Factors Influencing the Resiliency and Thriving of Housing Insecure Students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore factors influencing the resiliency and academic thriving of students who experienced housing insecurity while attending historically Black colleges (HBCUs). Exploring this from a non-deficit perspective focused on habits that would allow students to adapt and thrive. The Academic Resilience Model guided a qualitative examination to answer three research questions: 1) How do individual systems influence the resiliency and academic thriving of students experiencing housing insecurity at HBCUs? 2) How do external systems influence the resiliency and academic thriving of students experiencing housing insecurity at HBCUs? 3) How do academic systems influence the resiliency and academic thriving of housing insecure students at HBCUs? Interviews with sixteen study participants characterized the adversity and stress related to their experiences with housing insecurity. This understanding was important to fully frame how participants engaged protection mechanisms to overcome housing insecurity as a barrier to resilience and thriving. Participant narratives on coping with adversity and stress were multidimensional. Participants transitioned and morphed between individual, external and academic systems to mediate stressors brought on by housing insecurity. Participants demonstrated that the individual factors were essential in navigating the problems related to housing insecurity. Study participants demonstrated mindfulness and were able to recognize when the individual system alone was insufficient to sustain resiliency. Responses to research question two encapsulated the expectations and value participants placed on caring relationships, encouragement, and meaningful interactions. Four categories of relationships; family, friends, social networks, and role models were essential to how participants engaged the external system to sustain resiliency and to thrive. Participants universally valued the academic system to support their physical and mental well-being when experiencing housing insecurity. Participants discussed meaningful interaction with faculty inside and outside of the classroom, having a trusting relationship with the president and optimal participation in extracurricular activities as central to a balanced contribution from the academic system in support of resiliency and academic thriving. Tierney et al. (2008) previously noted that the resiliency experiences are fluid and make defining the support needed challenging. This study increases the knowledge to provide interventions at small private HBCUs.

Keywords: housing insecurity, sheltered homeless, resiliency, thriving, historically Black colleges and universities

Introduction

Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) remain a primary conduit for educating and producing Black professionals and leaders (Cantey et al., 2013). An emerging body of research points to housing insecurity, a condition in which an individual has a tentative living situation, as a significant barrier to higher education students achieving their dream of a better life (The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice, 2021; Sackett et al., 2016; Townley et al., 2020; Wynne et al., 2014). The lack of accommodation allowing youth to attend college guarantees futures as members of a low-income workforce (Crutchfield, 2018). Students experiencing housing insecurity have less likelihood of college enrollment and degree attainment, 8 to 12 points lower than other students (Broton, 2021). Without respect for background factors, housing insecurity is a statistically significant predictor of academic success; however, the profile of the highest risk factors for housing insecurity, low-income, first-generation student, and Pell Grant recipients might suggest that HBCUs have a higher probability of experiencing housing insecurity (Broton, 2021; The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice, 2021). Housing insecurity creates stress, negatively impacting the well-being and ability of students to thrive (Kidd & Shahar, 2008; O'Neill & Bowers, 2020; Schreiner, 2010). HBCUs have long stood in the gap for educational access for disadvantaged students, helping them navigate risks and adversities threatening their academic resiliency and thriving (Bracey, 2017; Lomax, 2006; Roebuck & Murty, 1993).

Housing insecurity is an extreme and complex issue that demands multidisciplinary perspectives and collaboration to confront its challenges (Masten, 2011). Previous researchers suggested that resilience is vital in alleviating stress and adversity and can be strengthened by developing protective factors (Keye & Pidgeon, 2013; Kidd & Shahar, 2008; Masten, 2011; O'Neill & Bowers, 2020). Previous studies on resilience in homeless youth share a common thread, the need to engage protective factors to mitigate risks and adversity (Cronley & Evans, 2017; de Oliveira Durso et al., 2021; Kidd & Shahar, 2008; O'Neill & Bowers, 2020; Paul et al., 2018). While research regarding the prevalence of housing insecurity among college students continues to grow, there is still much to be understood about its effects on resilience and, more specifically, among college students attending HBCUs (Dahl et al., 2022; O'Neill & Bowers, 2020).

Study Purpose/Research Questions

This study explored factors influencing the resiliency and academic thriving of students experiencing housing insecurity while attending HBCUs. The academic resiliency theoretical framework guided examining the lived experiences of housing insecure students in search of answers to three research questions. This research provides meaningful insights focused on addressing the following questions (1) How do individual systems influence the resiliency and academic thriving of students experiencing housing insecurity at historically Black colleges? (2) How do external systems influence the resiliency and academic thriving of students experiencing housing insecurity at historically Black colleges? (3) How do academic systems influence the resiliency and academic thriving of housing insecure students at historically Black colleges?

Theoretical Framework/Literature Review

Academic thriving is threatened when mechanisms fail to overcome adversities and related stress (Cronley & Evans, 2017; de Oliveira Durso et al., 2021; O'Neill & Bowers, 2020). Insights relating to the three research questions were explored using the academic resilience model (de Oliveira Durso et al., 2021) to synthesize findings central to the relationship between resilience and student success outcomes. As a theoretical framework, the academic resilience model developed by Samuel de Oliveira Durso, Luis Eduardo Afonso, and Susan Beltman (see Figure 1) suggests that students exposed to extreme stress and adversity can thrive through protective mechanisms and environmental factors in an academic construct. In addition to the heavy underpinnings of resilience theory, the model draws upon the retention and dropout model in higher education developed by Tinto (1975). Academic thriving is threatened when mechanisms fail to overcome adversities and related stress (de Oliveira Durso et al., 2021). A resiliency framework is a positive approach that empowers and disrupts negative stigmas. It begins with the individual system and draws in eternal and academic factors as complementary means to preserve or increase resilience to thrive (de Oliveira Durso et al., 2021; O'Neill & Bowers, 2020). The three questions were mapped to one of the key promoters of student resilience: the individual, external, and academic systems.

Adequate and affordable housing is vital for learning and student thriving (The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice 2021). Silva et al. (2015) indicated that approximately 9% of students experienced housing insecurity at least once during their college career. Measuring housing insecurity among college students is tricky because students are seldom considered a distinct and unique subpopulation of individuals, and there needs to be a standard definition or mechanism to track housing insecurity experiences (Bowers & O'Neill, 2019; O'Neill & Bowers, 2020).The circumstances differentiating how housing insecurity has a disparate impact on Black youth resilience suggest that housing insecurity can be viewed as a social justice issue (Karlin & Martin, 2020; Tierney & Hallett, 2012). Karlin and Martin (2020) investigated the issues of student homelessness using social justice theory, identifying, and eliminating barriers that challenge marginalized groups, in addition to resiliency theory, understanding how students are impacted and how colleges can help. The social justice theory intended to influence educational systems to design interventions specific to barriers that challenge the thriving of disadvantaged groups (Karlin & Martin, 2020).What Dahl et al. (2022) dubbed the new economics of college, rising income inequality, declining government support for education, increasing college costs, and a weak social safety net hit Black students experiencing housing insecurity particularly hard during the pandemic. Additionally, the lingering effects of racial segregation in neighborhoods and schools continue to play a role in how Black youth experience housing insecurity (Edwards, 2020). There has been widespread attention given to the financial constraints economically disadvantaged students face navigating college focused on tuition costs. However, little attention has been given to the economics of student housing (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2018).

