as being stronger than I thought I was, or like how much it took for me to go through and come to college and be successful. (Ellen)

Learning/growth experiences.

Several participants (4 of 7 [~57%]) characterized their resilience by their ability to see traumas as learning and/or growth experiences. These following excerpts illustrate some of ways in which participants saw traumas as beneficial and how they perceived themselves as better off as a result of their experiences:

I've been through these traumatic events but looking back now, they've helped me to learn from them and become stronger and better deal with my issues that I might have in the future, like anything, like bumps in the road that I might come over. (Becky)

But now I know better and hopefully the next time I'll make a different judgment call if I feel that situation is presented… Because of the experience, I have a better ability to make better choices. (Anna)

I think I spent a lot of time kind of realizing that people come from different places and sometimes if somebody's having a strong reaction to something… maybe something that they haven't figured out how to process yet. (Fiona)

Thankfulness.

A few participants (3 of 7 [~43%]) described resilience in terms of thankfulness in light of their traumatic experiences. For these students, feeling thankful for the good they experienced was directly related to their past traumas:

> I was just telling my professor earlier that having gone through something so horrible on a college campus, and then actually moving to a place where you feel safe and at peace at some degree, you appreciate the institution more. (Deborah)

> I think it's just helped me to grow and become a more mature person and to take things, I don't know, to just be grateful for the things that I *do* have and to be grateful to be here. I don't know, it just, they all helped me, which I wouldn't have thought when they happened. I just feel that I've had a lot of opportunities to better myself that they [siblings] might not have. (Becky)

Shifts in Perception and Behavior

In discussing their perceptions of personal resilience, all seven participants (100%) indicated they experienced positive perceptual and/or behavioral shifts which they attributed to their resilience. These shifts were categorized as either internally or externally related. The most frequently identified were internally related shifts (46 references); these concerned changes in how participants perceived or treated themselves.

Internally related. (See Figure 3 below.)

I have control.

The most commonly identified internally related shift (7 of 7 [100%]) was participants' perceptions of having control of their own lives. Grace illustrated this shift while reflecting on her artwork: "When trapped in the cycle of these thoughts, I felt like I

was falling and slipping into them, like I was controlled by them. This piece now says to me, Please help." Others described different experiences of feeling in control:

> I think even the small things that you can control such as time management, and if you can decrease your stress just by doing things on time… Setting aside time for it is really healthy so that you're not building up stress from… little things or other things that you can't control. (Becky)

> I found my voice, and it helps me in almost every aspect of my life, with school especially… I am on a sleep schedule which has helped me tremendously, just being on a pattern and a schedule… instead of like, just laying in bed and doing nothing and just wasting the day away. (Deborah)

Three of seven participants spoke specifically of their sense of control in terms of a shift in competence (~43%). One participant described a newfound confidence in her ability to manage daily life responsibilities:

> I would say I'm a fairly independent person. I feel pretty competent that I can take care of myself and I'm pretty competent now in terms of like, I can run my own life… There are basic things: I can feed myself, I can get myself up in the morning, I can get stuff done, I can organize my life… I can be an adult now, is sort of a big one I think. So, that's something that's been really big for me, that I'm not using my parents or my boyfriend as a crutch anymore… If they were all gone it would be very upsetting and very unfortunate because I'd still want them here, but I know I would be OK, that I would be able to function, get money, be able to live and sort of basic necessities would be met, which is a big thing for me because I've pretty heavily relied on my parents for the last couple years, and I haven't really liked that but it's just been the nature of the situation. So, the fact that I feel that way about myself now is a pretty big deal. (Anna)

Two of seven participants (~29%) described their ability to take control in terms of being more social than they had previously been. Charles noted this contrast in his

behavior: "I go out and see people more than I used to… When I'm feeling distressed, I talk, I actually *do* talk to people, mostly to my girlfriend now." Another participant described how greater comfort and confidence led to her increased socialization:

> I was so afraid of like, being judged… I've kind of taken a lot of steps in meeting people and talking to them and realizing that it doesn't really matter as much as I originally thought it did, which has kind of allowed me to, you know, connect with people, make new friends, and also to get some job experience… (Fiona)

ID	Name	I Have Control	Healthier	Greater Insight
101	Anna	X	X	
102	Becky	X	X	
104	Charles	X	X	
105	Deborah	X		
107	Ellen	X	X	
108	Fiona	X	X	
110	Grace	X		X
TOTAL		7 (100%)	5 (~71%)	1 (~14%)

Figure 3, Data Summary Table: Internally Related Shifts

Healthier.

Five participants (~71%) described their resilience in terms of being healthier. This sometimes included general improvements in participants' eating and exercising habits; in others, it meant improved self-perceptions and enhanced self-care routines. Ellen described being healthier in terms of "eating better and I exercise more." For other

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participants, being healthier meant overcoming harmful habits and/or poor self-perceptions which they had held onto for many years. This perspective was evident in the following statement:

> I definitely had a very strange relationship around body weight and eating and food intake. And college is where I really worked that issue out and started having less of a love/hate relationship with food, I would say. So, just working through my mindset of, just because I'm no longer this type of weight but a couple pounds heavier does not mean I'm fat and doesn't mean I'm unattractive and is not a bad thing as long as I'm still healthy and I'm still eating right and exercising. Getting more into that mindset rather than like, eat a full thing of ice cream and I gained five pounds and now you need to go and stop eating for five days. Really just working out that psychological mindset throughout college. (Anna)

Some participants spoke generally about their improved ability to care for themselves as a characteristic of their resilience. One participant spoke specifically about her shift in taking the time to care for herself:

> Taking more time to think about how I'm feeling. Like if I am stressed out… to step aside for a second and do things that would help me feel less stressed out or less anxious rather than like, keep going on my work… I'm not going to be productive if I can't thoroughly think about something. So I've just taken a lot of time to think about like, how I'm feeling and what I need to do to better myself, because I think that will, in the end… allow me to be more successful all around, not just in my classes, but like a better person. And it'll help me to have more of an open mind I think. (Becky)

Greater insight.

Only one participant (~14%) conceptualized her resilience in terms of the greater insight that she had achieved following her traumatic experiences. Grace described this

improved insight: "I feel like I'm definitely… more mature. I feel like I'm just insightful about myself… I'm really self-aware."

Externally related. (See Figure 4 below.)

There were 12 references made by participants throughout the data to externally related shifts which they had experienced. These were shifts which occurred in how participants saw other people specifically and the world generally.

ID	Name	More Optimistic	Releasing Blame
101	Anna	X	
102	Becky		X
104	Charles	X	
105	Deborah		X
107	Ellen		
108	Fiona		
110	Grace	X	
TOTAL		3 (~43%)	2 (~29%)

Figure 4, Data Summary Table: Externally Related Shifts

More optimistic.

A few participants (3 of 7 [~43%]) indicated they became more optimistic, though the nature of this optimism varied across individuals. Two of seven participants (~29%) discussed being more trusting. For Grace, her increased trust related to her ability to be more honest with others than she had been in the midst of her eating disorder. She stated: "I trust that it's OK to share more, because I used to be really secretive when I was sick… I just wanted to be, not share anything with anyone because it's all a secret." Another

participant talked about feeling greater trust that people would not hurt her as others had

in the past:

> It [trust] has been difficult for me… But now… I can actually trust having
> friends, that they aren't going to treat me like what happened in middle
> school. That's been a really, that was a big one to get over… to just trust
> people again that they wouldn't betray me, like those girls said how they
> were my friends kind of thing… I've now found a group of friends here
> and at home that I can really trust… I have a boyfriend who I can really
> trust and be really honest with. (Anna)

One of seven participants (~14%) discussed being more optimistic in general and

seeing challenges as opportunities specifically. He stated:

> "If I fail a class, I can take it as an opportunity to pay more attention and
> keep driving myself to do better." This was in contrast to his previous
> pattern of "I'd just think about everything bad, and I'd make it worse and
> worse and worse, and it just piles up and piles up. I'd never see the good
> side of things, whereas now I see the good side of things. I'm more
> optimistic than I used to be." (Charles)

Releasing blame.

Releasing blame was an externally related shift referenced by two of seven

participants (~29%). They described their shifts in perspective regarding behavior of

important people in their lives. Participants noted they had come to release these people

from blame for the negative aftermath that ensued as a result of their behavior. One

participant in particular spoke about coming to terms with her mother's decision:

> It was a hard decision for her obviously. It's not like she just one day
> decided to drop me off and put me up for adoption, but she did it with
> intention of… giving me a better life. And I think that's… a huge gift to
> give someone, just life. (Becky)

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<center>**Finding 2**</center>

All seven participants (100%) indicated that action steps they took contributed to their resilience (see Figure 5 below).

My second research question in this study aimed to identify the factors participants perceived as contributors to resilience. In addition to describing their resilience, participants identified factors they believed contributed to their resilience. The latter group of responses that I obtained in the data collection process informed the second finding of this study.

ID	Name	Action Steps	External Supports	Personal Attributes	College
101	Anna	X	X	X	
102	Becky	X	X	X	X
104	Charles	X			X
105	Deborah	X	X	X	
107	Ellen	X	X	X	X
108	Fiona	X	X		X
110	Grace	X	X	X	X
TOTAL		7 (100%)	6 (~86%)	5 (~71%)	5 (~71%)

<center>**Figure 5, Data Summary Table: Finding 2**</center>

Action Steps

All seven participants (100%) indicated that one or more action steps they took contributed to their ability to be resilient. Participants identified a variety of action steps such as creative expression, socializing, and relaxation/self-soothing techniques.

<center>113</center>

Four participants of seven (~57%) spoke of creative modalities contributing to their resilience. Deborah described the helpfulness of writing: "I write a lot of journals about things, just random things that have happened in my day, and I try to end on a positive note, so it puts me in a positive mindset." For Grace, visual art was very important: "I remember some of my worst times when I was just so depressed and angry and not myself. I could just… express visual art. It's… my biggest modality." For another participant, music was especially helpful:

> I really like to do art and music. Those are… really calming and relaxing things for me… I just feel that being able to play someone else's music who has the same emotions helps to cope because you feel like there's someone there, kind of helping you. (Becky)

Another commonly referenced action step was socializing, discussed by four of seven participants (~57%). Ellen commented, "I go and I talk to my friends, or I go out with them or I do something fun." For another participant, socializing was important not just as a distractor in stressful situations, but she felt it was helpful to create new relationships that were not connected to her past trauma:

> The other thing I find is really helpful when I'm feeling like, stressed, is to spend time around people… But, I think also just having new relationships… in contrast to the way it was in high school, that aren't connected to that [trauma]… Not everything has to be about like, did your dad do that last weekend? It's like, *Stop*! You know? So, I think that's really helpful… to be able to foster new relationships. (Fiona)

A few participants (3 of 7 [~43%]) discussed physical movement as an important self-soothing technique which contributed to their resilience. Anna described her physical self-soothing techniques: "I would say definitely dance… It's been the only constant in

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my life…that's really helped me work through it. Exercising in general." Deborah spoke

of the self-soothing benefit she gained from helping others: "Helping others, like that's a

big thing… I collect jackets and blankets from friends, and I distribute them to the

homeless, so that makes me feel a lot better."

