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UNDERSTANDING THE HOMESICK EXPERIENCE THROUGH THE NARRATIVES OF
FIRST-YEAR COLLEGE RESIDENTIAL STUDENTS

A Dissertation Submitted to Molloy College
Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
TALITA SANTOS FERRARA

Dr. Allison Roda, Dissertation Supervisor

MARCH 2022

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2022

Molloy College



SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES

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ABSTRACT

Homesickness is a complex phenomenon that operates on a spectrum and impacts individuals' psychological, cognitive, and physical functioning. Sufferers experience a preoccupation of home and a strong desire to return home. In higher education, homesickness among first-year students has been linked to a higher risk of dropping out of school, symptoms of depression and anxiety, and a lack of satisfaction with the overall college experience. Through the lens of belongingness theory, this phenomenological study examined the essence of the homesick experience among first-time undergraduate college students living in the residence halls of a private Catholic college in the Northeast. The seven participants self-identified as experiencing homesickness during their first week away from home and agreed to participate in three semi-structured interviews across the span of the Fall 2020 semester when COVID-19 precautions were in place. Most participants spoke about homesickness as a paradoxical experience filled with mixed emotions. Common triggers of homesickness included reminders of home, a lack of activities and connections, and being alone. Participants indicated that establishing a sense of comfort in their new environment played a central role in reducing symptoms of homesickness. Lastly, the COVID-19 pandemic prolonged students' homesickness and created an additional obstacle from achieving a sense of belonging at college. This study adds important dimensions to the complex nature of homesickness and its progression for first-year college students. Recommendations for parental guardians, higher education administration, and students are outlined for reducing or avoiding homesickness.

Keywords: homesickness, belonging, residential college students, COVID-19

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am immensely grateful to be surrounded by so much support from my family, friends, faculty, and colleagues. Dr. Roda: Thank you for introducing me to the beautiful world of qualitative research. Your wisdom, direction, and calming presence were invaluable to my dissertation process. Dr. Biscari: As a colleague and a friend, you somehow achieve the perfect balance of nudging me out of my comfort zone, while also creating a safe and supportive space. Dr. Nadrich: Thank you for your attention to detail, guidance, and for helping me grow as an academic writer. To the faculty and administration at Molloy College and the entire School of Education: Thank you for this priceless opportunity.

To my husband and best friend, Mike: I could not have completed this journey without you. From my countless hours in front of the computer, to the many moments when mom guilt knocked me down, you were always there with a plate of seafood, a shoulder to cry on, and the reassurance that everything would be okay. To my family, mãe, papai, and Babita: Thank you for the unconditional love and for the integral part each of you had in making me the person I am today. I deeply cherish our perfectly imperfect family. To the friends that have become family—George, Lauren, Lois, Jess, Nanny, Papa, Katherine, and so many more: Thank you for adding so much love to my life.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my children, Madisyn and Robby. When I walked into my first doctorate class, Robby, you were in my belly, and Madisyn, you were in diapers.

Although you are both still too young to read this, please know that the innocence of your smiles, warmest of hugs, and purest form of love nurtured me throughout the dissertation process. Being your mother has been, and always will be, my greatest accomplishment. I hope I make you as proud as you both make me.

PREFACE

In December 1994, I landed at John F. Kennedy airport with my sister, a suitcase, and a coat far too thin to handle the bitter cold of a winter day in New York. I recall the paradoxical experience of feeling an internal emptiness after leaving my father and native country behind, while feeling anticipation and excitement to reunite with my mother who had moved to the United States in 1990 to seek a better future for our family. During my first 10 years of life in Brazil, I exuded independence, confidence, and extraversion. I was the kid that befriended the stranger on the bus and faced new adventures, like the start of a school year, with enthusiasm and self-assurance.