Figure 1. *Academic Resilience Model*
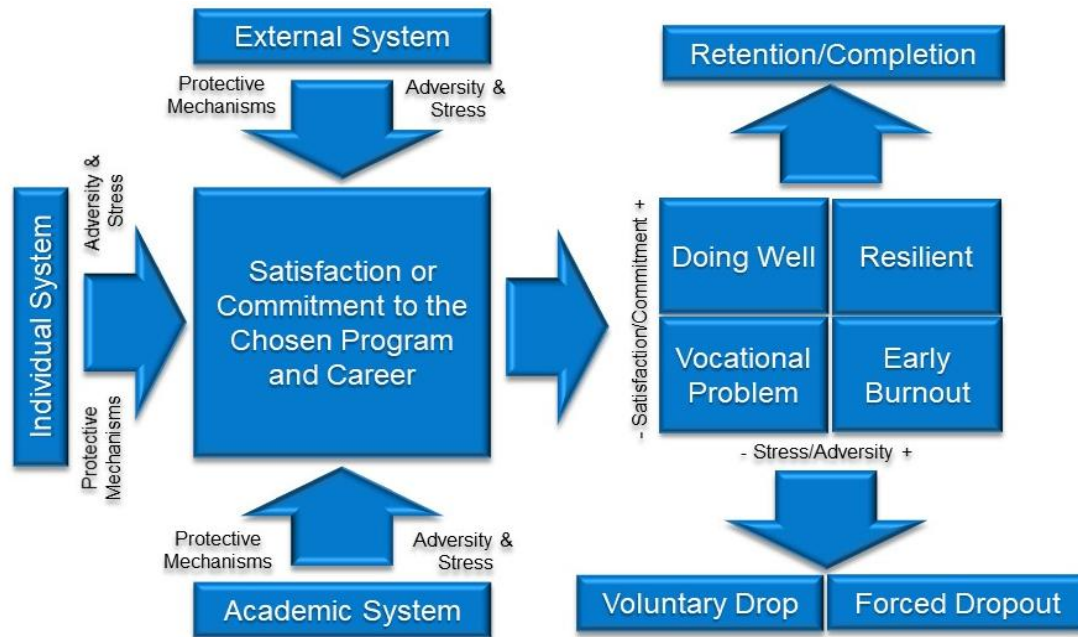
Note. Adapted from de Oliveira Durso et al. (2021).

When economically insecure students enroll in college, 29% face a spectrum of housing insecurities and related issues most frequently occurring is partial payment for utilities and 27%partial rent or mortgage payment (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2015; The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice, 2021). Economic distractors influence perceptions of the advantages of persisting to degree completion over pursuing other beneficial economic activities (Sandoval-Hernandez & Cortes, 2012). These challenges negatively impact the quality of life, learning capacity, and success outcomes (Sackett et al., 2016). Two-thirds of HBCU participants in a 2020 #RealCollege survey reported experiencing at least one form of basic needs insecurity, with the highest being housing insecurity. Students attending HBCUs self-reported instances of housing insecurity and homelessness at 55% and 20%, respectively (Dahl et al., 2022). The only place housing insecurity rates were higher was predominantly Black community colleges (Dahl et al., 2022). Despite being economically disadvantaged and subject to social injustice, students attending HBCUs have a legacy of resilience and thriving through HBCU academic programs, affordable tuition, small-college experience, and an understanding of the cultural environment (Lomax, 2006).

Resilience is a dynamic process of adapting well in the face of adversity or stress resulting from multiple and complex coping processes (de Oliveira Durso et al., 2021; Greitens, 2016). Students may have overcome recent or not-so-recent bouts of homelessness that have left them with lingering trauma despite meeting their current needs (Hallett et al., 2019). Flach's (1988) theory of resilience espouses a cycle of disruption and re-integration as necessary to learn to cope with life's stresses and that temporary challenges are good opportunities to deal with old hurts. Greitens (2016) says that resiliency involves a reflection period whereby students can make sense of past experiences and digest learnings as part of planning for what comes next and that individuals are shaped by their experiences. The resilient do not simply recover from adversity; they find healthy ways to integrate calamity into their lives (Greitens, 2016).Youth resilience manifests when individual, external, and environmental factors effectively mitigate stress and adversity (Cronley & Evans, 2017; de Oliveira Durso et al., 2021). Individual factors include self-compassion and self-regulation. External factors (external system) may include role models, parents, governmental agencies, legislation, or social support. The most significant environmental factor for students is the academic institution (academic system) and the culture established therein (Cronley & Evans, 2017).

The more vulnerable students are to risk and adversity, the greater the need to co-create connectedness (Roffey, 2017). Greitens (2016) suggested that understanding the connection to those who came before strengthens resilience. Youth find hope in times of adversity and stress by knowing stories of resilience told by family (Greitens, 2016). The family is vital and complementary to other protection mechanisms, especially since students at HBCUs are often first-generation college students. Statistical evidence suggests that 51% of housing insecure students have no parent with college experience (Broton, 2021). This vital social safety net may not have the capacity to understand housing insecurity issues in higher education (Broton, 2021). The gap in understanding may limit parents' willingness or knowledge to effectively fold protection mechanisms into routine interactions (Broton, 2021). Even strong networks can break under the pressure of continually being the backstop, especially when there is a compromised ability to empathize (Hallett et al., 2019). When families believe the relationship has drained their social capital, they are no longer willing to invest. They may withhold support, insisting that the student fix financial issues themselves (Hallett et al., 2019).

Earning social capital is central to building a network of friends that can co-create resiliency within students. Social capital enables individuals to accomplish goals through network development (Tierney & Hallett, 2012). Social capital is earned through sustained interaction with others (Tierney & Hallett, 2012). Integration into a group creates social obligations and accrues benefits that students can access to negate adversity and risks students face when experiencing housing insecurity (de Oliveira Durso et al., 2021; Tierney & Hallett, 2012; Tinto, 1975). Homeless students are highly mobile. This mobility can make it difficult to develop quality friendships sufficient to earn and access social capital as a protection mechanism (The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice, 2021; Tierney & Hallett, 2012). Additionally, the temporary nature of housing insecurity for many students challenges the ability to create and maintain networks. Social networks play a vital role in fostering resilience sufficient to gain housing and shift students' ability to re-examine their worth beyond homelessness (Tierney & Hallett, 2012).

This study's most significant environmental factor is that of the academic institution. Colleges have a significant role in creating a learning ecosystem conducive to students' thriving abilities (Karlin & Martin, 2020). College, for many, marks the transition from adolescence to adulthood. It represents a changing economic landscape where students move away from family support to independence (Bowers & O'Neill, 2019). Many view college as the most direct path to achieving a middle-class lifestyle and are thereby willing to mortgage meeting basic needs while they invest in pursuing educational goals (Broton, 2021). As protective factors, colleges must ensure the effective integration of students into the institution socially and academically to foster academic resilience and to thrive in college (Lee & Choi, 2010; Tierney & Hallett, 2012; Tinto, 1975). As housing insecurity among unaccompanied youth grows, higher education officials must acknowledge and address the problem (Silva et al., 2015). University administrators seldom address the complexities that contribute to stress in the lives of vulnerable students with meaningful, coherent strategies for support (Ringer, 2015). Higher education leaders' skills to address the "dark side of college" vary, with researchers citing that "higher education programs that trained them to be deans or chancellors have prepared them to be leaders of 20th-century colleges rather than innovators to respond to 21st-century challenges" (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016).

Karlin and Martin (2020) found a material misalignment between what college officials believe happens on campus and reality. Housing insecure students often transition between multiple residential experiences, and the fluidity of the categorization of their level of housing security makes it difficult to define what academic support is needed (Tierney et al., 2008). The design of support structures to help students navigate housing insecurity demands considering the many ways it is experienced (Tierney & Hallett, 2012). Some everyday experiences among housing insecure youth are couch surfing, doubling up, and street youth. *Couch surfers* migrate nightly among family members and friends sleeping on a couch or the floor. A San Francisco State University study indicated that couch surfers might pay rent for this accommodation (Wolin et al., 2019). The Federal definition of *doubled-up* is a circumstance where two or more families live in a dwelling intended as a single-family residence. *Street youth* live in cars, abandoned buildings, or campsites (Hallett, 2010; Tierney & Hallett, 2012). Youth experiencing housing insecurity have a residential history mired by frequent transitions and multiple types of homelessness (Hallett, 2010; Tierney & Hallett, 2012).

Students and staff readily point to policies and procedures that contribute to housing insecurity for students (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016). Student affairs professionals can step in where the laws and institutional policies lag and play a pivotal role in re-imagining how a college or university might nurture this vulnerable population (Kuh, 2010). Unfortunately, even when faculty and staff step up and are ready and willing to advocate for marginalized homeless students, the campus culture may be such that there is no platform to deliver the message (Hallett, 2010). Kuh (2010) asked colleges and universities to put focused effort into reducing the psychological size of the campus. Peer programs, meet-and-greets, and other events that help build connections help students develop a sense of belonging and reduce stress levels threatening student resilience and thriving. This is especially important when the physical size of the campus or the distance from the familiar can add to the stresses of being homeless or housing insecure (Kuh, 2010).