External Supports

The majority of participants (6 of 7 [~86%]) identified external support as a

contributor to resilience. They indicated a variety of sources of external support,

including friends, family, faculty, therapists, and community members. For example,

Deborah stated: "I have a really great family… I have a great therapist who I've been

with for about two years. I just have a good support system." A few participants noted the

critical support they received from family and friends, illustrated in the following two

quotes:

> My family and friends' support… they know about all my little things,
> things that I would never want to share with other people, but they still
> love me. And I feel like unconditional love is… one of the biggest parts of
> healing. (Grace)

> I really had a strong network there that I could really rely on when I
> needed them… So, that was I think the biggest help that I could have ever
> asked for… I think I can't emphasize enough the importance of social
> support in every single one of those contexts. (Anna)

Other participants spoke of the support they received at Lesley from a variety of

faculty and staff:

> I definitely think the size and all the resources that are here have really
> helped me. Especially, she's not here anymore but Laura from the
> Disability Services, and Holly who is still here was great. They really

helped me with like, my fears in the beginning about my meal plan stuff. So I worked out a plan with them… it's still being implemented to help me… And also… so many resources… the peer advising program is the program I've been in… My advisor, academic advisor my freshman year… I would like, just go talk to him and he was just so nice and… [he] let me talk to him about other stuff, too. (Grace)

The support I've gotten from my teachers, a lot of my professors know what I've gone through, and they are tremendously supportive. They won't just… acknowledge what you said. But they'll even go the extra mile to say, If there's anything you need… They accommodate you, and they are very careful what they say so they don't… say anything that is triggering or anything like that. (Deborah)

Personal Attributes

Aside from action steps and external supports, several participants (5 of 7 [~71%]) reported that personal attributes contributed to their resilience. Participants identified a range of attributes, though the most commonly referenced was being persistent and determined (4 of 7 [~57%]). Becky referenced her determination in her response to the screening questionnaire item regarding resilience: "I do wish to do extremely well and to push myself to succeed, and become involved in the community." Other participants expressed their persistence and determination in the following ways:

I think just my persistence and always trying to do better, I think that's helped me. I don't know, I think I'm a pretty strong person… I've dealt with a lot and I think, I don't know how to explain it… dealing with that, not letting it, not turning myself into a victim, but wanting to do better. (Ellen)

Having a really difficult class, getting a bad mark on an exam, feeling really bad, you feel every bad feeling. You tend to doubt yourself a little bit. But then at the end, after putting in a lot of hard work, going to office

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hours, studying with classmates, you see the results, and your hard work pays off, and that kind of correlates to my mental state in a way too, because I've had to really work to get where I am now. (Deborah)

A couple of participants (2 of 7 [~29%]) identified optimism as an important contributor to resilience, noting that attitude and outlook helped them thrive despite traumatic experiences. One participant described her optimism in terms of seeing herself as capable of survival:

> … [my] natural personality of just really being a positive person rather than having things bring me down, has been incredibly helpful, especially in college. I think it's my personality. I think I was really, really lucky to have a positive outlook and a much more optimistic outlook. Because I think if I had had a different personality, I would probably not be in a good place right now with all that stuff [trauma]. Or at least one of those [events] would have really set me back a lot… So, knowing that I'm a generally positive person is really helpful. I have always believed that I could survive anything that happened to me… having this basic philosophy that no matter what is going to happen to me, I know in the end I will survive it… This mentality that I can survive these things. I *know* I can survive anything else that is thrown my way. That got me through the other two [events] because I knew in the end I would get through it. Even if it sucked now, there would be an end point that I would be OK, and I knew that about myself. (Anna)

College

Five out of seven participants (~71%) discussed how coming to college was a significant contributor to their resilience. The nature of this relationship varied across participants. For some, coming to college meant being able to separate from past traumas and focus energy on something of personal importance. For others, being in college provided opportunities to become immersed in a nurturing and accepting campus

community, as Becky described: "I think that just the community itself and not feeling judged has… allowed me to be stronger and just allowed me to be myself more." Others conveyed their experiences of coming to college in the following ways:

> College is really great about allowing people to kind of see themselves as their own person… I think it's been really great in redirecting energy and also just kind of realizing that it, you know, it *is* OK most of the time… To be able to be removed from that [trauma], I think was a great thing. Because then it kind of, you know, it could be put in its place. It could be like: OK yes, this did happen, but you know, right now I want to go like, hang out with a friend, or I want to like, go shoe shopping… at this particular second in time, it doesn't need to matter. Whereas before, I think I was still like, in the trenches, so I couldn't do that. (Fiona)

> Now if I just want to go see someone, I walk down the hall, maybe walk across campus for five minutes… All the activities that are here give me a place to meet more people, in classes and things, meet more people, and get to know people and sort of distract me from feeling down… Everyone's really accepting of everyone. No one's really judgmental at all. (Charles)

> It [coming to college] was something I was really excited about too, because I knew I would be able to get away… Living on campus, having that community of people who you may not know very well, but you all live in like, this shared space. Slowly you get to know them and it's become very much like a community here living on campus, which is nice. (Ellen)

Finding 3

The majority of participants (6 out of 7 [~86%]) indicated their own healing was both a motivator in choice of major and an outcome of psychology-related studies (see Figure 6 below).

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With my final research question in this study, I sought to examine the relationship between participants' resilience and their choice of major. Throughout the data collection phase of my study, participants described conceptualizations of personal resilience, identified the factors they believed contributed to resilience, and explained motivation for pursuing a psychology-related course of study. In addition, participants discussed perceptions of how their studies impacted them. The latter two groups of responses that I obtained informed the final finding of this study.

ID	Name	Motivation				Effects	
		Personal Success	Relatability	Empathy for Others	Giving Back	Healing	Learning
101	Anna	X	X	X		X	
102	Becky	X	X		X	X	X
104	Charles	X			X		
105	Deborah	X	X	X		X	
107	Ellen	X	X			X	
108	Fiona			X	X	X	X
110	Grace	X	X			X	X
TOTAL		6 (~86%)	5 (~71%)	3 (~43%)	3 (~43%)	6 (~86%)	3 (~43%)

Figure 6, Data Summary Table: Finding 3

Motivation

Personal success.

Nearly all participants (6 of 7 [~86%]) indicated their personal success engaging in counseling or utilizing an expressive therapy modality motivated their choice of

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psychology-related major. Becky spoke specifically about the relevance of art in her healing: "I want to go into psychology and art therapy because art has been something that kind of helped me get through these things [traumas]." This was similar to Anna's experience with dance: "One of the reasons why I'm also in this program…is because I know it works. Because it helped me get through… It's been the only constant in my life."

Other participants referenced how their success in counseling influenced academic decisions. For example, Deborah commented: "I see what therapy can do… it changed my life, and I think that I want to help other people do the same…" Charles shared this sentiment: "I've been seeing a therapist for three years now. And he's just helped me a lot. And I thought… maybe that I could help other people."

Relatability.

The majority of participants (5 of 7 [~71%]) identified their ability to personally relate to emotional difficulties as a motivating factor in choice of major. These participants described feeling drawn to working in the psychology field as a result of their own experiences of emotional difficulty or of witnessing the struggle of someone close to them. A few participants described their perspectives in the following ways:

> I can't change what happened, but I *can* be that person for other people in… a counseling setting, the person that I had always needed, that my mom has always needed. I know what it's like to be on the other side, to be the person that I always had sought out… or didn't know how to reach out to other people in my situation. (Ellen)

> I've gone through this. I need to work with people who have also, like with kids who have gone through this and work with trauma because it's

something I'm so familiar with on a basic level… I know personally how that trauma is worked through and how it can affect someone on a body level. (Anna)

I kind of hope one day maybe I could work with people who are going through eating disorders or depression or something that I could understand, and then maybe I could help them or make a difference… (Grace)

Empathy for others.

Three out of seven participants (~43%) indicated that their empathy for others' suffering motivated them to pursue a psychology-related course of study. Fiona expressed this sentiment: "…The decision was kind of one of wanting to help people, not necessarily that had been through a similar situation, but just because I understand that life is hard…" Deborah spoke about understanding others' coping difficulties: "I know some people are having coping problems, and I sympathize with that, and I have empathy for that."

Giving back.

Aside from personal success, relatability, and empathy for others, three of seven participants (~43%) spoke about being motivated to pursue a psychology-related education by their desire to give back to the helping community. These participants expressed appreciation for the help they received and a desire to pay it forward:

I think it was really important in some ways, to kind of be able to give back. I think hopefully everyone reaches that point in time where you kind of want to give back as opposed to continue to work on your own stuff. (Fiona)

…Realizing all the help that I got from like, my therapists and my psychiatrists… really made me want to be a part of that community, to give back to the people who are struggling like I once was… I feel that I can connect some of my experiences to theirs. And it just has made me want to like, give back a lot to the people who have helped me. (Becky)

Effects

Healing.

The majority of participants (6 of 7 [~86%]) indicated they experienced emotional healing of traumatic experiences as a result of their psychology-related course of study. This healing came in the form of gratitude for a few participants. Grace illustrated this as she spoke of her art-based curriculum: "I love how you can just… put it out there and then… look back on it after and either like, remember how you felt or be grateful that you don't feel that way." Another participant described the gratitude that she experienced as a result of her internship experience:

…In the big picture scheme of things and just life necessities, I really have it pretty good. Put that experience in context of what I could have gone through and it could have been way worse of what I could have been living with… I don't have to deal with that stuff every single day, like some of my kids I was working with were dealing with trauma every single day of their life from the day they were born… (Anna)

Other participants spoke of the way in which their coursework helped them achieve greater personal insights or functional improvements, a view reflected in the following statement:

I think that the reflective work is great and the fact that you kind of can come to terms with it [trauma] and you can recognize like, oh this is bugging me and this is bugging me, instead of like, I'm feeling freaked

out, I don't know what's going on! And then, you can kind of focus more on things… I'm really interested in like, empowering women… That's something that can come to the front instead of…having an anxiety attack and [I] can't handle it, because I can't process. (Fiona)

Finally, one participant spoke about her ability to release from blame the people who had traumatized her, describing this as a result of her psychology-related studies. For her, being able to do this was instrumental in her ability to heal from her traumatic experiences.

Learning.

Three out of seven participants (~43%) reported they experienced important cognitive shifts as a result of engaging in psychology-related curriculum. Participants described how reflective learning opened them to multiple perspectives. This sentiment is illustrated in the following statement:

> Seeing the different ways has helped me to be more open-minded… the approaches that they [instructors] take and thinking like, oh, I hadn't thought about it in that way before, so potentially like, even if I'm just talking to a friend and they're going through like a rough time, being able to have that approach that I learned from my professor. (Becky)

Uncertain.

One participant of seven (~14%) stated that he was unsure what effect his psychology-related course of study was having on him. Charles explained it was too early in his college career to determine this: "I haven't really done anything with my major at all. I'm just doing Gen Ed things."

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented the three key findings that emerged from my study. I organized findings according to my research questions. The data I collected from individual interviews, questionnaire responses, and artifacts unearthed participants' perceptions of their experience of psychological resilience. In keeping with the qualitative research tradition, I incorporated extensive samples of participants' quotes in an effort to accurately represent their individual experiences of resilience.

The primary finding of my study is that all seven (100%) participants perceived their ability to integrate traumatic experiences into the rest of their lives as a hallmark of personal resilience. This finding emerged from participants' descriptions of resilience, through which they indicated their ability to acknowledge and accept traumatic experiences, but that these experiences did not consume their lives. Participants spoke of being able to move on with their lives as a result of their ability to integrate traumas. Other perceptions of personal resilience emerged in participants' discussions including: (a) agency (power in one's life); (b) optimism; (c) empowerment; (d) seeing traumas as learning and/or growth experiences; and (e) thankfulness. However, the only characteristic referenced by all seven participants was their ability to integrate trauma.

In addition to describing their resilience, participants identified internally and externally related shifts they had experienced. These shifts concerned how they perceived and acted towards themselves (internally related) and how they perceived and acted toward others specifically and the world generally (externally related). Participants most often indicated experiences of internally related shifts, which included feeling in control, being healthier, and having greater insight. A few participants spoke about experiencing

externally related shifts of being more optimistic and releasing from blame those who had hurt them.

The second finding of this study was that all seven (100%) participants identified as contributors to their resilience one or more action steps they had taken. For several participants, action steps were in the form of creative expressions such as writing or producing art. Others spoke about taking steps to socialize more, particularly when distressed. A few participants identified relaxation/self-soothing techniques such as exercising and practicing mindfulness. While action steps were the most commonly referenced contributor to resilience, participants also identified the following influential factors: (a) external support, such as that of friends, family, and faculty; (b) personal attributes, such as positive outlook and faith in ability to survive; and (c) going to college, a setting both removed from past traumatic events and replete with opportunities to pursue a variety interests.

The final finding was that six of seven participants (~86%) indicated their own healing from past traumas was both a motivator in choice of major and an outcome of their psychology-related studies. Several participants also mentioned feeling drawn to the psychology field by experiences of their own suffering or of someone close to them. A few participants stated their desire to enter the field was motivated by general feelings of empathy, while still a few talked about their desire to give back to the helping community as a result of being helped in the past.

When participants spoke of their perceptions of how their psychology-related studies had impacted them, they primarily (~86%) indicated that their studies were

instrumental in their own healing. For some participants, new knowledge lent to their ability to release from blame individuals who had previously hurt them. Others talked about experiencing personal insights or overall functional improvements as a result of their studies. A few participants mentioned experiencing cognitive shifts as a result of their studies, describing how the psychology-related curriculum encouraged them to challenge their own assumptions and open up to multiple perspectives.

The purpose of presenting my research findings in this chapter was to prepare the reader for the remaining chapters of the dissertation. In the final two chapters, I will interpret the study findings, draw conclusions from them, and present recommendations based on them.

CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS

*

"At this point, the survivor faces the tasks of rebuilding her life in the present and

pursuing her aspirations for the future. She has mourned the old self which the trauma

destroyed; now she must develop a new self. Her relationships have been tested and

forever changed by the trauma; now she must develop new relationships. The old beliefs

that gave meaning to her life have been challenged; now she must find anew a sustaining

faith." - Judith Herman

*

Introduction

This study primarily employed qualitative interviewing methodology within the

phenomenological tradition to explore the phenomenon of college student resilience, as

well as supportive data from questionnaires and artifacts. Participants of this study

included a group of seven emerging adult students in psychology-related majors who

reported a history of at least one traumatic event prior to their arrival at college and who

saw themselves as thriving in academia. Data were initially coded, analyzed, and

organized by research question. Next, I used the conceptual framework described in

Chapter 2 to code, analyze, and organize data by category and subcategory.

The analytic categories of this study are distinctly aligned with each of the

research questions. To augment the narrative discussion, a diagram of the study's research

questions, analytic categories, themes, and findings is included as Appendix H. I used

these same categories to code data and present the study findings in Chapter 4. In the data

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analysis phase of this study, I looked both for patterns and relationships within these analytic categories, and for themes and connections existing among them. This constituted the study's first level of analysis. A second level of analysis included my weaving in of outside theory and research in order to compare my study's findings to those found in the literature.

In the previous chapter, I organized the abundance of data into categories and presented the study findings in narrative form. In this chapter, I provide interpretive insights into these findings. The purpose of the data analysis of Chapter 4 was to reduce and split raw data, identify significant elements, and develop a framework for communicating the essence of what the data revealed. In contrast, the purpose of this chapter is to provide a holistic understanding of the study by deconstructing the findings. Thus, the analysis presented here supports a layered data synthesis. In keeping with the tradition of qualitative phenomenology, I provide a description of the essence of participants' experiences as related to each finding. These descriptions appear at the end of each analytic category discussion.

This chapter presents a comprehensive discussion that integrates study findings with literature, outside research, and practice. In this discussion, I take into consideration the literature on trauma, resilience, emerging adulthood, and adult learning. I conclude the chapter with a re-examination of the assumptions presented in Chapter 1 and a closing summary.

Analytic Category Development

Themes and patterns began to emerge as I examined my data summary tables to analyze the concentration of responses within and across individuals. These themes and patterns became the basis of the study's findings (presented in the previous chapter), which informed my development of analytic categories (a completed analytic category development tool is included as Appendix I). I then looked both within and across cases to formulate my interpretation of findings, which is presented in detail throughout this chapter (a completed interpretation outline tool is included as Appendix J).

The primary finding in this study revealed that participants conceptualized their resilience by their ability to integrate traumatic experiences into the rest of their lives. I named Analytic Category 1 "Conceptualizing emerging adult students' resilience," as it speaks to this primary finding.

The study's second finding showed that participants attributed their resilience to a variety of factors, of which the most commonly indicated was action steps they had taken. Speaking to this second finding, I labeled Analytic Category 2 "Fostering post-traumatic resilience."

The final finding of this study revealed a connection between participants' choice of psychology-related major and their resilience. Resilient healing following traumatic experiences served as a motivator for pursuit of a psychology-related course of study, and it was also perceived as an outcome of engaging in this curriculum. I named Analytic Category 3 "Acknowledging the connection between students' choice to pursue a psychology-related major and resilience," as it speaks to this last finding.

Analytic Category 1: Conceptualizing Emerging Adult Students' Resilience

In order to appreciate resilience, it is necessary to understand the nature of traumatic experiences that makes resilient thriving an inspiring phenomenon. In an effort to illustrate the nature of resilient responses to trauma, I embed throughout the following discussion examples of negative effects which may result from traumatic experiences.

Integrating Trauma

My first research question aimed to determine perceptions of resilience. Participants unanimously characterized their resilience by their ability to successfully integrate traumatic experiences into the rest of their lives. The process of integrating trauma involves acknowledging and accepting the reality of trauma while finding value living in the present. The trauma is, in effect, contextualized within the larger backdrop of life. This perspective was reflected in Fiona's statement: "There is a certain place for these things… it doesn't have to be that consuming all the time."

The ability to integrate trauma is resilient in that it is adaptive, allowing the individual to successfully move on from the trauma instead of developing a negative reaction. Trauma researcher Priscilla Dass-Brailsford explains, "A primary characteristic of a traumatic experience is that it challenges an individual's capacity to create and integrate a narrative of that experience" (2007, p. 45). In this context, it made sense that participants would include ability to integrate trauma in their descriptions of personal resilience.

The idea that trauma recovery occurs through its integration is well-supported in the literature (Gregory & Embrey, 2009; Herman, 1998; Masten & Obradovic, 2006; McAdams, 1993; Sutton, Robbins, Senior, & Gordon, 2006; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Trauma researcher Judith Herman describes integration as an important aspect of the "work" of recovery: "This work of reconstruction actually transforms the traumatic memory, so that it can be integrated into the survivor's life story" (1998, p. S147).

Agency and Control

Reclaiming control.

The ability to integrate traumatic experiences is not the only characteristic of resilience, however. Participants also described their resilience in terms of agency. This was reflected in participants' efforts to exert control over their surroundings, and in their perceived ability to do so. The types of experiences which result in psychological trauma are ones that invoke a loss of control. Herman asserts, "Psychological trauma is an affliction of the powerless. At the moment of trauma, the victim is rendered helpless by overwhelming force… Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning" (1992, p. 33). It is understandable then, that another popular way participants described resilience was in their sense of agency. Indeed, the concept of agency is consistently linked to resilience throughout the literature (Garmezy, 1994; Hage, 2006; Jenmorri, 2006; Masten et al., 2006).

In addition to describing personal characteristics of resilience, all of the participants discussed shifts in perception and behavior experienced as a result of their resilience. Given the emphasis on agency in the resilience literature and the fact that five of seven participants included it as a resilience descriptor, it was reasonable to believe the majority of participants would describe feeling more control in their lives.

Interestingly, *all* of the participants identified experiencing a marked shift in sense of control over their lives. Instead of feeling controlled by outside forces and being passive participants in life, they described feeling able to take charge of both the day to day aspects of their lives and overall life course. In light of this result, it is unclear why participants did not unanimously identify agency as a characteristic of resilience. A possible explanation is that the ability to integrate traumatic experiences, indicated by all participants, may actually be understood as a function of agency.

Beyond the helplessness which can result from traumatic experiences, individuals may also experience disempowerment (Decker, 1993; Herman, 1992). In the midst of a traumatic experience, someone or something else is in control, and the individual is relegated to a disempowered state in which he/she cannot stop what is happening (Herman, 1992). Herman explains, "Recovery therefore is based upon empowerment of the survivor…" (1998, p. S145). It is not uncommon for resilient individuals to experience increased personal strength in response to trauma (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Further, personal power is included as an internal asset of emerging adult resilience on the CAMPUS psychometric (Pashak & Scales, 2012). Thus, it was not surprising the majority of study participants identified their ability to reclaim power and control in their lives as a characteristic of resilience. One participant in particular spoke of feeling empowered in her resilience:

> I feel like having that horrible experience gave me a voice in some way…
> because I was kind of a doormat, not *kind of* a doormat, I *was* a doormat,
> and I just went with everyone else… even if I didn't like what was going
> on. I'm so much stronger after all that… I was afraid before, like to speak

up, even just over stupid little things. But now I feel empowered… I use my trauma history as fuel to achieve my goals. (Deborah)

Competence.

A few participants also described another aspect feeling in control, the theme of feeling competent. Participants described this as a shift from feeling helpless and powerless to seeing themselves as competent and skillful. They talked about being previously reliant on others and unable to effectively manage stressors, and now being independent of others and utilizing effective coping skills. Fiona's comment captured this shift in perceived competence: "I am able to handle things, whereas before I was just kind of like, Argh just make it stop! I didn't really have any, you know, feeling that I could kind of control anything."

The idea that competence is a function of resilience is well-documented in the literature. It is evident in Garmezy's work with children in Project Competence, and also underlies the study of adult resilience and well-being (Garmezy & Devine, 1984; Masten, Burt, & Coatsworth, 2006; Masten & Obradovic, 2006). More recently, competence has been included as an internal asset of emerging adult resilience (Pashak & Scales, 2012). Researchers also believe that "competence begets competence" (Masten & Wright, 2010, p. 217), resulting in a developmental cascade, or snowball effect, of growth in competence throughout the lifespan (Masten et al., 2005). Since competence has been linked to resilience throughout the lifespan, it was reasonable to assume it would be an important aspect of resilience for this study's sample of emerging adult students.

It is interesting to consider whether participants' increased sense of competence may be better explained as a function of transitioning from emerging to full adulthood, than in relation to resilience. Feeling incompetent is not unusual for emerging adults since, as Arnett (2004) suggests, they are frequently experiencing failures or frustrations in identity explorations in love and work. Arnett (2004) asserts full adulthood, in contrast, is characterized by competence, noting the following hallmarks of adulthood: responsibility for oneself and one's choices; ability to make independent decisions; and achieving financial independence. Given that participants who described a shift in competence did not indicate the presence of all three hallmarks of adulthood, it is reasonable to attribute their improved competence to resilience as opposed to a possible transition to adulthood.

Optimism and Thankfulness

As Herman (1992) explains, a traumatic event overwhelms an individual's coping capacity because it is beyond the range of normally occurring events. In effect, the traumatic experience shatters one's confidence in the safety and predictability of life. Traumatic events can leave people feeling untrusting, hopeless, and in despair (Decker, 1993; Garbarino & Bedard, 1996; Herman, 1992; Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995).

It came as little surprise then, that the majority of study participants identified optimism as a characteristic of their resilience. In particular, Anna noted the persistence of her optimism despite the trauma she experienced: "I think I'm still, even after everything I've been through, a fairly positive and optimistic person… I tend not to get caught up in negative stuff or in a negative mindset." This finding is consistent with other

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researchers' assertions that optimism serves as a resilient protective factor in the experience of trauma (O'Connell Higgins, 1994; Pashak & Scales, 2012; Segovia, Moore, Linnvile, Hoyt, & Hain, 2012).

Out of five participants who identified optimism as a characteristic of their resilience, three described it as an externally related shift. These three participants described having greater trust in others and the world at large, despite feeling hurt and betrayed in their traumatic experiences. In addition, participants illustrated shifts from pessimism to optimism when they spoke of seeing opportunities in challenges instead of succumbing to a feeling of negativity and hopelessness.

Arnett (2000) asserts that emerging adulthood is characterized in part by a sense of hope and belief in life's possibilities. Thus, it is possible participants' optimism was not only an indicator of resilience, but also a developmental characteristic. Out of the five participants who spoke of their optimism, three described it as a distinct shift from previous pessimism and negativity. Given the available information, it is not clear whether participants' optimism was a developmental feature which contributed to resilience, or whether optimism stood alone as a feature of resilience.

Instead of allowing themselves to succumb to feelings of hopelessness and despair, some study participants indicated being thankful for what good they *did* receive in life. These individuals were not blinded by their traumas, but were able to look outside of the traumatic experiences in order to acknowledge and appreciate the good existing beyond. This is consistent with O'Connell Higgins's (1994) description of resilient adults

as being thankful for what they received despite the painful reality of traumatic experiences.

In addition, researcher Laura Vernon links gratitude to successful recovery from trauma *and* to general resistance to psychological distress (2012). Vernon explains individuals who exhibit gratitude focus less on negative aspects of trauma and more on perceived benefits. This might suggest that optimistic individuals are more apt to respond to traumatic events with gratitude. However, this relationship was not reflected in my study's sample, as only two out of the five participants who spoke of their resilience in terms of optimism also talked about being thankful.

Post-Traumatic Growth and Transformative Learning

Learning/growth experiences.

While traumatic experiences may indeed result in psychological distress, it is also true that many people actually experience positive change as a result of their traumatic experiences (O'Connell Higgins, 1994; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995, 2004). Researchers Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun (2004) explain that resilient individuals are able to achieve these positive changes by seeing their traumatic experiences as manageable, understandable, and meaningful. Further, some theorists assert that hope emerges from suffering *and* simultaneously enables the individual to find meaning in a tremendously painful situation (Frankl, 1959; Kierkegaard, 1849/1980; Yalom, 1980).