However, like an unannounced tidal wave, the sudden and forceful homesickness that crashed upon me when I arrived in the United States abruptly separated me from the characteristics so integral to my personal identity. I became introverted, scared, and completely codependent on my mother. School and interpersonal interactions, which I thrived in all my life, were now settings that brought me great physiological and psychological distress. During my walk to school every morning, my stomach would churn, and my body would stiffen as if preparing for battle. I found myself consumed with anxious and intrusive thoughts. Consequently, I progressively isolated from my peers. Homesickness had stripped me of who I was and left behind a girl I did not recognize.

As quickly as the tidal wave of homesickness came, it receded. Four months after my arrival in the United States, I returned to the outgoing and independent little girl I was when I left Brazil. I felt comfortable in my new surroundings and began to form new relationships. To this day, I try to make sense of my personal experience with homesickness. Homesickness was a phenomenon strong enough to alter so many aspects of my self-identity and life satisfaction but

also so quick to subside. Although I can vividly recall the angst I felt, how I overcame homesickness continues to be unclear. This is where my study on understanding the lived experiences of first-year college residential students experiencing homesickness fills a gap in what we know about the symptoms, coping mechanisms, and progression of this phenomenon.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Homesickness is a near-universal occurrence to people separating from their home for a prolonged period (Thurber, 2005). Homesickness is “a complex cognitive-motivational-emotional state concerned with grieving for, yearning for and being occupied with thoughts of home” (Fisher & Hood, 1988, p. 426). People experiencing homesickness present with a range of physical, cognitive, and psychological symptoms ranging from mild to severe (Fisher, 2017).

In the past two decades, college attainment in the United States has increased significantly. In 1999, approximately 25% of Americans attained a college degree or higher, while this figure grew to 36% in 2019 (Duffin, 2020). In addition to an increase in college attainment, researchers have addressed the benefits of students living on campus. For instance, Astin (1984) found that residential students have a better engagement with peers and professors in comparison to students who live off campus. Three decades later, Douglas-Gabriel (2015) also highlighted the association between living on campus and a better college adjustment. As many as 87 colleges and universities in the United States make it a requirement for first-year students to live on campus, partially to increase the likelihood of a successful college experience (Douglas-Gabriel, 2015). Although, for some students, living on campus can be an exciting experience associated with increased independence, the separation from home can have a devastating impact for other students suffering with homesickness (Thurber & Walton, 2012).

There exists a wide variation in the prevalence of homesickness among college students, ranging from 31% to 94% among first-year students (English et al., 2016; Fisher & Hood, 1988). Nonetheless, homesickness has been cited as one of the top concerns faced by first-time residential students (Fisher, 2017). In addition to its prevalence, homesickness has been linked to an increased chance of dropping out of school, an overall lack of college satisfaction, and an

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association with symptoms of depression and anxiety (Daugherty & Lane, 1999; Fisher, 2017; Sun et al., 2016; Thurber & Walton, 2012). Considering its pervasiveness, negative impact on the college experience, and mental health implications, the objective of this research is to understand the homesickness phenomenon among first-year college residential students through the lens of belongingness theory.

Theoretical and Conceptual Underpinnings

The emphasis on the importance of belonging can be dated back to Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs. Maslow proposed that to reach full life satisfaction, humans need to achieve a sense of feeling connected with and cared for by others. The concepts of social support, connection, and belonging in the college environment are intertwined with the manifestation of the homesickness experience (Daugherty & Lane, 1999; Strayhorn, 2019). As an expansion of Maslow's tier of love and belonging, Baumeister and Leary (1995) conceived of belongingness theory and proposed that human beings are born with a need to form and maintain interpersonal relationships. Baumeister and Leary argued that all humans crave to have a certain amount of intimate connection with others.

In addition to emphasizing the importance of belongingness and interpersonal support in the human experience, Baumeister and Leary (1995) discussed factors that need to be in place to foster personal connections. Mainly, personal connections need to have "stability, affective concern, and continuation into the foreseeable future" (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 500). The theorists also cautioned that upon the dissolution of these interpersonal connections, people can experience devastating psychological and physiological consequences. In to higher education context, when college students move into on-campus housing, they are faced with a separation from the previously established connections from back home (Watt & Badger, 2009).