The academic system can facilitate counterfactual thinking to re-imagine stereotypes commonly held about housing insecure students (Grant, 2021). Activating counterfactual thinking might generate allies by having non-Black people imagine college life being Black, economically disadvantaged, or a first-generation college student with a wholly distinct cultural background (Grant, 2021). Grant (2021) illustrated a timeline of stereotype shifting to open minds to advocacy, which can be applied to support housing insecure students. Stereotype shifting moves from having an experience to forming a stereotype to having a new experience to questioning the stereotype to questioning stereotypes in general. Advocacy relies heavily upon the shift from stereotyping to questioning stereotypes. In context, college-based programs that fully integrate support programs for these students as a suite of student services instead of a "bolt-on" work best because they reduce the perceived stigmas that limit student engagement in these services. When done right, students report an increased sense of belonging (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016).

Environmental factors that emanate primarily from within the college provide the cultural context for how the academic system mitigates adversity and risk (de Oliveira Durso et al., 2021). Broton and Goldrick-Rab (2016) suggested that students feel less alienated and are more apt to access support systems addressing housing insecurity when interventions appear as just another student support service rather than a supplemental service for disadvantaged students. Academic systems have also been cited as contributing to student housing insecurity by creating policies that proliferate the problem (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016). Educators play a vital role in eliminating hindrances to student success and are critical to providing access to resources needed for students to be resilient and thrive (Karlin & Martin, 2020). Creating interventions that foster resiliency and thriving provides mutual benefit for the student and the institution (Karlin & Martin, 2020).

The theoretical framework cites a need for students to view the academic system as an accessible protection mechanism and that integration with the college or university is vital to resilience (de Oliveira Durso et al., 2021; Tinto, 1975). The academic system must be multidimensional, recognizing that integration can be significantly influenced by family, personal and educational background, and the prevailing socio-economic climate within and external to the institution (de Oliveira Durso et al., 2021). Researchers suggested there can be a misalignment between what is really happening among housing insecure students and the perceptions held by faculty, administration, and staff (Karlin & Martin, 2020). Interventions should be designed to be scalable to address the continuum of housing insecurities and the varied circumstances that landed students in their respective circumstances to foster resiliency (Karlin & Martin, 2020).

The effective engagement of the resilience factors determines where individuals fall along a continuum from satisfaction to commitment. Authorities support grit as an essential personality trait in fostering persistence to achieve success in circumstances that are high stress (Dam et al., 2018; Duckworth, 2016; Han, 2021). Researchers suggested that consistency of interest and perseverance of effort and grit practices can enhance the well-being of students (Han, 2021). The optimal outcome is a strong commitment that mitigates adversity-related stress enough to achieve resilience (de Oliveira Durso et al., 2021). Grit can contribute to resilience. Grit requires perseverance to accomplish long-term objectives despite the adversity and stress of housing insecurity (Han, 2021). Resilient individuals derive satisfaction and commitment from having a positive outlook on life (Paul et al., 2018). Grit speaks more to overcoming a situation; resiliency encompasses an added dimension of learning to respond to a situation in an emotionally healthy manner and respecting systems other than the individual to foster increased well-being and thriving (Greitens, 2016; Warren & Hale, 2020). Satisfaction and commitment can also be fueled by self-esteem, confidence, and a belief in being worthy of happiness and success (Paul et al., 2018). The academic resilience model guided the research design to show how participants sustain satisfaction and commitment.

Schreiner (2010) described thriving as flourishing, enthusiasm for life, productively engaging with others, and resilience in the face of personal challenges. Academic thriving is reflected in the students' enthusiastic participation in the learning process, as evidenced by class attendance, active interest in material comprehension, and meaningful dialogue with professors and colleagues about what is being taught. (Schreiner, 2010). Interpersonal thriving is rooted in having positive self-worth and a positive perspective on life. Students thriving interpersonally are less likely to be derailed by unfortunate circumstances (Schreiner, 2010). Interpersonal thriving means that students appreciate the interdependent nature of the college experience providing a holistic view of student development and focusing on building diverse social connections, valuing individual differences, and learning and growing from them (Schreiner, 2010). Thriving reframes success beyond grades and graduation to include healthy relationships, a sense of community, a give-back spirit, and leaning into discomfort to navigate risk and adversity. It is an interplay between adversity, stress, and protection mechanisms. Individual, external, and academic, each of the three resilience factors is supported by a series of protection mechanisms (Cronley & Evans, 2017; de Oliveira Durso et al., 2021). Focusing on thriving, a vital companion to resilience, has a high potential to change student views of success (Schreiner, 2010).

Method

This interpretive research recognized that perceptions of housing insecurity are socially constructed, and there are multiple ways that students experience it (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This study allowed participants to share lived experiences of being housing insecure while attending a historically Black college and to ascribe meaning to those experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research was preferable because of its value in exploring ignored or often marginalized populations (Marshall et al., 2022). Qualitative inquiry facilitated an increased understanding of how HBCU students experience housing insecurity, interpret their experiences, employ mechanisms to navigate its perils and extract meaning from the experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Following qualitative research methodology, the researcher discovered how students engage each of the three primary factors influencing resilience to boost resilience sufficiently to thrive in college (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The desired understanding could not be gained using experimental approaches for practical or ethical reasons, justifying qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Research, where words are the data, is best understood through qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Site Selection and Population

Two private, liberal arts, historically Black colleges in the southeast United States were chosen for the study. Both colleges were founded by churches and have maintained ties to the founding denomination. College A was founded by a Black congregation and had approximately 1,000 students and offers learning opportunities in both online and face-to-face modalities. College B was founded by a White congregation and had an enrollment of approximately 750 students. Both colleges offered college-owned, on-campus housing. Additionally, College B contracted with local housing providers to offer supplemental housing to meet the needs of students. Both colleges were founded in the late 1800s.

Sample Selection

The sampling frame consisted of currently enrolled students. The sample size of sixteen students was broad enough to explore patterns among participants purposefully (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The sample population included participants with diverse backgrounds, genders, academic classifications, and perspectives. To manage gender bias, the sample included nine male and seven female participants. Study participants were 18 years of age or older. The sample selection process did not make classification an explicit selection criterion. However, it was sensitive to the mix as part of the sense-making process and understanding housing security implications on resilience and thriving along the college journey.

The researcher accessed the student population using a designated gatekeeper at each institution. The primary responsibility of the gatekeeper was to facilitate access to students. The gatekeeper identified students at the institutions who assessed student support services, indicating housing insecurity. Gatekeepers collaborated with the financial aid administrator to access students who identified as homeless on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and were willing to disclose their lived experiences as housing insecure. Lastly, the researcher used snowball sampling, engaging students who participated in the research to identify other housing insecure students as participants. The researcher developed an abstract of the proposed research that was shared with the gatekeepers to facilitate a sufficient understanding of the study and to be able to enlist support in identifying students to participate in semi-structured interviews. The abstract noted any potentially sensitive issues discussed later in the document in the trustworthiness section and how they would be managed to avoid harm.

The researcher contacted potential participants identified by the gatekeepers to ensure an accurate understanding of the nature of the study and expectations for participation. Initial contact was made by email to schedule a Zoom meeting. Because of the potential sensitivity students might have in sharing their status as housing insecure, contact was made one-on-one between the potential participant and the researcher. In addition to ensuring the broadest understanding of the study objectives, the researcher used this meeting to set the tone for the follow-up interview. The researcher provided email and telephone contact information and solicited the same from participants for follow-up. Through this process, the researcher identified the participants most suitable for the study.

Data Collection

After the study sample was selected, data collection began. To ensure the desired quality of the data collected, the researcher confirmed at the onset that participants were clear about the purpose of the study and how the data would be used. The data from participants were gathered through semi-structured, in-depth interviewing. Through these interviews, participants were solicited to tell stories of their experiences as housing insecure students attending a historically Black college. The interview guide used open-ended questions, and as appropriate, the researcher asked additional questions to gain clarity or explore other unanticipated themes. The in-depth interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes. Interviews were conducted and recorded via Zoom to provide data capture accuracy.

The researcher followed best practices, including scheduling a convenient time and place for study participants (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Role clarity was honored during the data collection, especially during interviews. Throughout the interview, the interviewer was disciplined, dedicated, and honored that the participants were going through a sense-making process (Seidman, 2019). The design of the data collection process was structured to minimize disruptions to the college and the participants. Optimal timing and locations for all parties impacted were discussed during initial conversations with the institutional gatekeepers and study participants. Informed consent was captured both verbally and encapsulated in an informed consent document. In addition to ensuring clarity of purpose for the study, the researcher conveyed the rights of study participants, issues of confidentiality, benefits, how the study would be used, and how follow-up contact could occur. The researcher provided email and telephone contact information and solicited the same from participants for follow-up.