In perceiving traumatic experiences in this way, individuals make meaning of the trauma as an experience from which they extract learning and/or personal growth (Linley & Joseph, 2003). The findings of my study provide evidence to support the literature, as

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the majority of study participants noted an ability to perceive their trauma as learning

and/or growth experiences. This view is reflected in the following comments by

participants:

> It's helped me learn about myself and just to get away from people who
> have that negative energy… I wouldn't wish it upon anyone else, but in a
> way it was just a learning experience for me. (Becky)

> I've learned to better cope with things, experiences… I'm happy. And I
> think that really without this all happening, I don't think that, I think I
> could have just been who I used to be, because I don't think I ever would
> have changed. I would have just kept on being depressed and just rolled
> along. (Charles)

Since "traumatic experiences tear at the individual's pre-existing systems of

meaning-making" (Sutton et al., 2006, p. 78), it is interesting to consider the individual's

construction of a new and integrating meaning of trauma as a function of transformative

learning. Mezirow and Marsick's discussion of transformative learning (1978) can be

applied here as a way to conceptualize study participants' perceptions of their traumas as

learning and/or growth experiences. The traumatic event can be seen as a disorienting

dilemma, causing a disconnect between existing meaning structures and reality. In

addition, the participant's ability to make meaning of the trauma in this way may be

understood as his/her construction of new and integrating meaning schemes.

Healthier perceptions and behavior.

In addition to characterizing their resilience in terms of ability to see traumas as

learning and/or growth experiences, the majority of participants noted a shift to being

healthier. This included improvements in both self-perception and self-care; as positive

shifts occurred in participants' self-perception, improvements in self-care followed. The following statement clearly illustrates this change:

> Who I was then? I see myself, I obviously saw myself as a depressed little loser who deserved everything that happened to him… Now I guess I'll be a *something* with a house and a family…as opposed to a *nothing* with a *nothing*, or a *nothing*… I see myself as a better person because of everything, because I know that there's a better life than sitting in my room depressed and killing myself. But how I see myself now is, I see myself now as a good person, a better person. (Charles)

In keeping with Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning framework, participants' shifts to being healthier following traumatic experiences may be understood as evidence of transformation. In Mezirow's (2000) explanation of the process toward transformation, he notes that individuals experience cognitive shifts following a disorienting dilemma which precede behavioral shifts.

As study participants wrestled with feelings of adequacy and worth following their traumatic experiences, the majority achieved positive shifts in their self-perception followed by behavioral shifts in self-care practices. One participant did not indicate being healthier, but did note improved insight in relation to resilience. Though greater insight and self-awareness could represent a larger cognitive shift, such as the shift in self-perception noted above, this participant did not make such an indication, nor did she identify any related shifts in her behavior. Merriam (2005) explains that not all disorienting dilemmas result in transformation, which could explain why not all participants noted shifts in both self-perception and behavior.

A couple of participants indicated being able to release from blame people whose actions had hurt them. Instead of blaming others and their choices for the difficult experiences which ensued, these participants had come to view the situations more forgivingly. Here again, shifts in participants' perception and behavior may be understood as evidence of their transformation.

A Conceptualization of Emerging Adult Students' Resilience

My first research question in this study aimed to address the gap in knowledge regarding emerging adult resilience by exploring participants' perceptions of personal resilience. Participants characterized their resilience in a variety of ways, but all appeared to logically relate to their general agency and ability to integrate traumatic experiences into the rest of their lives. In addition, all participants talked about experiencing positive shifts in their sense of control within their lives. The ability to regain control following traumatic events was discussed by participants in a variety of ways: integrating trauma, being empowered, and being competent. In addition to reclaiming power, participants' resilience reflected optimism, thankfulness, and post-traumatic growth.

All individual characteristics and inner dynamics participants identified as indicators of resilience are consistent with those found in the extant literature (Benson, 1997; Brooks & Goldstein, 2001; Gardner et al., 2008; O'Connell Higgins, 1994; Pashak & Scales, 2012; Werner & Smith, 1992). So far, I have discussed participants' perceptions of their resilience and contextualized these accounts within the broader areas of literature. Now, I will discuss participants' perceptions of the contributors to their resilience. Again, these accounts will be discussed in relation to the relevant literature.

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Analytic Category 2: Fostering Post-Traumatic Resilience

Action Steps

My second research question aimed to capture the factors that participants perceived as contributors to their resilience. Participants indicated a variety of factors contributed to their resilience: action steps, external supports, personal attributes, and going to college. They unanimously indicated action steps they had taken lent to their resilience.

This finding was somewhat expected, given the popularity of agency as a characteristic used by participants to describe their resilience. This finding was also not surprising since the idea that taking action steps contributes to healing from trauma is supported by the literature. Herman explains, "Trauma robs the victim of a sense of power and control over her own life; therefore, the guiding principle of recovery is to restore power and control to the survivor" (1998, p. S145). Taking deliberate steps to restore control in one's life is easily understood as a contributor to resilience.

Participants described a variety of action steps which contributed to their resilience, though the most commonly indicated were engaging in creative expression and socializing. In utilizing creative modalities, participants experienced cognitive shifts, catharsis, and a sense of being understood. The importance of cognitive reprocessing, especially, among those who have experienced trauma is well-documented in the literature, as it promotes healthier and more accurate responses to trauma (Cohen & Mannarino, 2008; Sutton et al., 2006; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995, 2004).

Both creative expression and socializing served as a helpful distraction from trauma for participants, an idea also supported by the literature: "Engaging in pleasurable activities provided a welcome distraction from distressing memories of past trauma, and an outlet for managing strong affective states" (Sutton et al., 2006, p. 84). In addition to serving as a distraction, participants noted that the deliberate act of socializing also reflected their initiative to branch out, as can be seen in Grace's comment: "I have joined groups and am currently in a theater production and have been meeting new friends, and trying new things." Finally, participants' deliberate socialization also served efforts to integrate and move beyond traumatic experiences, as they created new relationships that were separate and far removed from past traumas.

Other than creative expression and socializing, a few participants talked about utilizing relaxation and self-soothing techniques to bolster their resilience. The notion that such methods are helpful to healing in general was consistent with the literature: "Increasing pleasurable activities is well known to be an effective intervention… helping young people manage negative ruminations and increase positive feelings from engaging in activities they find enjoyable" (Sutton et al., 2006, p. 84). One participant in particular indicated that the act of helping others was enjoyable and relaxing. It is possible that helping others serves to help oneself by promoting self-esteem and positive feelings about oneself, as is suggested in the literature (Sutton et al., 2006).

External Supports

In addition to taking deliberate action steps, all but one participant indicated that external supports contributed to their resilience. Herman states the "core experiences of

psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others" (1998, p. S145). Thus, it stands to reason that reestablishing human connection is especially important to healing. Herman continues:

> Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation. In renewed connections with other people, the survivor recreates the psychological faculties that were damaged or deformed by the traumatic experience. These include the basic capacities for trust, autonomy, initiative, competence, identity, and intimacy. (p. S145)

Since the developmental tasks of emerging adulthood are forming identity and achieving intimacy, emerging adults very frequently engage in social and intimate explorations (Arnett, 2000). In doing so, it is possible that emerging adults have greater opportunities than others to receive external support that nurtures their resilience. Indeed, study participants frequently spoke of their increased socialization since coming to college. While it is possible that this increase is related to the range of opportunities available on campus, it is also possible participants sought out these opportunities as explorations in socialization and intimacy.

Participants received support from a variety of sources including family, friends, faculty/staff, therapists, and community members. They perceived these external supports as contributors to their resilience for several reasons. In particular, participants noted feeling unconditionally accepted, supported and understood by others, and less alone as a result of the external support they received. Perceived social support is consistently referenced in the literature as one of the most significant factors contributing to trauma

recovery (Hage, 2006; O'Connell Higgins, 1994; Pashak & Scales, 2012; Pepin &

Banyard, 2006; Saakvitne, 2000; Sutton et al., 2006; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Thus, it

was not surprising that participants so highly valued the external support they received. In

addition, it made sense that participants noted unconditional acceptance as an important

aspect of external support, given Mancini and Bonanno's (2006) assertion that those who

have experienced trauma need to be allowed space and opportunity to acknowledge even

the shadow side of their existence (Jung, 1959).

Some participants talked about feeling especially supported by their academic

peers who were also engaged in psychology-related studies. One participant in particular

noted:

> There's a really great support system at Lesley and I think the psych
> students… Even though they haven't experienced exactly what I've gone
> through…they understand… That was really helpful… having friends who
> would just listen and were supportive and understood to an extent. (Ellen)

Support from people who share a similar experience is also indicated as a contributor to

healing in the literature:

> Being with people and sharing experiences… allowed participants to compare
> their own situations with others'… Trauma survivors are more likely to
> incorporate new perspectives from people who have 'been there,' and this can
> lead to more adaptive schema integration. (Sutton et al., 2006, p. 83)

Aside from the support received from peers, a few participants discussed the

importance of receiving professional support from therapists and campus faculty/staff.

Participants indicated that they felt supported, acknowledged, and less alone as a result of

receiving this support. However, the most powerful external supports noted by participants were those received informally through peers and family. This came as a surprise, since as a therapist, I initially anticipated that participants would identify the professional support they received as a significant contributor to their resilience.

It is interesting to note that professional support is perceived as largely ineffective compared to non-professional support in other studies found in the literature, and that peer-support for traumatized individuals has increased in popularity in recent years (Davidson, 2002; Hage, 2006; Jain, McLean, & Rosen, 2012; Morris, Campbell, Dwyer, Dunn, & Chambers, 2011). This perspective is echoed clearly in Anna's comment: "I mean, counseling is great and it's helpful and having that is useful. But I think at the end of the day if you don't have social support, it's just not going to happen. That's my take home message."

Personal Attributes

Other than action steps and external supports, the majority of participants identified specific personal attributes which they perceived as contributing to their resilience. The most commonly referenced attribute was being persistent and determined. Participants talked about being determined to succeed, acting accordingly, and pushing themselves to transcend their traumatic experiences.

A different personal attribute, referenced by two participants as a contributor to their resilience, was optimism. The important role of optimism in a resilient response to trauma is highlighted in Becky's statement: "Have a better attitude about it… you might be able to deal with things better if you have that kind of attitude."

These results were consistent with those found in the broader literature. Those discussions of resilience reveal a multitude of traits and characteristics linked to positive adaptation to trauma. In general, a strong sense of self (including self-esteem and self-confidence) is believed to contribute to a resilient orientation (Holahan & Moos, 1991; Pashak & Scales, 2012; Schiaffino & Revenson, 1992; Skodol, 2010). In their study of individual protective factors in the Kauai Longitudinal Study, Werner and Smith (1992) noted motivation to achieve as an important contributor to resilience. More recently, achievement motivation has been identified as an internal asset of emerging adult resilience (Pashak & Scales, 2012). In addition, internal locus of control, or the belief that one can control events and circumstances that affect him/her, is a function of optimism, and both are linked to resilience in the literature (Holahan & Moos, 1991; Schiaffino & Revenson, 1992; Seligman, 2002).

Lastly, maturity and insight, linked to engagement in self-discovery, are also identified as contributors to resilience within the literature (Pashak & Scales, 2012; Weinstein & Ryan, 2011). It is possible that emerging adults possess an added protective factor in their tendency toward self-discovery. As Arnett (2000) suggests, emerging adulthood is a time of identity exploration and self-focus. Emerging adults may respond more positively to traumatic experiences than others, given that they are engaged in a relatively persistent quest of self-discovery. However, such a relationship was not reflected in this study's sample. Though one participant noted that she was more mature and insightful as a result of her traumatic experiences, no participants identified these personal attributes as contributors to their resilience. It is possible that participants were

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unable to perceive the maturity and insight I observed in my interactions with them. It is also possible that they did not perceive these attributes as contributing to their resilience.

College

Researchers suggest that college can serve as a turning-point opportunity for individuals to change their life course (Arnett & Tanner, 2006; Masten et al., 2006). The major life transitions of emerging adulthood, which for some includes the transition to college, provide opportunities to alter one's developmental trajectory (Schulenberg & Zarrett, 2006).