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Strayhorn (2019) identified belonging as a crucial component of a successful college experience. In their study, Gopalan and Brady (2019) confirmed, “at 4-year colleges, belonging was positively associated with persistence, use of campus services, and mental health” (p. 135). Relatedly, as a person relocates to live in the residence hall of their college of choice, theorists have suggested that the separation, although not permanent, may interrupt the stability of potentially existing safe and supportive home-based relationships that are so crucial to the establishment of students’ sense of belonging (Watt & Badger, 2009). Consequently, following this disruption, individuals may experience distressing psychological symptoms, which can be defined as homesickness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

The final element of belongingness theory that is important to discuss regarding homesickness is the assertion that “the need to belong can, in principle, be directed toward any other human being, and the loss of relationship with one person can to some extent be replaced by any other” (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 500). Baumeister and Leary’s (1995) assertion suggested that the perceived loss of relationships with family and/or friends from the hometown after relocation to college could, in essence, be replaced by new relationships formed at college. Therefore, if students develop strong interpersonal connections in the college setting, their need of belonging would be met and their feelings of homesickness would subside.

It is important to note that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the participants in this study were living on campus with new health and safety regulations. Previous highly publicized pandemic illnesses, such the 2009 H1N1 influenza, led to some college students experiencing an increase in fear of contracting the disease and overall health anxiety (Wheaton et al., 2011). Likewise, college life during the COVID-19 pandemic has been cited as sharing familiar characteristics of college during the influenza pandemic of 1918 (Scott, 2020). Scott (2020)

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compared both pandemics as a shared “kindred moment of social distancing, deep anxiety mixed with devil-may-care attitudes, and, of course, the awkwardness of life in face masks” (para. 7). COVID-19 health and safety regulations included wearing a face covering, practicing social distancing, and a decrease in the amount of face-to-face academic and social college offerings. Accordingly, it was presumed that the pandemic would present an obstacle in the development of new interpersonal connections and an increase in psychological disturbances among participants in my study.

Statement of the Problem

Researchers have cited homesickness as a prevalent phenomenon with debilitating effects on sufferers (Fisher, 2017), and have explored the symptomology, risk factors, and coping strategies associated with homesickness (VanTilburg, 1996). Fisher asserted that the symptoms of homesickness can negatively affect a person’s physical, cognitive, and psychological well-being. Symptoms of homesickness may include gastrointestinal complaints, weakened immunity to infections, disruption in appetite, pervasive negative thoughts about the new environment, depressed mood, loneliness, and anxiety (Fisher, 2017; VanTilburg, 1996).

In reference to risk factors, researchers have discussed the following groups of college students to be at a higher risk of experiencing homesickness: people who (1) have less control over the decision to relocate; (2) live farther away from home; and (3) identify as Black, Latinx, or Asian attending a predominately White institution (Fisher, 2017; Poyrazili & Lopez, 2007; Sodowsky & Plake, 1992; Thurber & Weisz, 1997). Bourke (2016) defined a predominantly White institution (PWI):

PWI means much more than simply the number of White students (50 percent of more) that are enrolled in relation to the number of members of underrepresented groups that

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are enrolled... [it]signifies the extent to which Whiteness is embedded throughout interconnected organizational practices. (pp. 18-19)

The potential increased vulnerability to homesickness of Black, Latinx, and Asian students attending PWIs in comparison to White students may include the prevalence of experiencing racial discrimination in the new setting, an overall lower sense of belonging, and insufficient efforts by the PWI to include a racially diverse representation in the campus culture and customs (Gopalan & Brady, 2019; Poyrazili & Lopez, 2007; Sadowsky & Plake, 1992; Strayhorn, 2019).

Third, past researchers have suggested that cognitive behavioral therapy and building social connections in the new place are effective coping strategies in overcoming homesickness (Denovan & Macaskill, 2013; Saravanan et al., 2017; Thurber, 2005). As defined by Benjamin et al. (2011), cognitive behavioral therapy “represents a combination of behavioral and cognitive theories of human behavior and psychopathology, and a melding of emotional, familial, and peer influences” (p. 179). In reference to homesickness, cognitive behavioral therapy interventions include helping clients identify and challenge negative and distorted thoughts about the new environment and explore effective coping strategies to enhance emotional regulation (Saravanan et al., 2017).