Best practices caution researchers about saturation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).The researcher stopped collecting data on 16 study participants realizing that emerging themes from new data no longer sparked fresh perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Marshall et al., 2022; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative research recognizes that reality is ever-changing and is not a fixed objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher ensured timely data conversion into a retrievable form to avoid its loss or deterioration.

Data storage was in two forms: (a) a watermarked, notebook-bound, hard copy and (b) a password-protected electronic copy, both maintained by the primary researcher.

Data Analysis Procedures

Using the sense-making stories told by the participants, the researcher co-constructed an understanding for designing and implementing interventions for this population at HBCUs (Greitens, 2016). Interview transcripts generated from ZOOM interviews, audio and video recordings, and interview notes were crossed referenced to ensure accurate cataloging of participant experiences. The researcher immersed in the data reading and re-reading transcripts to become thoroughly familiarized with it before searching for themes and beginning the coding process. The researcher reengaged the participants as necessary to ensure accuracy in the data capture. In Vivo coding helped to expose participant voices and aided the researcher in codifying interpretations. Coding was an iterative process, with each cycle providing a new depth of understanding and synthesis of meaning (Bernard et al., 2017). From the synthesis of codes, the researcher developed themes defined by the frequency of codes, the perceived influence on the phenomenon, and the degree to which context influenced the logical groupings of codes. The researcher extracted first-person accounts from within themes, focusing on their contribution to co-constructing valuable meaning for future interventions and policies to support student resiliency and thriving. The researcher interpreted meanings from findings by weighing discoveries emerging from the data, personal reflection, and comparisons to literature and past studies (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Reflectivity was used as secondary and tertiary opportunities to negate the implications of bias and assumptions. Part of the data synthesis accounted for the fact that human memory can be faulty and firsthand accounts of personal behavior can be inaccurate (Bernard et al., 2017). The researcher used techniques like cued recall, aided recall, and landmarks to improve the accuracy of self-reported behaviors.

Description of Participants and Sample

Sixteen students from two historically Black colleges participated in the study. The study participants included nine males and seven females, ages 18–41. International students accounted for 38% of participants. The classification distribution was one freshman, five sophomores, four juniors, and six seniors. All but one of the students were considered traditional students. Table 1 provides additional detail on the participant demographics.

Table 1. *Participant Demographics*

Participant	Institution	Age	Class	GPA	Gender	First Gen	Int'l Student
Marlon	LC-01	22	SR	3.6	M	Y	N
Denzel	LC-02	23	SR	2.8	M	Y	N
Zion	LC-03	22	SR	3.3	F	N	N
Kevin	LC-04	20	SO	2.0	M	N	N
Winston	LC-05	20	SO	2.5	M	Y	N
Paulette	LC-06	21	JR	2.2	F	Y	N
Jacqueline	SC-01	20	SR	3.4	F	Y	Y
Jared	SC-02	22	SO	2.7	M	Y	N
Karim	SC-03	24	JR	2.9	M	Y	Y
Patrice	SC-04	18	FR	3.5	F	N	N
Ora	SC-05	24	SR	4.0	F	Y	Y
Jamir	SC-06	20	JR	3.2	M	Y	Y
Caleb	SC-07	22	JR	2.8	M	Y	N
Alese	SC-08	20	SO	4.0	F	Y	Y
Irvin	SC-09	20	SO	3.3	M	Y	Y
Charity	SC-10	41	SR	3.9	F	Y	N

Phenomenological Analysis

The findings in this section focus on aligning the definition of housing insecurity with the unique set of adversities and stress participants experienced. After completing interviews with the sixteen study participants, the researcher concluded that there were two overarching themes associated with housing insecurity: (a) adversity and (b) stress. In order to fully frame how participants engaged protection mechanisms to mitigate the implications of adversity and stress, it was essential to understand how participants described these challenges to resiliency and thriving.

Theme 1. Adversity

Student narratives described how housing insecurity impacted resiliency and thriving currently and pre-college. Stories of living conditions at home, current and pre-college, contributed to how students developed protection mechanisms to foster resiliency and thriving in college. Here, four sub-themes emerged: safety, poverty, sheltered homelessness, and student housing. Safety emerged as a theme important to how students experienced housing

insecurity. Jared grew up with his father and grandmother on the south side of Chicago. The grandmother was the head of the household, and her solid moral conviction shielded Jared and his father from the perils of the street. After seeing his brother die from gun violence and realizing how he was living was disappointing to his "Nana," he went to college to put distance between himself and home. Jared said,

I live in these people's neighborhood. I never know what type of intentions they have. I ran into them a couple of times, and it was all bad intentions. So, I try to avoid home. I know I can lay my head there, but I can walk out of the house any day and catch some bullets.

Poverty emerged as a contributor to housing insecurity. Caleb grew up in a home with his birth mom, a single parent of five children. Because of economic circumstances, Caleb and his four siblings took on jobs to make ends meet. As a college student, Caleb continued to provide for his family 10 hours away. Caleb said, "When I work, most of my checks are sent back home to care for my family." Caleb has housing on campus, but at the place he calls home, his family is facing eviction and threats to basic needs. Charity was a non-traditional student. She shared the tight finances and tangential impacts of maintaining housing and pursuing college. She talked about how the need to stretch a dollar did not always support eating healthy. She acknowledged poverty as an affront to physical and mental well-being. Charity stated,

I've gained weight. Making healthier food choices isn't always open to me because my money has to be directed toward school and housing. If I were stable, I could consider introducing more fruits and vegetables into the diet and manage portion control.

Findings from this study suggest that students challenged to achieve housing stability rely on academic institutions for shelter and consider institutional housing a haven from the perils of housing insecurity. Students like Jared, Denzel, and Patrice, who had homes where they could lay their heads, saw home as an option of last resort for housing because of the dynamics. When speaking of home, Denzel said,

I have somewhere to lay my head, but it is not a comfortable situation. Including me, my mom has seven children, and we all stay in our grandmother's apartment. All of us up in the house at once; it was a struggle.

Kevin lived with his mother and his sister. A few months after starting college, his family became homeless. His mother went to live with her mother, and his younger sister moved in with her father. Kevin saw college as a home providing "all he needed." Kevin said,

This is my home because all of my stuff is here. I just go back there to visit. I'll spend the night on the couch one or two nights. Then I'm coming back here because I got a bed. I got my TV, refrigerator, food, and my clothes. If I return to my city, I ain't got nothing in my city.

On-campus student housing was a lifeline for study participants. Study findings indicate that as much as campus housing was a lifeline, traditional models for student housing at these institutions presented a unique challenge to having a consistent, safe, and affordable place to live. When student housing closed for traditional breaks, Fall, Spring, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Summer, these students who relied upon on-campus housing were thrust back into housing insecurity. While breaks were temporary, they transitioned participants from sheltered to unsheltered homelessness. Like many international students, Ora, a student from the continent of Africa, considered the cost benefits of a sometimes multi-day trip for an abbreviated break during dorm closures. Ora said,

I'm always scared or worried about the next break and a place to go, so sometimes I just ask for permission to live in the dorm during the school breaks because it's difficult and expensive to get an apartment outside of school, especially when you do not get to work as an international student.

Theme 2. Stress

Students felt stress, which often contributed to a fragile sense of well-being. Framing the nature of the stress and motivations to negate stress-related adversities was essential to understanding the mechanisms students engaged to be resilient and thrive. Alese was an international student from Africa. She and her sister attended college. She had a great summer and was looking forward to returning to campus. When she and her sister arrived on campus, she was surprised that she had an outstanding balance on her tuition and was denied access to on-campus housing because her father paid her tuition using foreign currency. The financial aid staff had yet to be successful in completing the transaction. Despite efforts to resolve the matter, there was no immediate solution. To avoid alarming her parents, she borrowed money from another relative in the States and stayed in a hotel. Alese relived the stress of the ordeal by stating,

It threw me off academically and socially. I was supposed to channel my energy towards school and getting back with friends because I was gone all summer, but I had to channel all my energy to housing. Sometimes it worries me and takes my mind off things I should be worrying about. I mean, it's draining. Housing should be the stable place you go when you're stressed. Not having that stability can really take a toll on your mental health.