Thus, it was expected that participants would identify going to college as a contributor to their resilience. Indeed, going to college was a noteworthy contributor to resilience for the majority of study participants. For some, it meant intentionally separating from their past traumas, which may be understood as a step towards integration of traumatic experiences. In addition, going to college afforded participants the opportunity to invest their energy in self-discovery and studies that were personally chosen. This view is reflected in one participant's comment in particular:

> Now this is like, *my* choice. So it feels like I'm doing this for *me*, not because somebody told me to or somebody is like, making me. And I get to make choices and do what makes *me* happy and follow what *I* want to do. (Grace)

Again, as emerging adulthood is a stage characterized in part by identity explorations and self-focus (Arnett, 2000), it was not surprising that participants spoke of coming to college in this way. In addition, participants who noted that coming to college was important for this reason also described their resilience in terms of personal agency.

Thus, it appears likely that coming to college was both an indicator of agency as well as a contributor to resilience for these participants.

For other participants, coming to college contributed to their resilience because it provided them with a supportive and nurturing community. Participants' intentional socializing as an action step (discussed earlier) coincided with their perceptions of college as a contributor to resilience. Those who utilized intentional socialization to bolster their resilience also indicated that going to college was important because it provided opportunities to engage with others who they perceived as supportive and accepting. As noted earlier, perceived social support is consistently referenced in the literature as a contributing factor to resilience, so participants' emphasis on the socializing opportunities in college was expected. My findings were consistent with those found in the literature, as researchers have specifically identified socialization opportunities as contributors to resilience (Arnett & Tanner, 2006; Bohnert et al., 2007; Cronce & Corbin, 2010). Further, a supportive and caring school environment has recently been indicated as an external asset of emerging adult resilience (Pashak & Scales, 2012).

Fostering Emerging Adult Students' Resilience

Initially, the traumatic events which participants experienced left them feeling powerless, isolated, and unable to consistently or adequately take care of themselves. These effects were consistent with those found in the trauma literature, as described above. Despite these initial emotional reactions, all participants were able to describe

themselves as resilient at the time of interview. My second research question aimed to capture the factors that participants perceived as contributing to their resilience.

Several categories of contributing factors emerged throughout this study: action steps, external supports, personal attributes, and coming to college. These factors bolstered participants' resilience by providing for catharsis, integration of trauma, self-soothing, social acceptance, interpersonal connection, faith, and a sense of agency. All of these contributors were consistent with those indicated in the resilience literature as well as with participants' descriptions of their resilience (see Analytic Category 1 discussion). In addition, all participants indicated their resilience developed over time, even those who spoke of their resilience in terms of personality traits such as optimism and thankfulness. This provides supportive evidence to the claim found in the literature that resilience is malleable and able to be grown (Luthar et al., 2000).

So far in this chapter, I have discussed participants' perceptions of their resilience and the factors which they believe contributed to it. In addition, I have contextualized participants' accounts within the relevant bodies of literature. I will now discuss participants' perceptions of the relationship between their psychology-related major and resilience, again presenting these accounts within the context of existing literature.

Analytic Category 3: Acknowledging the Connection Between Students' Choice to Pursue a Psychology-Related Major and Resilience

My final research question aimed to explore to what extent participants' choice of psychology-related major related to their resilience. For the majority of participants,

personal resilience in response to trauma was both a motivator in choice of major and an identified outcome of their psychology-related studies.

Motivation

Personal success.

Throughout the data collection phase, participants discussed their motivation for pursuing a psychology-related course of study. All but one identified their experience of post-traumatic resilience as a motivator. The majority of participants talked about feeling compelled to share the wisdom of psychology and therapeutic approaches with others due to a "I know it works" mentality. It appeared, for these participants, pursuing a program of study that would enable them to help others in ways they knew to be effective was an important action step, and a reflection of their personal agency. No longer feeling disempowered as a result of their traumatic experiences, participants felt able to take this step as a result of their resilience.

An interesting relationship exists in the literature between receiving help following a traumatic experience and the survivor's tendency toward helping others. Researchers suggest the presence of helpful and supportive others communicates prosocial values and is likely to promote the survivor's altruism (Staub & Vollhardt, 2008). In light of this demonstrated relationship, it came as little surprise that the majority of participants would feel compelled to pursue a psychology-related course of study following their own experiences of receiving help in response to trauma.

The findings of this study revealed that all participants characterized their resilience, at least in part, by their ability to integrate traumatic experiences into the rest

of their lives. A fundamental aspect of this integration was the ability to move on to a life not defined or inhibited by the traumatic experience. As such, participants actively rebuilt new and positive self-images that were not impinged upon by the weight of past trauma. Researchers not only suggest this rebuilding step is important to trauma recovery, but that an individual's subsequent desire to help others may be a function of rebuilding (Gregory & Embrey, 2009; Herman, 1992). Further, a general attitude of caring about the welfare of others also reflects an internal asset of resilience in emerging adults specifically (Pashak & Scales, 2012). Thus, it is possible that rebuilding a new and positive self-image unencumbered by past trauma is both resilient in nature and evidence of transformation following a disorienting dilemma.

A final connection between participants' resilience, choice of major, and the literature lies in the theory of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). According to Arnett (2000), one of the characteristics of this developmental stage is the marked sense of hope and belief in life's possibilities. It is possible participants felt drawn to psychology-related majors as a result of their own success, and that this attraction was underscored by their sense of hopefulness for the welfare of others in suffering.

Relatability.

Out of the six participants who identified resilience as a motivating factor in their choice of major, five also noted this choice was motivated by their personal connection to the psychology field. Though participants did talk about their own experiences of needing help, some also mentioned feeling drawn to the field because of the struggles of a close family member. This perspective is illustrated by the following statement:

… I'm going to school for expressive arts therapy… I feel like I'm really understanding when other people are having a hard time because of my mom and me, also like, in my experiences. (Grace)

It appears that for the majority of participants, experience with suffering and/or receiving help gave way to their intellectual grasp of psychology-related concepts. Deborah conveyed this intellectual draw to the field in her comment: "I think there's a lot of things that you can't teach somebody who is a counseling major. Academically I feel very confident in psychology, because I've seen a lot of the system already." This intellectual draw is consistent with a basic tenet of adult learning theory, the assertion that adult learners intellectually connect to material that is personally relevant and of immediate value (Knowles, 1970).

It is also possible participants' attraction to the psychology-related field as a result of connection to suffering reflects their pursuit of personally constructed world views, which Arnett (2000) suggests is a central task of emerging adulthood. As this developmental period is largely characterized by identity explorations, the choice of major is especially important and reflects the student's mission to create a life that is personally meaningful (Arnett, 2000). In pursuing a major of personal relevance, it is likely that participants sought a career based on what they felt was important, helping others in need.

Empathy for others.

A motivating factor discussed by only three participants was their empathy for others. For these few participants, their personal suffering or that of a close family member resulted in their increased compassion for others in general. While it is possible

this empathy for others is linked to participants' personal relatability to the psychology

field discussed above, it is difficult to determine such a link. Of the three participants who

spoke of their empathy for others as a motivator in their choice of major, two also

referenced their personal relatability to the field. This perspective is clearly illustrated in

one participant's statement:

> Definitely understanding what was my sister's problems was a big one.
> Just understanding… just understanding that this was her diagnosis. Just
> having that clarity of like OK, these are the symptoms that are happening
> with this diagnosis and that you just needed help dealing with those
> symptoms… (Anna)

The idea that surviving traumatic events results in increased empathy for others is

supported by the literature. Researchers suggest that surviving trauma may lead an

individual to believe that he/she can relate and empathize with others in great distress in

ways that other people may not be able to do (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995; Sutton et al.,

2006). This idea is also found elsewhere in the literature discussed earlier, which suggests

non-professional support may be more effective than professional support for traumatized

individuals (Davidson, 2002; Hage, 2006; Jain et al., 2012; Morris et al., 2011).

It has been demonstrated in the literature that both children and adults experience

empathy in response to others' distress (Batson et al., 1991; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1990;

Roth-Hanania, Davidov, & Zahn-Waxler, 2011). However, recent research adds that older

children who experience trauma exhibit increased altruism and are thus inclined to

engage in more prosocial behaviors, such as helping others in need (Li, Li, Decety, &

Lee, 2013). It is important to note that this empathic response and increased altruism is

not observed in younger children, since they are not able to perceive a situation from another's point of view due to their cognitive development (Li et al., 2013).

Given that an empathic and altruistic response hinges on the individual's ability to take another's perspective into account, it was reasonable to expect that emerging adults would respond to trauma with empathy and increased altruism. Thus, it was not surprising that some participants would identify their empathy for others as a motivating factor in their choice of major. It is unclear why this was not a more frequently indicated motivator, though it is possible that some participants' empathy did not extend to altruism in this particular way.

Giving back.

A final motivating factor, the desire to give back or pay forward the help received, was indicated by a few participants. These participants spoke about being grateful for the help they received and wanting to give back by helping others in distress. Becky even noted that she pursued an internship at the adoption agency involved in her case as an expression of gratitude: "I did an internship at the agency because I just wanted to express to them like, my gratitude towards them and all they had done for me."

For these few participants, pursuing a psychology-related major was a socially conscious act, reflecting a degree of responsibility in alleviating others' suffering. Researchers suggest that individuals who respond to trauma with resilience are more likely than others to feel responsible for helping others in distress (Staub & Vollhardt, 2008). Herman (1998) notes that social action requires resilience and simultaneously enhances the individual's interpersonal connections. This is a particularly important

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outcome, given that trauma is characterized by disconnection and disempowerment (Herman, 1998). Thus, social action is particularly meaningful for those who have survived traumatic experiences:

> Social action… offers her an alliance with others based on cooperation and shared purpose. Participation in organized, demanding social efforts calls upon the survivor's most mature and adaptive coping strategies of patience, anticipation, altruism, and humor. It brings out the best in her; in return, the survivor gains the sense of connection with the best in other people. (Herman, 1998, p. S149)

Both Herman (1998) and O'Connell Higgins (1994) note the importance of social action in adult resilience. They explain that by engaging in social action, resilient adults do not strive to undo the harm done to them, but work to help others in traumatic situations similar to their own and work to prevent others from being traumatized in the future. Social action, which can take many forms including but not limited to activism and intellectual pursuits, serves as a way to make meaning of trauma and thus contributes to adults' post-traumatic growth (Herman, 1998; O'Connell Higgins, 1994; Williams, Davey, & Klock-Powell, 2003).

Researchers looking specifically at resilient females aged 18 to 25 note the dual presence of concern for the welfare of others and commitment to giving back (Williams, Lindsey, Kurtz, & Jarvis, 2001). Further, commitment to social justice has recently been identified as an internal asset of resilience in emerging adults (Pashak & Scales, 2012). Not only is social action relevant to resilient adults, but it appears it is also important to resilient emerging adults, as is seen in the literature and my study's findings. However,

this relationship should not be overestimated, as only a few study participants identified

the desire to give back as a motivating factor in their choice of major.

Effects

Healing.

The majority of participants indicated they experienced emotional healing from

their trauma as a result of engaging in psychology-related studies. For some, healing was

experienced in the newfound ability to experience gratitude in life despite the painful

reality of past traumas. For others, healing was experienced as functional improvements

or shifts in perspective. One participant in particular spoke of her ability to release from

blame those who hurt her:

> I think it [psychology curriculum] really helped me understand people's
> motivations for doing what they do. I don't think I had that understanding
> until then… It's helped me understand how early childhood and early
> experiences can really affect later on adult behaviors… It certainly
> diffuses my anger a lot more just because there are so many factors to take
> into place… it's sort of hard to blame it on them when they're just the
> product of their social situation, their experience growing up… (Anna)

Another participant spoke of her improved insight into her own experience with

trauma:

> I think a lot of people who are drawn to the psych major are seeking to
> understand something about themselves or like, not necessarily have gone
> through what I've gone through, but have experienced [trauma] to some
> level. And so I've understood things about myself… an acceptance. It's
> like: Oh, this is why this happens… It gives you a sense of relief. (Ellen)

I expected participants would report experiencing a degree of healing from trauma

as a result of their psychology-related studies. Since psychology explores human

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motivation and behavior, it was reasonable to believe participants would experience some alleviation of suffering as a result of their newfound knowledge. Further, this assumption could explain why the one participant who had not yet begun to take psychology-related courses at the time of interview was the only one not to indicate an experience of healing as a result of engaging in his curriculum.

Indeed, my study results were consistent with those found in the literature. Researchers suggest that understanding the root of one's suffering can promote healing (Staub & Pearlman, 2006; Staub & Vollhardt, 2008). In regard to interpersonal trauma specifically, understanding the factors that contribute to perpetrators' acts of violence contributes to the survivor's ability to make meaning of the traumatic experience (Staub & Vollhardt, 2008). Understanding the context of one's victimization may help the survivor to integrate the traumatic experience and thus contribute to healing (Pearlman, 2012). Others argue that students can learn to analyze situations more realistically and thus be helped to avoid self-blame (Zunz, Turner, & Norman, 1993). It is possible that the healing experienced by participants resulted, at least in part, from such analytical shifts.