When Caleb decided that he needed to go to college to change the trajectory of his life, he knew that he would also create a financial gap that still needed to be managed. There were times when he had to dig deep not to lose sight of

his purpose, knowing that, for the first time, he had prioritized his future ahead of the well-being of his family. Caleb disclosed,

I'm not so much worried about that assignment due at 11:59pm when I'm concerned about my family 10 hours away. What's their living situation? Is there food on the table? Man, it takes up a lot. It affects me heavily from a mental standpoint. It's tough sitting there in class, and your professor's preaching, I mean teaching, and your mind is on how the next bill is getting paid. It distracts me from doing my very best. It distracts me from being the best student I can be.

Marlon spoke of a "feeling of betrayal."Upon the recommendation of the president, he earned an internship. The work was tightly linked to the college's focus on advancing an aspiration to become a greener, more sustainable campus. Because the job required Marlon to be in the office twice a week, and it was 6 hours from home but only eighty miles from campus, he enrolled in summer school to gain access to on-campus housing. Stress for Marlon began when summer school ended, and he had three weeks left in his internship. The dorms closed, and his saga began. Wondering where he would shelter for those three weeks, Marlon was deflated when campus housing was unavailable. Marlon couch surfed, shouldering the stress accompanying his new status of housing insecurity. He said, "It was hard to think and focus on work." Marlon said the academic system betrayed him because "my work was related to my school, and I'm thinking they don't even want me on campus."

Table 2. *Summary of Themes Related to Student Experiences with Housing Insecurity*

Theme	Sub-Theme	Related Theoretical Construct
Adversity	Safety	Protection Mechanisms:
	Poverty	Individual System
	Sheltered Homeless	External System
	Student Housing	Academic System
Stress		Satisfaction/Commitment:
		Retention/Completion
		Voluntary Dropout
		Forced Dropout

Participant narratives on coping with adversity were multidimensional and demonstrated active engagement of the individual system as well as external and academic forces to cope successfully with adversity. Participants transitioned and morphed over time between systems to mediate stressors brought on by housing insecurity.

Research Question 1: How do individual systems influence the resiliency and academic thriving of students experiencing housing insecurity at historically Black colleges?

Participants demonstrated that individual factors were essential in navigating the problems related to housing insecurity. Study participants demonstrated mindfulness and could recognize when the individual system alone was insufficient to sustain resiliency. Research question one explored how study participants mediated stressors to be able to thrive academically. Five themes emerged, reflection, purpose, motivation, spirituality, and focus.

Theme 1. Reflection

Thirteen participants were first-generation college students with varying degrees of struggle transitioning to college life. Participant narratives reflected on how expectations of college were developed. Denzel had expectations shaped by how TV portrayed the HBCU experience. Television shows created an idealistic view of college where every day was worry-free. Students were carefree, contented, and faced little or no adversity. Denzel said, "I was expecting no worries. I was expecting the experience you see on TV. But it's been tough. It's definitely not what I expected at all." He described instability in his academic experience but learned to focus on improving academic performance and a desire to make a positive contribution to his home community. Denzel said,

I definitely feel good about my degree. After my sophomore year, my GPA went way down. I'm happy that I got my stuff back up where I can get looked at, and I could get accepted into clubs and fraternities.

Patrice saw the college environment as a place where she could focus on her studies. She said, "I feel like sometimes, I get in my head too much." She spoke about feeling refreshed, energized, de-stressed, and able to appreciate her surroundings during quiet times in a housing secure campus environment. She said, "I go outside and do my work in the fresh air. It just getting out helps." Other participants described the value of taking an undistracted walk or run, going to the gym, listening to music, or reading a book to restore balance and regain focus. Jamir understood the value of enjoying being a student and the balance found in communing with nature. He said, "I like to chill outside, cut off my phones, walk down by the river and just get back in balance."

Theme 2. Purpose

Participants referred to purpose as a goal to intentionally achieve. Most expressed resolution and determination to improve the economic conditions of themselves, their families, and their communities. Patrice grew up fostered by the first cousin of her birth mother. She spoke of a future where she owned foster homes and enabled better living

conditions for fostered children. Patrice did not dwell on personal circumstances but rather on an altruistic mindset. She pointed to the circumstances of a high school friend in a foster home. She said, "the way he talked about it just didn't sit right with me. The living conditions just weren't up to the standards I felt they should be." Kevin wanted to "start the wealth journey, the wealth chain."He said, "I want to create a net worth for my kids, and their kids, and their kids. Then they're gonna keep that going on. My biggest aspiration is to be wealthy for generations." Caleb described a driving passion "to have the education to get the job that will provide enough money never to have to worry about bills."Winston stated, "I want to ensure my success rate is high."

Theme 3. Motivation

It was essential to understand why participants were attending college and the factors influencing persistence despite the adversity of housing insecurity. Students discussed motivations for pursuing a college degree, from escaping poverty and poor living conditions at home to making family and friends proud. Participants shared their why for attending college and discussed how those factors contributed to their resilience and thriving. More than half of the study participants drew motivation from a commitment to family. A common retort was, "I want to make my family proud." As first-generation college students, participants felt obligated to improve the economic conditions of their families. Karim believed he was a role model to his younger siblings and wanted to be one worth emulating. In a moment of self-reflection, Karim said,

My brothers were following in my footsteps. So, if I'm doing bad and that's what they do, if I do good, then they gonna do good. I saw much potential in my little brothers, and I knew if they saw it in me, they would do better.

Ora spoke about being self-motivated and the dreams she had for herself. She said, "I don't wait for anybody to tell me to apply to grad school, for an internship, for a scholarship, or a job. I just do those things on my own. I search for opportunity." Friends motivated Ora. She said, "I have a friend in biology, another in computer science, and a friend in cyber security. We talk and walk hand in hand. We just motivate each other."

Theme 4. Spirituality

All study participants referenced believing in something bigger than themselves as contributing to their resiliency and thriving. Zion described herself as profoundly spiritual and spoke of fellow churchgoers who inspired her and the church as a refuge where she found purpose and hope. While struggling with housing insecurity, homelessness, and living in her car, Zion said, "She felt God." She described the homelessness experience as "temporary" because "the church connected me to somebody, and I ended up staying with that person until I could get on campus."Charity also saw the church as a source of strength. She found a respite from multiple bouts of homelessness, saying, "There was always a beautiful church and really wonderful spiritual place nearby."

Patrice spoke about praying without ceasing."I pray a lot, even when I'm not struggling. Even on a good day, I'm still going to pray."Paulette said she was "taught to pray about everything."During housing insecurity, Paulette said, "I cried and prayed and just hoped for the best."Irvin stated it simply."I just talk to God about it."Jacqueline said, "When I'm stressed, I go straight to God. He would actually help me and guide my way. God finds a way to bless me and solve my problems for me." Denzel, who said, "I'm not really a spiritual person," went on to say, "I do sometimes pray to heal my stress. If I need help, I ask my parents to talk to God, and He answers their prayers. When they pray about it, I feel better."

Theme 5. Focus

Participants in this study shared narratives that suggested an ability to connect actions, thoughts, and emotions to individual values. Study findings suggested that self-awareness allowed participants to objectively moderate behaviors, manage emotions, and sense how others perceived them. Jared had a short temper that challenged him to stay balanced and focused. Jared recalled that interactions in his neighborhood and school had not always gone well. He described inconsistencies in his high school academic performance and wanted more consistency in college. He said,

I always wanted to be an architect. I want to design skyscrapers. I'm going to revamp the west side of Chicago and fill it with opportunities for kids in the neighborhood. I'm doing good. I have good grades. I'm making my grandmother proud.

Housing insecurity was challenging for Charity. Diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), she felt her ability to focus was "impaired." ADHD made managing the adversity of chronic homeless challenging for Charity. Charity spoke about feeling "scatterbrained" and the importance of maintaining a schedule to remain focused. Charity described a story of resiliency and thriving. Charity said,

What I've been able to achieve in college is. . .I know, it's cliche to say. . .I'm achieving my dreams. My dreams have come true. It's embarrassing to say, but I got into Harvard for grad school. I'm just a nobody from down the street. I dreamed about those kind of things but thought that they would never happen to me. Look at me.

Research Question 2: How do external systems influence the resiliency and academic thriving of students experiencing housing insecurity at historically Black colleges?

Responses to research question two helped to understand the expectations and value participants placed on caring relationships, encouragement, and meaningful interactions. In response to research question two, four themes emerged, family, friends, social networks, and role models.

Theme 1. Family

Findings point to family as a protective mechanism to advance resiliency. Participants identified three themes critical to quality relationship interactions with family, communications, financial security, and college experience. Study participants believed communication was critical. Participants described the significance of routine communication to commitment to persist in college. A first-year student, Patrice wanted family to be there when she needed coaching and counsel. Patrice said,

Sometimes it gets hard, and I need somebody to talk to. Sometimes I feel like I will just lose it. When I need to talk, somebody is always going to answer the phone, whether it is my mom, my aunt, or my uncle.

Most study participants received financial assistance from the institution but needed help to meet all of the school-related expenses. Participants received little financial support from families. Karim said, "I do not get financial support from back home. However, there is love there. They just do not have the money or the assets to help financially. Jared said, "I do not even ask for money. I try to give my parents money." Keenly aware of his family's economic circumstances, Denzel said, "I don't come from a financially stable family or background." Only study participant had family members who had attended college. Patrice saw this as a positive and said,

Most of my family went to college, so I just felt like it was the right thing to do. I would love to get into clubs or sororities because my mother was. The opportunities she got from being in a sorority inspires me to be in one.

At the other extreme was Caleb. No one in his family had attended college. He saw this as a deficiency as he attempted to navigate the college experience. Describing the difficulty of completing the FASFA without family support, Caleb said,

My mother didn't go to college, and her mother did not, so FASFA, we didn't know what that was. That took time for me and my siblings to learn on our own. My family, they attempt to be there. But honestly, some things they cannot help me with.

Theme 2. Friends

Understanding the contributions of friends to resiliency and thriving led to the identification of factors, including the importance of having (a) a best friend, (b) close friends, and (c) social networks. Participants characterized the relationship with a best friend as being one where there were few if any, secrets. Participants with a best friend spoke of trust and financial and moral support provided. Participants expected best friends to be honest and straightforward. Jamir described the relationship with his best friend as "a single soul dwelling in two bodies." He said, "He knows everything about me, and I know everything about him. Ain't nothing we keep from each other. Ain't nothing we can't trust each other with." Caleb grew up not trusting and never letting others get close. He did not expect to make friends in college. He said,

Friends tend to go separate ways in life. When you're expressing yourself to a friend, they may not support your goals. So, you shouldn't concern yourself too much about their opinion. It's more important to me that my family have my back.

International participants spoke about "friend groups" when describing fellow countrymen and women. Their common nationality and shared culture forged a bond that held them together. Miles away from families and cultural ties, they developed close friendships that provided a connectedness essential to resiliency. They shared meals the way they remembered them from home and were able to navigate cultural nuances in the U.S. without exposing to others a lack of cultural understanding. Irvin said,

I don't have a problem making friends, but the people from my country, we came here together, from the same school. That's like my family. We're living in the States, so we check on each other and make sure we're straight.

Ora found motivation in a "friend group" and said, "We walk hand in hand and share our dreams; it makes me work hard. We just motivate each other." When Ora spoke of being housing insecure, she said, "My friends know because we are all in the same situation. But talking to an external person, I don't think I've done that."

Theme 3. Social Networks

Study Participants valued social networks. Participants belonged to several on-campus affiliations. Participants valued sorority and fraternity membership. Patrice wanted to be more active on campus. Her guardian was a sorority member, and she saw how it added to her life experiences but was concerned that it would be demanding and distract from the time needed to study. She said, "I feel like right now it's just going to be too much on me. They do a lot of stuff, and I just want to focus on my grades." Denzel discussed having aspirations of joining a

fraternity but said, "That's a lot of stress too." Fraternity life was a part of the college experience that television shaped for him. Now a senior, he spoke about missed opportunities to build relationships and networks through fraternal associations. He said,

I was going to try a fraternity, but I just feel like that's a lot of stress. I don't come from a financially stable family. All that requires money, and I ain't got the money. The only thing I could do was keep my grades up, go to class, and just graduate.

Marlon frequently referenced the contributions of the fraternity to fostering resiliency and thriving. He said,

I joined the greatest fraternity ever. I got the chance to become a member of that. It's been great and a positive influence on my life. Just meeting the brothers on and off-campus from different causes who have been able to share with me and give me jewels and tips, and advice to keep with me.

Theme 4. Role Models

Study participants spoke about the importance of role models in improving resiliency and thriving. They described family members as role models. Others pointed to role models who were international personalities. One participant identified a fictional character as a role model. Jacqueline identified her grandfather as her role model, whom she referred to as "Mr. Make It Happen." She said, "Well, my grandfather, "Mr. Make It Happen," pushes me in everything I do. Honestly, with everything I have done in my life, the opportunities I had back home, it's because of him." Marlon used the word "authenticity" to describe his role models. He described them as real, unapologetic, and honest. He said,

I really love the people they are, authentic, unapologetic, and honest. They have missions and goals for themselves. For them, it's not a matter of if; it's just when. I'm done with the ifs. I just know I'm ready to get there.

Kevin cited Spiderman, a fictional character, as his role model. Kevin described himself as the glue of the family. He described an ability to manage the chaos at home. He said he and Spiderman were "just kids in the big city who just wanted everybody to vibe." Kevin had a vision for himself and his family where there was a peaceful existence. He said, "Everyone would have their own goals and would be striving for the best." He pointed to the Spiderman poster that was just over his shoulder and said,

A positive role model? Real talk, I cannot lie to you; mine is Spiderman. Spiderman's uncle told him "With great power comes great responsibility," and that is how my mind is. You got to have responsibility and be cool with it. I look up to Spiderman because he is going to fight for what he believes in. So that's what I look up to for sure.

Irvin identified Dr. Myles Munroe, a Bahamian evangelist, as his role model. He identified with the boldness of Dr. Munroe in "evangelizing the goodness of Christ." He described the evangelist as "from the bottom to the top, the definition of a faith-based man."

Research Question 3: How do academic systems influence the resiliency and academic thriving of housing insecure students at historically Black colleges?

An exploration of how the academic system influenced the resiliency and thriving of participants identified three emergent themes, faculty, administration and staff, and extracurriculars.

Theme 1. Faculty

Study findings pointed to meaningful interactions between students and faculty as critical to resiliency and thriving. Participants described faculty engagement as pivotal to their development, focus, and progress toward attaining a college degree. Ora felt faculty engagement contributed to her academic success. Because good grades were important, she interacted with the faculty socially and academically. Ora shared,

I have a close relationship with my professors because I know they're instrumental in how my grades go. I take advantage of office hours and the resources they give students. I'm not trying to be the teacher's pet; I just take advantage of opportunities when I see them.

Zion was not always as focused as she needed to be. She felt a mass communications instructor motivated her to stay on task. Zion described his innovative curriculum. She spoke about the amount of classwork he gave to prepare students for success once they graduated. Zion said,

He pushed all of us. He changed the whole curriculum. He renamed the classes. He gave us a long list of stuff to do for senior seminar for the sake of us being able to get into graduate schools and to be able to get nice paying jobs. I think that's something positive.

Caleb established personal connections with the faculty. Caleb described relationships with faculty as "magnetic." Caleb said, "I tend to gravitate towards them. I know these people by face and name, and they know me. They know what I'm capable of, and when they need help, I'm one of the students they call. "Paulette described faculty experiences shaped by what she described as "hidden gems." She said,

These were the faculty hidden in their offices. You might have to search for them because they are not the people who broadcast themselves. They are hidden in their offices. I recently met a faculty member who is helping me get

internships and I put my friends on to her. Because she is helping me, I know she will help others. She does more than just come to teach and go about her day.

Theme 2. Administration and Staff

Students at each institution described how leadership contributions from the president impacted their college experience. Participants spoke of being energized by encounters with the president. Jacqueline felt a personal connection to the president. She said, "The president believes in me, and it feels good; she made a difference."Presidents at both campuses had ambassador groups that afforded participants direct student engagement. Participants spoke of being a POP Scholar at College A or a Presidential Scholar at College B as a badge of honor and inspiration to be resilient and thrive. For Paulette being a POP Scholar made her focus on raising her GPA to maintain her position in the inner circle of the president. Charity spoke of the support from the administration. Charity said,

It's been easy to navigate through challenges because everybody has been willing to work with me as long as I've communicated openly with them." I was waiting for my financial aid refund to catch up to me. I talked to the counselor about the stress of paying back the debt I accrued waiting. She arranged for me to get emergency funds. I was not expecting that. That was absolutely incredible.