Given that emerging adulthood is characterized in part by a distinct optimism and sense of hope in life's possibilities (Arnett, 2000), it is possible that emerging adult students are more apt to be positively influenced by psychology-related studies than other populations. The potential healing derived from engagement in psychology-related studies is perhaps magnified by the general optimism of the emerging adulthood years. However, there was limited overlap observed between participants' optimism and healing

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due to their studies. Thus, it is difficult to determine whether participants' healing was the result of their unique optimism, their studies, or a combination of both.

Learning.

Out of the six participants who reported a degree of healing as a result of their psychology-related studies, three also indicated experiencing important cognitive shifts in learning. Participants described how the curriculum and pedagogy encouraged them to consider multiple perspectives, resulting in significant shifts in their own perspectives. This sentiment was clearly illustrated in Fiona's comment: "The reflective thing is a great thing… you have to challenge your own assumptions, and it also kind of, I think, is a key component for helping people."

This finding was expected, given the overarching pedagogical approach of the participants' academic department at Lesley. Choosing from many effective approaches to psychology-related training, Lesley demands praxis of students. Students must put academic theories about human development and behavior into practice while simultaneously engaging in ongoing critical reflection. This educational approach aligns with teaching psychology-related curriculum for transformation, a concept found in the literature. Corey and Corey (2011) suggest the most important element of training in the psychology-related majors is to know oneself. Reflection is thus encouraged to prevent students' personal assumptions from negatively impacting their work in the field (Griffith & Frieden, 2000). The goal of this particular educational approach is transformation of the students' meaning perspectives (Gere et al., 2002).

Of the three participants who did make reference to this type of learning, one was a first-year, another a sophomore, and the third a junior. Given this distribution and the available information, it is difficult to determine why only three participants made mention of these important cognitive shifts. It may be due to the fact that the majority of participants were of lower class student status, since it is likely they had not taken many courses in their major at the time of interview.

Another possible explanation is that, as discussed earlier, not all who experience a disorienting dilemma engage in perspective transformation (Merriam, 2005). Merriam (2005) explains that transformative epistemological shifts can only occur when the individual reaches developmental readiness and when he/she is unable to apply existing meaning perspectives to new experiences. Thus, it is possible that the four participants who did not report transformative shifts in meaning perspectives were not developmentally ready to engage in the discourse required to achieve transformation, and/or possessed meaning schemes that were able to accommodate their new academic experiences.

Understanding Resilience and Choice of Major

Having explored participants' perceptions of resilience and factors which they believe contributed to it, my final research question aimed to explore the relationship between choice of major and resilience. An interesting relationship emerged between participants' resilience and their choice of psychology-related major. Not only did resilience to traumatic experiences motivate participants to pursue a psychology-related major, but these studies also contributed to their resilience. Participants were drawn to the

field by their sense of empowerment and desire to help others. Further, the pursuit of a psychology-related degree reflected a deliberate action step taken by each participant, and served as an indicator of their agency.

Other factors that motivated participants' studies stemmed from the relevance of course material to their lives, desire for personal connection, and gratitude for help received. Resilient healing occurred as an outcome of participants' psychology-related studies, and was reflected in their gratitude, compassion for self and others, and improved coping skills. In addition, this specific course of study lent to participants' ability to challenge personal assumptions while being open to multiple perspectives. Thus, resilience appears to be intricately linked to participants' psychology-related course of study.

These findings were consistent with claims found in the literature regarding both trauma survivors' desire to help others and the potential benefits of a psychology-related education. In addition, the theories of transformative learning and emerging adulthood provide helpful frameworks for understanding participants' healing via their psychology-related studies.

So far in this chapter, I have discussed what each of my study findings means in relation to the phenomenon of college student resilience. In addition, I have integrated the findings within the broader context of relevant literature. I will now briefly re-examine my assumptions from Chapter 1 in light of the findings discussed above and provide a closing summary.

Revisiting Assumptions From Chapter 1

At the outset of this study, I presented my initial assumptions and explained their basis in my personal background and professional experiences. It is useful to revisit these four basic assumptions here, in light of my analysis of the study's findings.

The first assumption underlying my study was that people strive toward personal growth and a sense of wholeness. This assumption held true, given that all participants described some degree of personal growth following their traumatic experiences. Though all participants spoke of experiencing initial negative effects following these experiences, they also all described their subsequent journeys toward wholeness. This was illustrated in the first finding of my study, which revealed participants' perceptions of their resilience.

My second assumption was that despite the human tendency toward personal growth, not all students thrive in their college experiences. This assumption did not hold to be true, as is illustrated in my first finding. Since selection criteria required that participants perceived themselves as thriving, it makes sense that this assumption did not hold true for my study's sample. However, it is probable that this second assumption would be supported had I not exclusively sampled participants who identified as resilient.

The third assumption was that some aspects of the college experience contribute to students' resilience. This assumption held true, given that all participants indicated at least one aspect of the college experience contributed to their resilience. Some participants even specifically referenced the act of coming to college as a major contributor to their resilience. The idea that college contributes to students' resilience was illustrated by the second finding of my study.

My fourth and final assumption was that for students in psychology-related majors, the college experience can serve as a time for resilient growth. This assumption turned out to be true in this study. All participants except one indicated experiencing resilient growth as a result of their psychology-related studies. The one participant who did not share this experience had not yet taken any psychology courses at the time of interview. This relationship between psychology-related major and resilient growth was illustrated in my study's third finding.

Summary of Interpretation of Findings

In this chapter, I portrayed the experiences of resilience of a sample of students in the psychology-related majors. The above discussion sheds light on the complex and multifaceted nature of college student resilience. Specifically, the discussion reveals the intertwined relationships of participants' indicators of resilience, factors contributing to this resilience, motivations for pursuing a psychology-related major, and perceived outcomes of engaging in these studies. Throughout the course of this chapter, I attempted to offer plausible explanations informed by the literature for why participants perceive their resilience as they do, how the factors they identify contribute to their resilience, and why resilience is both a motivator and outcome of their choice of psychology-related major.

In the previous chapter, I identified what was significant in the data and developed a framework for communicating the essence of what the data revealed. My challenge there was to reduce a large amount of raw data into meaningful themes and patterns. In this chapter, I moved from the role of objective reporter to one of informed

storyteller in an effort to deconstruct the findings and integrate them within the literature and broader research. In order to do this, I performed both extensive within- and cross-case analyses to examine relationships across findings as well as similarities and differences among participants' experiences. My aim in analyzing the study findings was to create a multi-layered, integrated synthesis.

I offer a word of caution regarding the implications that can be drawn from my study. It is crucial to acknowledge that any implications are based only on the experiences of the individuals in my particular sample. This sample was small, consisting of only seven individuals engaged in psychology-related studies. The majority of the data was obtained via interview, as only one participant provided artifacts for review. In addition, I included only participants who perceived themselves as thriving, so no comparisons were able to be drawn between resilient and non-resilient students.

Despite my rigorous analysis of the findings, looking at them from a variety of angles and searching for competing interpretations, it must be recognized that my analysis represents only one of many ways of interpreting the data. In an effort to minimize my bias as a researcher, I engaged in ongoing reflection throughout the stages of data collection and analysis by journaling and discussing my thoughts with colleagues. I remained open to different perspectives and ways of making meaning of the data. Ultimately however, the report presented here is but one subjective view, despite my efforts to minimize researcher bias. In the final chapter of this dissertation, I offer my conclusions and recommendations drawn from the study findings.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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"My dear, in the midst of hate, I found there was, within me, an invincible love. In the midst of tears, I found there was, within me, an invincible smile. In the midst of chaos, I found there was, within me, an invincible calm. I realized, through it all, that… In the midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer. And that makes me happy. For it says that no matter how hard the world pushes against me, within me, there's something stronger - something better, pushing right back." - Albert Camus

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Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological inquiry was to explore with a sample of undergraduate students in psychology-related majors their perceptions of personal thriving and the factors they believe contributed to it. I anticipated the knowledge generated from this study would afford new insights into the resilience of emerging adults in general, and of students in these majors specifically, thus informing higher education practice.

The resilience literature provides a comprehensive view of childhood resilience, portraying it as a feature shaped by a variety of individual, family, and community factors (Garmezy, 1994; Werner & Smith, 1992). Benson's (1997) Developmental Assets Framework enumerates a multitude of external and internal factors that contribute to a child's capacity for resilience. In addition to these childhood resilience factors, researchers include the ability to self-regulate and the internalization of relationships with

peers and adults in their conceptualization of adolescent resilience (Gardner et al., 2008; O'Connell Higgins, 1994).

Researchers also identify a variety of characteristics and dynamics which contribute to a conceptualization of adult resilience. O'Connell Higgins (1994) describes adult resilience in the following terms: exhibiting resilient faith as a process of meaning-making; giving to others what one did not receive and experiencing gratification as a result; experiencing a correction or neutralization of damage; mourning one's loss; and experiencing gratitude for what one did receive. However, in comparison to childhood resilience, the study of adult resilience is relatively new and researchers have not yet reached a consensus in their conceptualization (Roisman, 2005).

This brief discussion reveals a comprehensive conceptualization of childhood resilience and a conceptualization in progress of adult resilience. There is a marked gap in knowledge regarding resilience beyond childhood in general, and in the emerging adult years specifically. As the emerging adult framework (Arnett, 2000) is relatively new, researchers have not consistently incorporated it within their studies. In conducting this research study, I intended to contribute to a conceptualization of emerging adult resilience.

My conclusions from this study follow the research questions and findings, addressing three central areas: (a) students' perceptions of their resilience, (b) factors that contributed to students' resilience, and (c) the relationship between students' resilience and their choice of psychology-related major. I present here a discussion of the study's major findings and the conclusions I have drawn from the research. I offer several

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recommendations based on my findings, analysis, and conclusions of this study. These recommendations are for practice and policy in higher education, and for future research. To support this discussion, I include a consistency chart of findings, interpretations, conclusions, and recommendations as Appendix K. I close the chapter with final thoughts on the views expressed in this study.

Emerging Adult Resilience

Conclusions

If the period of time between age 18 and the mid-to-late twenties comprises, as Arnett (2000) suggests, a unique developmental stage of emerging adulthood, it warrants its own branch of resilience research. How does resilience during emerging adulthood compare to resilience earlier and later in life? Is it characterized by similar or different factors, and what are the reasons for this?

A recognized theoretical framework of emerging adult resilience has yet to be published, but the need for research in this area has certainly been recognized (Luecken & Gress, 2010). Pashak and Handal (2011) reveal some overlap of assets between the Developmental Assets Framework (Benson, 1997) and the Young Adult Developmental Assets Survey (YADAS; Scales, 2010). A refined and consolidated psychometric, the College Assets Measurement Profile for Undergraduate Students (CAMPUS; Pashak & Scales, 2012) remains unpublished at this time, but initial findings suggest that its' determination of emerging adult resilience is statistically significant (Pashak & Handal, 2013).

In an effort to identify characteristics of emerging adult resilience, I examined participants' perceptions of personal resilience. My first major finding is that all participants characterized their resilience by their ability to successfully integrate traumatic experiences into the rest of their lives. Since trauma challenges the capacity for cohesion, this integration reflects an adaptive and resilient response to trauma (Dass-Brailsford, 2007; Herman, 1998).

A conclusion to be drawn from this first finding is that emerging adult resilience is largely characterized by trauma integration, which I understand as a reflection of personal agency. All other characteristics of resilience identified by participants (optimism, thankfulness, trauma as learning/growth, healthier perceptions/behavior) were secondary to agency and integration. For example, the ability to maintain an optimistic attitude, or even further, to embrace one despite experiencing a trauma, is easily understood as a function of one's ability to assert control over his/her life. The same is true for the ability to be thankful, to perceive a traumatic event as a learning or growth experience, and to adopt healthier perceptions or behavior.

Recommendations

Based on my conclusion that emerging adult resilience is primarily characterized by trauma integration and agency, I suggest the following recommendations for higher education practice and future research.

In regard to higher education practices, emerging adult students should be provided with opportunities and encouraged to make choices and to have their voices be heard. There are a variety of ways in which this can be accomplished, including but not

limited to: opinion polls with institution response/follow-up, individually designed programs of study, student government, and activities/clubs. These options provide students with the chance to take charge of their lives in a meaningful way by making important decisions. In addition, they allow students to witness the power of their own opinions, ideas, and voices. Thus, students can bear witness to and strengthen their own agency.