Theme 3. Extracurriculars

Experiences outside of the classroom augmented academic programs and enriched participant resiliency. Internships, affiliations, leadership opportunities, and community service helped participants synthesize learning experiences and apply knowledge. Co-curricular offerings connected students to the institution and enhanced college experiences fostering resiliency and thriving. Caleb participated in extracurricular activities as a distraction from the stress of housing insecurity. He fully engaged in extracurricular activities, which distracted him from the chronic issues related to the economic insecurity of his family. He valued the support provided by the academic system. Participating in diverse activities contributed to his thriving college experience. Caleb said,

I currently serve as vice president of the Black Male Initiative. I host 3601 The Yard, the podcast for my institution. I'm a member of a fraternity. I'm a part of the SGA senate and the Plug, a student ambassador team to recruit new students.

Ora did not have school-related affiliations. She saw sororities as a "distraction from purpose." Ora said, "I don't think they are serious. They have stuff going on while classes are happening, and I cannot miss my classes for anything." However, Ora participated in campus activities such as homecoming and step shows to maintain balance. Karim experienced many "wow" moments in college. He shared his appreciation for the academic support system and relied on it for resilience and thriving. Karim had a 2.9 GPA. He realized he needed to focus more on improving his academic performance. Karim said, "I had to level myself and drop a couple of things so I could get back on track. It's good to be in extracurricular stuff, but if your mindset ain't strong, you have to take some things off your plate."

Table 3. *Summary of Factors Influencing Resiliency and Academic Thriving*

Research Question	Factors	Related Theoretical Construct
How do individual systems influence the resiliency and academic thriving of students experiencing housing insecurity at historically Black colleges?	Reflection	Individual System Protection Mechanism Adversity & Stress Satisfaction/Commitment
	Purpose	
	Motivation	
	Spirituality	
	Focus	
How do external systems influence the resiliency and academic thriving of students experiencing housing insecurity at historically Black colleges?	Family	External System Protection Mechanism Adversity & Stress Satisfaction/Commitment
	Friends	
	Social Networks	
	Role Models	
How do academic systems influence the resiliency and academic thriving of students experiencing housing insecurity at historically Black colleges?	Faculty	Academic System Protection Mechanism Adversity & Stress Satisfaction/Commitment
	Administration & Staff	
	Extracurriculars	

Conclusions

Student narratives shared during interviews demonstrated how participants co-constructed resilience within their environment, warding off structural and systematic threats to thriving. The value of exploring student success outcomes using the academic resiliency model offered a unique perspective, countering the much-researched study of persistence. Previous studies also highlighted the difficulty of thoroughly assessing the magnitude of housing insecurity because of the hesitancy of students to discuss the issue. This barrier to assessing the magnitude of the problem emerged in this study. The researcher identified and recruited a prospective participant, knowing the student from prior interactions had experienced housing insecurity and had accessed resources to address the circumstances. However, during the screening process, responses to questions indicated the individual had not been housing insecure during college. The interview was concluded at that time, and the prospect was not included among the sixteen participants. This experience was consistent with findings previously referenced by Silva et al. (2015) and Tierney and Hallett (2012) regarding the challenge of assessing the magnitude of the problem when students mask it.

This study bore out the assertion made by Silva et al. (2015) that the traditional college-age population is uniquely vulnerable to housing insecurity, as fifteen of the students interviewed were 18–24, and that non-traditional students are an emerging population subject to housing insecurity. Understanding how traditional versus non-traditional students experience housing insecurity and how coping mechanisms vary can advance practices and policies to address the issue holistically within higher education. Townley et al. (2020) concluded that, among other life experiences, students who are the first in their families to attend college are more likely to be housing insecure. With 81% of first-generation college students included in this sample population, the percentage exceeded the results from a research study by The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice (2021) that suggested that first-generation college students experienced basic needs insecurity at 64%. Sixty percent of the students interviewed at College B were international students. These students, as Brown-Grier (2021) discussed, were most notably subjected to housing insecurity challenges during extended holiday breaks when the dorms closed or faced other barriers to stable housing associated with a non-citizen status. The comments that Ora shared mirrored these findings. Ora said that as the end of the semester became increasingly closer, anxiety about how she would manage housing over the break increased. International students shared this sentiment. Hallett and Crutchfield (2017) discussed housing insecurity as existing along a spectrum and morphing as circumstances and severity impacted economics. This is similar to how Ora described the impacts to her focus on academics.

Participants viewed housing insecurity as an adversity to be consistently managed instead of a singular unfortunate happenstance to recover from. The mindset shift of Marlon from "not, if, but when" and the epiphany Caleb shared that "he needed to do something for himself to avoid being in the same circumstance as his family when he turned thirty" demonstrated a commitment to resilience and thriving. This perspective was full adoption of Greitens' (2016) assessment that what happens to us becomes part of us and that resilient people do not bounce back; they find healthy ways to integrate adversity into their lives. This was a common way of thinking among participants.

Protection Factor 1. Individual System

Resilient students tend to have constructed a rational philosophy of life and college (Warren & Hale, 2020). Marlon and Kevin arrived at college believing college would be as they had seen it on television. As a result, adjustments were needed to focus on the more significant issue of academic resilience. Participants in this study, engaging all three systems, constructed a rational philosophy about college and navigated the experiences through that filter, sustaining resilience and thriving (Lamba, 2020). Students were in various stages of processing the pain and emotions of their circumstances but demonstrated mindfulness and a will to overcome. Her mother's abandonment still hurt Patrice, and how it contributed to her housing situation. She was focused on adding nuance to her situation and talked about joining a sorority and graduating. Covey et al. (2022), Foster (2020), and Keye and Pidgeon (2013) all suggested mindfulness and self-efficacy as vital fuel for jumpstarting resiliency within the individual system. Ora reflected on a conscious decision to change the level of dependence she had on her friend group to help her navigate her housing challenges, having concluded that her priorities no longer aligned with those of her friend group.

Common among all participants was a sense of purpose for being in college. As first-generation college students, a shared narrative was a desire to make the family proud. Alese was majoring in journalism. When asked why she chose journalism, she replied that her grandmother thought she would be a good journalist and a great television anchor when she was growing up. Alese followed her grandmother's dream and was not entirely sure it was hers, yet it gave her purpose and motivation. Nearly half of the study participants found purpose and motivation in trying to avoid returning to the hard life that they experienced growing up. Several students talked about how overwhelming thoughts of their past were and how too much reflection on the past challenged them to see the future for which they were striving. They were grateful for the balance the external and academic systems offered when they could not manage adversity alone.

While several students found purpose and motivation to distance themselves from the challenges seen through rearview mirrors, others were more clearly motivated by visions looking forward through the windshields. Kevin wanted to be the catalyst for creating generational wealth for his family, and Winston saw a future defined by one word, success. These students had not set aside the pain and negative emotions of their adversity, nor were they overcome by "blind optimism or "toxic positivity" (Covey et al., 2022). Participants believed a better life was possible and within their grasp.

Despite variations in participant demographics, the most overwhelming factor participants employed to foster resiliency and thriving was spirituality. Concerning resiliency, research says that spirituality and believing in something bigger than oneself can alleviate a sense of separateness and restore community (Levine, 2016). Zion said that there was not a time through all of her adversity that she did not feel God. Paulette talked about praying when times were good and when they were bad. Kevin owned up to not being overly spiritual, but he said he occasionally prayed. He knew his parents were spiritual, and they prayed, standing in the gap when he did not. Howard et al. (2023) pointed to a growing body of research indicating spirituality as essential to understanding resilience and well-being. Data indicate a significant association between spirituality, positive life satisfaction, better physical and mental well-being, and stronger resilience (Bukhori et al., 2017;Howard et al., 2023).

Jared was the only participant whose interview might suggest that the individual system most heavily influenced the coping mechanisms he had shaped. Jared had a fierce sense of independence and no shortage of self-esteem. He was a "hustler" and shared unapologetically all the ways he invoked resiliency, not all legal. From some of his comments, it could be inferred that he believed it was his job to parent his parents. His GPA of 2.7 was respectable. However, Jared's self-confidence might be characterized as toxic self-reliance. Bazubagira and Umumararungu (2020) spoke of toxic self-reliance as a defense mechanism from being abandoned or rejected that is intensified during other life changes. The childhood trauma Jared told of, coupled with being in the early part of his college career, may hinder his total engagement with all three systems. No other participant showed similar evidence of toxic self-reliance.