Future research should explore the relationship between all characteristics of emerging adult resilience (agency, integration, optimism, thankfulness, trauma as learning/growth, and healthier perceptions/behavior). It was unclear at times whether characteristics were inter-related or inter-dependent. For example, as noted in Chapter 5, it is possible the ability to integrate trauma may be understood as a function of agency, rather than as a separate characteristic of emerging adult resilience. Future studies should aim to answer such questions.

In addition, cross-cultural analysis of emerging adult resilience should be conducted in order to identify potential similarities and differences across groups. Six out of seven participants in this study identified as Caucasian, resulting in a racially homogeneous sample. Arnett (2004) suggests emerging adulthood is less likely to occur as a distinct developmental period in minority cultures and lower classes. Future studies should examine how individuals from a variety of cultures experience the years between 18 and the mid-to-late twenties.

Contributors to Resilience

Conclusions

Though resilience was initially believed to be a fixed individual trait (Farina et al., 1963; Garmezy, 1971, 1975, 1983; Rolf & Garmezy, 1974), researchers now understand it to be malleable (Luthar et al., 2000). Childhood and adolescent resilience is believed to be influenced by a variety of individual, family, and community factors (Benson, 1997). As noted above, there is a growing body of research aimed at studying resilience later in the lifespan. Researchers suggest the following factors influence resilience in the emerging adulthood years: agency, adult support, opportunities for enacting change, and cognitive skills (Arnett, 2006; Masten et al., 2006; Tanner, 2006).

The contributors identified in the literature were corroborated by study participants in their discussions of action steps (agency), external supports (adult support), personal attributes (cognitive skills), and going to college (opportunities for enacting change). The second major finding of my study was that of these factors, all participants indicated that action steps they took contributed to their resilience. The very notion that resilience is growable is evident in participants' accounts of their resilience, as they shed light on some factors which may contribute to emerging adults' resilience.

From this finding, I drew the conclusion that action steps promote resilience by targeting the specific disconnection and disempowerment which can result from a traumatic experience. These action steps can take a variety of forms, including but not limited to the use of therapeutic coping skills, socializing, artistic and creative expression, and social action. Post-traumatic resilience can be fostered by providing emerging adult students with opportunities to engage in action steps.

Recommendations

Based on the existing literature and my second study finding, it is evident that post-traumatic resilience can indeed be fostered in emerging adulthood. The following recommendations for higher education practices and future research are informed by my conclusion that resilience can be fostered via opportunities to take action steps.

There are multitudes of factors which contribute to emerging adult resilience. In addition to providing students with opportunities to utilize their voices noted above, colleges and universities should provide students with a myriad of enrichment opportunities. These might include but are not limited to: academic, social, physical health, emotional health, political, spiritual/religious, and creative options.

Perceived external support is a critical contributing factor to emerging adult resilience, so care should be taken to create an inviting, supportive, and nonjudgmental campus community. In addition, since a variety of institutional aspects contribute to emerging adults' resilience, colleges and universities should establish an integrated and collaborative approach to student mental health. Faculty, staff, and administrators across a range of departments can play an important role in providing support to students and fostering their resilience; this is not solely in the hands of the counseling center. Lastly, cognitive skills which contribute to resilience can be taught, including: autonomy, coping skills, problem-solving, planfulness, and future orientation (Arnett, 2006; Masten et al., 2006).

The present study looked retrospectively at resilience and students' perceptions of factors which contributed to it over time. Future research should take a closer look at these factors to examine how and why they contribute to emerging adult resilience. In

particular, it will be important to study and compare the mediating effects of these factors in real time following a traumatic experience. In doing so, future studies can help to shed light on whether certain factors have more or less mediating potential and why this may be so.

Resilience and Psychology-Related Major

Conclusions

A fundamental principle of adult learning theory is that learners connect to material that is of immediate value and relevance (Knowles, 1970). Thus, it is reasonable to suggest that emerging adult students are drawn to fields of study which they perceive as meaningful, and to which they already feel a sense of personal connection. As Arnett (2000) asserts, a central task of emerging adulthood revolves around identity formation. In an effort to answer fundamental questions about themselves and what they want to do with their lives, emerging adults engage in explorations in love and work (Arnett, 2000).

In an effort to understand the relationship between emerging adult students' resilience and their choice of psychology-related major, I explored participants' motivations for pursuing their degrees, and their perceived outcomes of engaging in these studies. The final finding of my study was the majority of participants saw their own healing as both a motivator in their choice of major and an outcome of their psychology-related studies.

Thus, I drew the conclusion that for emerging adult students who have a history of trauma, the choice to pursue a psychology-related major is intricately linked to their resilience. The decision to help others may be a function of resilience, reflecting agency

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and integration of trauma. In addition, engaging in psychology-related studies can offer students the opportunity to work through trauma, thereby contributing to students' resilient growth.

Recommendations

Based on my conclusion that emerging adults' resilience is linked to their choice of major, I offer the following recommendations for practice and policy in higher education.

There is a clear overlap between effective teaching practices and best practices for promoting resilience (Howard et al., 1999). Since students may be drawn to psychology-related majors by their own suffering, it is especially important to utilize best teaching practices in these majors. These include but are not limited to: developing a relevant curriculum, promoting students' contributions to the academic community, offering fair and honest feedback, and being supportive and approachable (Nuthall & Alton-Lee, 1990; Porter & Brophy, 1988).

Researchers suggest that students can learn to analyze situations more realistically and be helped to avoid self-blame (Zunz et al., 1993). Psychology-related curricula can be developed to provide emerging adults with opportunities to explore, analyze, and critically reflect on personal experiences. In addition, instructors of psychology-related courses can facilitate this critical reflection by encouraging students to apply course theory to their own experiences.

As discussed in Chapter 5, professional support following trauma is largely ineffective compared to non-professional support (Davidson, 2002; Hage, 2006; Jain et

al., 2012; Morris et al., 2011). In addition, trauma survivors often believe they can empathize and relate to others in distress in ways that others are not able (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995; Sutton et al., 2006). Thus, colleges and universities should create opportunities for students to work with others in need. Such options may include but are not limited to: professional mentoring, peer advising, peer support groups, service learning, and internships.

Despite my assertion noted above, that student mental health and resilience do not fall solely in the hands of college counseling centers, it is imperative that anyone within a college or university setting who comes in contact with students be able to recognize and respond to the need for professional psychological support. Faculty, staff, and administrators must be provided with training around student mental health, red flags, and available resources/referrals. It is likely that personnel outside of the counseling center will encounter students who require psychological support, so they must be able to detect such a need and respond appropriately. Those who encounter students in psychology-related majors in particular should be well-trained in this, since these students may be more likely to come to college with a history of psychological struggle.

As far as policy in higher education is concerned, I suggest that colleges and universities establish universal mental health screenings to identify students in need of support and intervention. Research indicates that depression, suicidality, and self-injurious behavior are becoming increasingly prevalent in the emerging adult student population over the past decade (Kadison & DiGeronimo, 2004). More recently, an overwhelming majority (88%) of US college counseling centers reported a sustained

increase in the prevalence of severe mental health issues among students (Gallagher, 2012). As a final recommendation, I contend that it would be wise to screen for mental health concerns as students transition to college. This is especially important in the case of emerging adult students in psychology-related majors who arrive with a history of trauma, as their developmental identity explorations may trigger old traumatic wounds.

Researcher Reflections

As I come to the close of this dissertation study, I would like to offer some final words on the views expressed herein. While many young people do experience a marked developmental period of emerging adulthood, it is important to remember that many may not be afforded such an opportunity. As Arnett (2004) explains, minority cultures and lower classes are less likely to experience an extended period of identity exploration due to economic conditions and/or cultural values. Even in industrial and postindustrial cultures, individuals may find themselves propelled into full adulthood by external circumstances (Arnett, 2004). Thus, it cannot be assumed that all individuals between age 18 and the mid-to-late twenties contend with the same developmental issues.

In addition, the central goal of transformative learning is for students to develop the ability to identify distortions of reality, and to reconstruct meaning schemes (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978). Thus, transformational theory is dependent on rationality as the means by which learning occurs. Such a model of learning reflects an individualistic cultural paradigm (Brooks, 2000), and it is crucial that it not be perceived as the only worthwhile framework for pursuing knowledge. It is my hope that the information presented here contributes to a growing body of knowledge in the area of college student mental health.

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"Those who don't believe in magic will never find it." - Roald Dahl

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APPENDIX A: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

TRAUMA
- Event experienced
- Emotional reaction

SHIFTS IN PERCEPTION AND BEHAVIOR
- Internally related
- Externally related

BIG PICTURE RESILIENCE
- Integrated Experiences
- Learning/Growth Experiences
- Thankfulness
- Agency
- Optimism
- Empowerment

CONTRIBUTORS TO RESILIENCE
- Personal attributes
- Action steps
- External supports
- College

MOTIVATION
- Personal success
- Relatability
- Empathy for others
- Giving back

EFFECTS
- Healing
- Learning

Participant Code	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Marital Status	Major	Academic Year	GPA	Living Arrangements	Trauma	Thriving
101	Anna	24	F	Caucasian	Rel	CN	4	3.8	Off-campus apt	DV, Bullying/Hazing; Traumatic Loss; Sexual Assault	Optimism
102	Becky	18	F	Caucasian	Single	AT	1	4.0	On-campus dorm	Bullying/Hazing; Traumatic Loss; Sexual Assault	Agency
104	Charles	18	M	Caucasian	Rel	CN	1	3.4	On-campus dorm	Traumatic Loss; Medical Emergency	Agency
105	Deborah	18	F	Caucasian	Single	CN	2	3.3	Parents	Bullying/Hazing; Traumatic Loss; Mechanized Accident; Witnessing Violence to Others	Empowerment
107	Ellen	19	F	Caucasian	Single	CN	2	3.2	On-campus dorm	DV; Neglect	Integrated Experiences
108	Fiona	21	F	Unknown	Single	EAT	2	4.0	On-campus dorm	DV; Witnessing Violence to Others	Agency
110	Grace	20	F	Caucasian	Single	EAT	3	4.0	On-campus dorm	Medical Emergency; Neglect; Witnessing Violence to Others	Agency
TOTAL N = 7											

APPENDIX C: SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

LESLEY UNIVERSITY   Let's wake up the world.™
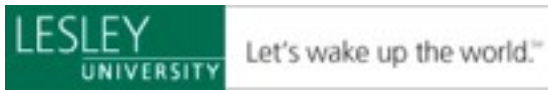
Age:

Gender:

Student year, if applicable: First, Second, Junior, Senior

Major:

Marital status:

Living arrangements:

Have you experienced any of the following prior to your arrival at college?

· Physical abuse

· Verbal/emotional abuse

· Sexual abuse

· Childhood neglect

· Sexual assault

· Domestic violence (including witnessing domestic violence as a child)

· Combat trauma

· Serious harm or threat of such harm to yourself incurred by another person(s)

· Witnessing serious harm or threat of such harm to someone else

· Traumatic loss of a loved one

· War/mass violence/man-made disaster (terrorist attack, bombing, shooting, arson, etc.)

· Severe medical emergency

· Natural disaster (earthquake, tornado, hurricane, flood, etc.)

- Mechanized accident (car/train/plane crash, etc.)

Do you see yourself as *thriving* in your college experience, and if so, how?

What is your cumulative GPA?

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

LESLEY UNIVERSITY Let's wake up the world.™
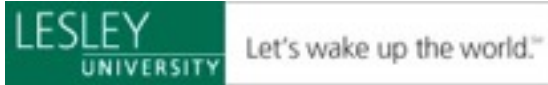
Semi-structured:

1) I'd like to begin by asking you some questions about your history. Could you begin by describing your experience of psychological trauma prior to entering college?

2) Now, can you tell me about how you think your traumatic experiences affected you?

3) Who/how do you see yourself as now? How would you describe yourself?

4) How do you see yourself as thriving and resilient in your college experience? What kinds of things do you do to cope when you feel distressed?

5) What role do you think that college has played so far in fostering your resilience? How exactly do you think college/your major has helped you so far? Have there been any changes in how you see, feel about, and take care of yourself?

6) Are there any other factors that you think have contributed to your resilience?

7) Is there anything that you've noticed/shifts that you've experienced as a result of participating in this study?