Protection Factor 2. External Systems

The findings confirmed that resilience is a product of systematic interdependence (Roffey, 2017). Students discussed contributions from family, friends, role models, and social networks to successful outcomes and connections to college. Parental communication helped shape students' perceptions during the transition into and persistence throughout college (Dorrance Hall et al., 2020). This study validated that support from family was a significant contributor to psychological well-being and levels of engagement in college (Dorrance Hall et al., 2020; Roksa & Kinsley, 2018). Patrice touted that her family did an excellent job checking on her and knew that her family would pick up the phone when she needed a listening ear. Patrice was among the minority of study participants who were not first-generation college students. She leaned on their advice based on prior college experiences of her family. Students like Paulette and Patrice, who recognized the benefits college gave family members, viewed family as a ready resource. Zion, the only other non-first-generation college student, could not benefit from the family college experiences because of the fractured family relationship. However, she did credit her impetus for attending college to a stated expectation while growing up.

Goldrick-Rab et al. (2015) noted financial issues as a contributor to most students leaving college without a degree. Most of the students in this study indicated monthly household incomes below $5,000. Tierney and Hallett (2012) stated clearly that poverty directly impacts the educational experience. Findings here further align with the conclusions from Tierney and Hallett that it does not directly impact outcomes. Participants seemed realistic about the financial support available from family and navigated their circumstances accordingly. Roksa and Kinsley (2018) found that family financial support challenged the resiliency and thriving of first-generation students but was a manageable barrier aligning with this finding. Despite deficits in the college experience and financial resources, the students said family offered moral and emotional support to advance coping. Emotional support registered high among study participants, especially from family, as a protection mechanism to mitigate economic distractors that could influence resilience and thriving. Statements from participants conveyed that love and caring from family were omnipresent. Only Zion shared a sense of being on an island, estranged from her family. However, she did speak of the emotional and moral support she gained from her church to the extent that it almost sounded like an acceptable proxy for what she could not get from her biological relatives. Findings from this research suggested that these students had a practical understanding of how their families could and would intervene and shape coping mechanisms to manage adversity and thrive in the context of that understanding.

Thriving within college requires finding a cultural fit and amassing sufficient social capital to sustain calm, supportive, and purposeful micro-moments of interaction that promote resilience (Roffey, 2017). All sixteen students studied seemed to have consciously decided which interactions benefited purposeful attendance. International students studied demonstrated a higher reliance on what was deemed as "friend groups." The narratives spoke of the influence of cultural connections and how that bond motivated success. The African students in the study both had 4.0 GPAs.

These participants judiciously forged relationships with other students and had not affiliated with social networks, clubs, or Greek letter organizations, citing them as a distraction from purpose. The four Bahamian students interviewed similarly valued the cultural connections but were more open to integrating into campus life. GPAs for this group ranged from 2.9 to 3.4. The difference might suggest that a fuller college experience was a trade-off in academic performance. The international students from Africa were the only two who built and were continually focused on nurturing networks to generate economic capital. Tierney and Hallett (2012) noted this as atypical for housing insecure students. These students indicated a conscious decision to avoid the typical HBCU social networks choosing to focus on relationships that would earn them improved scholarship, entry into graduate school, internship positions, and competitive jobs.

Protection Factor 3. Academic Systems

There were no material differences between how the students experienced housing insecurity attributable to the institutions. The fourteen participants who lived in on-campus housing described a continuum of housing insecurity at home. Under most circumstances, the home was an option to lay their heads, but several spoke of conditions that challenged their ability to be resilient and thrive. Paulette said that transportation from school to her home in Mississippi was always tentative and might leave her scrambling for housing over the breaks. Kevin, whose family circumstances had changed so dramatically since he left for college, declared that there was no place for him anymore. From all the narratives, it was easy to conclude that college sheltered these students from complete homelessness, at least as long as the dorms were open and available. Charity and Zion lived off-campus. The housing insecurity stress that Charity endured was due to her fragile relationship with her mom, and the constant "vibe" she got that living back at home at 41 with her daughter in tow inconvenienced her mother. Zion had her own apartment and was working full-time to meet the demands of rent and college. This was the first time since she left home at age 18 that she had experienced stability in her housing for any sustained period. She shared that it could have been better, but it was affordable and home. Zion was the only study participant who lived in housing as head of household.

Participants in this study gave high marks to the administration, namely the presidents at both colleges, as a primary contributor to their resilience and thriving. Administrators shoulder the responsibility for educational quality and, by virtue of their positions, can do remarkable things, but often they can only touch a small number of students directly (Kuh, 2010). Comments made by the participants can best be summarized as the presidents were accessible and high touch. Students discussed challenges, but to an individual, pointed to the president as a fair and ready resource to resolve any concerns. Participants suggested that standard practices supporting instances of housing insecurity were non-existent or, at best inconsistent. Students who admitted to having recurrences of housing insecurity stated that they could not count on any previous response from the college to be the same for a new occurrence. Students discussed the starting point for any dialogue varying from student affairs and the housing office to their academic advisor. Several students pointed out a need to escalate to the president for resolution. The absence of a clear roadmap to get assistance contributed to the stress students felt and undermined their efforts to be resilient. The more significant sentiment students conveyed was indifference from the college to the adversity they managed as housing insecure students. O'Neill and Bowers (2020) asserted that this might be because of a perception that college students are entitled or "unworthy poor," especially when they choose not to work when pursuing a degree. Zion was the only student in this study with a job beyond work study. Researchers suggested that the lack of sensitivity that participants characterized faculty as having might be a misalignment between what was really happening and the perceptions held by faculty (Karlin & Martin, 2020). When asked what she wished others knew about housing insecure students, Zion asked that faculty give students "a little more grace." She was sure faculty could not know how much energy it took some mornings for students to will themselves out of bed and get to class.

To the other extreme, there were students like Marlon, Paulette, Caleb, Charity, and Patrice who cited faculty as a vital contributor to the positive aspects of their college experience. Marlon and Paulette forged informal relationships with faculty and made them a part of the village that supported their ability to thrive. Caleb, Charity, and Patrice had more formal relationships with faculty who poured into them and gave them the push they needed to be steadfast in their pursuits. Charity and Patrice sang the praises of faculty advisors who were trusted academic partners. Caleb forged relationships with faculty and staff who advised one of the several campus organizations where he served in a leadership capacity. The awareness of students varied between the two institutions about available services external to the college to support the emergency needs of students. Students at College A needed more awareness. College B students had slightly better awareness, but that was because those service agencies had an on-campus presence at the college.

Recommendations

The findings from this study warrant the following recommendations 1) increase awareness within the college community of the challenges that students facing housing insecurity navigate, 2) expand the scope of student support services to include resources targeting housing insecure students,

3) lobby to advance government policies and practices supporting higher education students facing housing insecurity, and 4) shift research related to higher education students facing adversity from persistence to discovering factors supporting adaptation and integration factors that promote resilience and thriving.

Findings from this study suggested that there needs to be more awareness among college community members regarding the significance of housing insecurity despite research pointing to more than half of HBCU students self-reporting experiences with this adversity (Dahl et al., 2022). Instituting an awareness campaign on campus could impact how housing insecure students reimagine their circumstances and engage external and academic factors to foster and sustain resiliency and thriving. A well-designed awareness campaign could also reduce the stigma associated with this adversity and increase the number of individuals willing to share experiences that could positively shape intervention strategies.

Participants in this study described benefiting from emergency funds provided by student support services. These programs were not directly targeting housing insecure students. The participants described support for short-term, one-off issues. Programs were not designed to relieve chronic adversity, such as housing insecurity. At both institutions, the president was noted as the most direct route to finding relief. This research would suggest that the Student Affairs Office or other formal units explicitly address housing insecurity and include language in its scope of services that would communicate the availability of this support. Language should be intentionally constructed not to perpetuate a climate of discrimination or negative perceptions of individuals accessing the services. The literature supporting this study suggested that there are few external policies or legislation mandating support for housing insecure students within higher education similar to those targeting K-12. Findings from this study would support lobbying efforts to create new or expand existing legislation addressing housing insecurity among youth to include higher education students.

Participants in this study demonstrated an ability to tap into factors across all three systems to adapt to adversity challenging resiliency and thriving. Previous research on students facing adversity has focused on students persisting to the point of overcoming the challenge to academic success. While participants in the study demonstrate satisfaction with their academic progress, incorporating coaching and training for higher education students on adapting and integrating protection mechanisms to achieve academic success could increase satisfaction. Helping students to shift from a deficit perspective and being gritty enough to persist through to an approach that helps them to flourish would have value in ensuring that students enjoy a holistic college experience.

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