8) Is there any additional information that you think is relevant to this study? Do you have any reflective journals that you think would contribute to this study?

9) Any questions?

1. TRAUMA

      T1 Event experienced

      T2 Emotional reaction

2. SHIFTS IN PERCEPTION AND BEHAVIOR

      S1 Internally related

      S2 Externally related

3. BIG PICTURE RESILIENCE

      B1 Integrated Experiences

      B2 Learning/Growth Experiences

      B3 Thankfulness

      B4 Agency

      B5 Optimism

      B6 Empowerment

4. CONTRIBUTORS TO RESILIENCE

      C1 Personal attributes

      C2 Action steps

      C3 External supports

      C4 College

5. MOTIVATION

      M1 Personal success

      M2 Relatability

      M3 Empathy for others

      M4 Giving back

6. EFFECTS

      E1 Healing

      E2 Learning

APPENDIX F: DATA SUMMARY TABLE - EVENT EXPERIENCED

ID	Name	Traumatic Loss	Domestic Violence	Bullying/ Hazing	Witnessing Violence to Others	Sexual Assault	Medical Emergency	Neglect	Mechanized Accident
101	Anna	X	X	X		X			
102	Becky	X		X		X			
104	Charles	X					X		
105	Deborah	X		X	X				X
107	Ellen		X					X	
108	Fiona		X		X				
110	Grace				X		X	X	
TOTAL		4 (~57%)	3 (~43%)	3 (~43%)	3 (~43%)	2 (~29%)	2 (~29%)	2 (~29%)	1 (~14%)

APPENDIX G: DATA SUMMARY TABLE - EMOTIONAL REACTION

ID	Name	Anxious	Confused	Self-Loathing	Self-Blame	Ashamed	Powerless	Shocked	Afraid	Betrayed	Hurt	Angry	Overwhelmed
101	Anna	X	X	X			X	X				X	
102	Becky	X	X	X			X			X	X		
104	Charles				X						X		
105	Deborah	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X
107	Ellen	X	X	X	X	X			X				
108	Fiona	X	X		X	X							
110	Grace	X					X	X	X				X
TOTAL		6 (~86%)	5 (~71%)	4 (~57%)	4 (~57%)	3 (~43%)	3 (~43%)	3 (~43%)	3 (~43%)	2 (~29%)	2 (~29%)	2 (~29%)	2 (~29%)

APPENDIX H: DIAGRAM OF STUDY

To what extent did they feel their psychology-related program related to their resilience?

Effects
- Healing
- Learning

Motivators
- Personal Success
- Relatability
- Empathy For Others
- Giving Back

What factors do they identify as contributing to their resilience?

College

Personal Attributes
- Persistent/Determined
- Optimism

External Supports
- Friends
- Family
- Faculty
- Therapists
- Community Members

Action Steps
- Creative Expression
- Socializing
- Relaxation/Self-Soothing Techniques

- Separate From Trauma/Focus Energy
- Supportive Community

How do emerging adult students perceive their resilience?

Shifts in Perception and Behavior

Big Picture Resilience
- Integrated Experiences
- Agency
- Optimism
- Empowerment
- Learning/Growth Experiences
- Thankfulness

Internally Related
- I Have Control
- Healthier
- Feeling Competent
- More Social
- Greater Insight

Externally Related
- More Optimistic
- Releasing Blame

The majority of participants indicated that their own healing was both a motivator in their choice of major and an outcome of psychology-related studies.

All seven participants indicated that action steps which they took contributed to their resilience.

All participants characterized their resilience by their ability to successfully integrate their traumatic experiences into the rest of their lives.

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APPENDIX I: ANALYTIC CATEGORY DEVELOPMENT TOOL

ANALYTIC CATEGORY DEVELOPMENT TOOL			
Research Question	*Finding Statement*	*Outcome/ Consequence*	*Analytic Category*
1. How did emerging adult students perceive their resilience?	Finding 1: All seven participants characterized their resilience by their ability to successfully integrate their traumatic experiences into the rest of their lives.	Resilience was reflected in participants' ability to integrate their traumatic experiences.	Conceptualizing emerging adult students' resilience.
2. What factors did they identify as contributing to their resilience?	Finding 2: All seven participants indicated that action steps which they took contributed to their resilience.	Post-traumatic resilience could be fostered by creating opportunities for individuals to take action steps.	Fostering post-traumatic resilience.
3. To what extent did they feel their psychology-related program related to their resilience?	Finding 3: The majority of participants indicated that their own healing was both a motivator in their choice of major and an outcome of psychology-related studies.	The choice to pursue a psychology-related major was motivated by students' post-traumatic resilience and also instrumental in fostering it.	Acknowledging the connection between students' choice to pursue a psychology-related major and resilience.

APPENDIX J: INTERPRETATION OUTLINE TOOL

Analytic Category 1: Participants conceptualized personal resilience by their ability to integrate traumatic experiences

Ability to integrate traumatic experiences is not the only characteristic of resilient emerging adults. How else? Other hallmarks of emerging adult resilience include:

BIG PICTURE RESILIENCE

- **Agency**

    Feeling as though one has power in one's life is especially important for individuals who have experienced trauma. The very nature of a traumatic event as uncontrollable and overwhelming inhibits the individual's ability to exert a significant degree of control in the situation.

- **Optimism**

    A traumatic event overwhelms an individual's coping capacity because it is beyond the range of normally occurring events. In effect, traumatic experiences shatter one's confidence in the safety and predictability of life. Traumatic events can leave people feeling untrusting, hopeless, and in despair. An individual's ability to carry an optimistic attitude despite experiencing trauma illustrates resilience.

- **Empowerment**

    In traumatic experiences, someone or something else is in control, and the individual is relegated to a disempowered state in which he/she cannot stop what is happening. Trauma is the experience of victimization and empowerment is the experience of feeling strengthened.

- **Learning/Growth Experiences**

    The ability to perceive a traumatic experience as one from which learning and/or growth can occur reflects a process of meaning-making. Traumatic experiences tear at the individual's pre-existing systems for making meaning, so the ability to construct an integrating meaning of the trauma is resilient in nature. Instead of dismissing or regretting that one has experienced a trauma, resilience is illustrated in the ability to incorporate the event as an experience of learning and/or personal growth.

- **Thankfulness**

    Because trauma can leave people feeling despair and hopeless, the ability to be thankful for what one has in life is reflective of resilience. Being thankful in this way requires the individual to look outside of the traumatic experience in order to acknowledge and appreciate all the good that exists beyond it.

SHIFTS IN PERCEPTION AND BEHAVIOR
- **Internally Related**

  I Have Control: A shift from powerlessness to a sense of agency. Coming to the realization that one can control some things instead of being a passive participant in one's own life. A shift from feeling helpless and powerless to seeing oneself as competent and skillful. Being independent and not relying on others. Improved coping skills. Seeking out others when distressed. Seeking out others instead of isolating. Greater comfort and confidence in socializing.

  Healthier: Improvements in self-perception and in self-care. As positive shifts occurred in their self-perception, self-care follows.

  Greater Insight: Greater maturity and self-awareness.
- **Externally Related**

  More Optimistic: Greater trust in others. Ability to see opportunities in challenging situations instead of succumbing to negativity.

  Releasing Blame: No longer blaming others and their choices for difficult experiences that ensued.

BUT: The only characteristic of resilience identified by all participants was their ability to integrate traumatic experiences. So what contributed to their resilience and ability to do this?

Links to literature on trauma, resilience, emerging adulthood, and transformative learning.

Analytic Category 2: Factors contributing to participants' resilience

Participants indicated that a variety of factors contributed to their resilience. What kind of factors contributed and how?

Action Steps
- creative expression: shifting cognitive perspective in writing, catharsis in art, feeling less alone in music
- socializing: distraction, try new things, make relationships separate from trauma — integrating
- relaxation/self-soothing: release physical energy and decrease stress, helping others to relax self

External Supports
- family and friends: unconditional love, being accepted no matter what, not broken

- network to rely on when needed: trust in others
- supportive group: feeling understood
- campus resources and faculty: supported, not alone, acknowledged

Personal Attributes
- persistent/determined: hard work pays off, seeing results of hard work, feeling accomplished, contributes to sense of agency
- optimism: faith in survival ability, attitude influences your actions

College
- separate from trauma and focus energy: integrating trauma
- nurturing and supportive community: connection, support, acceptance, feeling understood
- make own choices: agency

Links to literature on resilience and emerging adulthood.

Analytic Category 3: Relationship between participants' psychology-related course of study and resilience

Having acknowledged their resilience and identified the factors that contributed to it, what connection did participants note between their choice of major and their resilience?

Motivation
- personal success: sharing something that works, desire to help others, empowerment, action step
- relatability: they intellectually get things they've personally experienced, it's relevant
- empathy for others: desire to help others, connection to others
- giving back: expression of gratitude for help received

Effects
- healing: gratitude for what was received, gratitude that trauma is over, understanding why you felt that way and being self-compassionate, improved coping skills, forgive those who hurt you
- learning: ability to challenge own assumptions and accept multiple perspectives

Links to literature on resilience, emerging adulthood, adult learning, and transformative learning in psychology-related majors.

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APPENDIX K: CONSISTENCY CHART OF FINDINGS, INTERPRETATIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings: If I find this…	Interpretations: Then I think this means…	Conclusions: Therefore I conclude that…	Recommendations: Thus I recommend that…
Finding 1: All seven participants characterized their resilience by their ability to successfully integrate traumatic experiences into the rest of their lives.	• Emerging adult resilience is largely characterized by trauma integration, a reflection of personal agency • Integration reflects an adaptive response to trauma, since trauma challenges capacity for cohesion	Resilience can be observed in a variety of ways among emerging adult students, though their resilience is primarily characterized by agency and ability to integrate traumatic experiences into the rest of their lives. Other aspects of EA student resilience logically stem from their agency and integration.	Practice: • Encourage and provide EA students with opportunities to make choices and to have their voices be heard (for example: polls, individually designed programs of study, student government, extracurricular activities/clubs) Research: • Explore the relationship between agency and integration of trauma with other aspects of EA student resilience • Cross-cultural analysis of EA college student resilience
Finding 2: All seven participants indicated that action steps which they took contributed to their resilience.	• Resilience can be fostered via opportunities for individuals to take action steps • Action steps illustrate agency, and can contribute to integration of trauma • Action steps can take many forms (creative expression, socializing, relaxation, self-soothing, etc.) • A variety of factors contribute to resilience by providing for catharsis, integration, self-soothing, social acceptance, interpersonal connection, faith, and agency	Action steps promote resilience by targeting the specific disconnection and disempowerment that can result from a traumatic experience. These action steps can take a variety of forms, including but not limited to the use of therapeutic coping skills, socializing, artistic and creative expression, and social action. Post-traumatic resilience can be fostered by providing emerging adult students with opportunities to engage in action steps.	Practice: • Since there is a wide variety of factors that contribute to resilience, provide EA students with a myriad of enrichment options (examples: academic, social, physical health, emotional health, political, spiritual/ religious, creative) • Create an inviting, supportive, and nonjudgmental campus community • Establish collaborative approach to student MH (many aspects of institution can contribute to student resilience)

			Research: • Take a closer look at these factors to examine why/how they contribute to resilience. • Is there a hierarchy among the contributing factors - are certain factors more/less influential? Why?
Finding 3: The majority of participants indicated that their own healing was both a motivator in their choice of major and an outcome of psychology-related studies.	• The pursuit of a psych-related degree is complexly related to students' resilience • Choice of major is a deliberate action step, thus reflecting agency and integration of trauma • Helping others via social action illustrates a resilient response to trauma • Students are drawn to material that is relevant to their lives • Engaging in psych-related studies can help students process their own experiences and facilitate transformative learning	For emerging adult students who have a history of trauma, the choice to pursue a psychology-related major is closely linked to their resilience. The decision to help others may be a function of one's resilience, reflecting his/her agency and integration of trauma. In addition, engaging in psychology-related studies can offer students the opportunity to work through their trauma, thereby contributing to students' resilient growth.	Practice: • It is especially important to utilize best teaching practices in the psychology-related majors, since there is an overlap between effective teaching practices and best practices for promoting resilience. • Encourage critical reflection of personal experiences (learn to analyze situations more realistically and avoid self-blame) • Encourage application of theory to personal experiences • Create opportunities for students to work with others in need (mentoring/peer advising, service learning, internships) • Recognize and respond to students' needs for additional supports Policy: • Institute universal mental health screenings to identify students in need of intervention