Although researchers have yielded significant information on homesickness, I aimed to address three gaps in the current literature. First, my goal was to understand the lived experiences of homesickness through the shared experience of those affected by homesickness. Second, the limited qualitative research on homesickness have consisted of either interviews of participants after their symptoms had subsided (Saravanan et al., 2019) or only one interview providing a single snapshot of the homesick experience (Denovan & Macaskill, 2013). A limitation in the existing literature is the lack of understanding in the lived experience of people

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with homesickness across time. Third, since the pandemic is so recent, I was not able to find a study on the impact of COVID-19 on homesickness and belonging at college. Therefore, I sought to understand the essence of the homesick experience of first-time undergraduate college students living in the residence halls of a private Catholic college in the Northeast during the COVID-19 pandemic, by listening to participants' subjective experience across the span of their first semester away at college.

Research Questions

Drawing on belongingness theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), this study intended to answer several questions:

1. How do first-time undergraduate students living in the residence halls of a private Catholic college in the Northeast experience feelings of homesickness?
2. What contributing factors help or hinder these students in overcoming homesickness?
3. According to students, what role does belongingness in the new environment play in the trajectory of the homesick experience?
 - 3a. How does social distancing and online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic play a part in the belongingness and homesickness processes?

Methods

As previously discussed, the existing literature on homesickness has a deficit in qualitative measures of inquiry. I utilized a phenomenological research design to address the deficit in qualitative research on homesickness and to answer my research questions. In the true essence of phenomenology, I sought to understand the phenomenon of homesickness by listening to the subjective experiences of those that were feeling homesick. Since homesickness is experienced by individuals that have initially physically separated from home (Fisher, 2017), the

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study focused on only first-year students living in on-campus housing who report a longing for home during the first week at college.

This study also aimed to address the research gap that specifically follows the progression of the homesick experience. Therefore, I conducted three audio-taped, semi-structured Zoom video interviews across the span of the students' first semester away at college during Weeks 1-2, Weeks 6-7, and Weeks 13-14. The selection of interview weeks was partially based on Bell and Bromnick's (1998) suggestion that homesickness significantly decreased from the second to the sixth week away at college. In addition to semi-structured Zoom video interviews, I asked participants to use a digital journal to document their homesick experiences in between interviews. As advised by Vagle (2018), a journal can provide a phenomenologist researcher a "space to wonder, question, think, contradict yourself, agree with yourself, vent, scream, laugh, and celebrate" (p. 155). Likewise, I kept a research journal and took field notes during and after each Zoom video interview session to process my emotional responses and minimize biased data collection, processing, and interpretation. My field notes included nonverbal communication such as participants' facial expression and gestures, as well as the environment where the student was participating in the Zoom interviews.

Settings and Participants

My study took place in a PWI private Catholic college located in a suburban community in the Northeast. During the 2018–2019 academic year, the college comprised 76% faculty and employees that identified as White. In the Fall 2020 semester, the population of 83 first-time residential students comprised 71% female and 88% residents of New York State. In reference to the students' racial identity on the college campus, 43% identified as White, 24% Latinx, 24% as two or more races, 4% Asian, 2% Black, 2% who did not wish to disclose their racial identity,

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and 1% who identified as American Indian. The College had three residence halls with approximately 160 students living on campus.

As previously stated, Black, Latinx, and Asian students are subjected to increased discrimination on college campuses and may be more vulnerable to experiencing homesickness and a lack of belonging, especially while attending a PWI (Gopalan & Brady, 2019; Poyrazili & Lopez, 2007; Sodowsky & Plake, 1992; Strayhorn, 2019). Although the objective was to understand the general lived experiences of first-year residential students, I believed it would be beneficial to have as much diversity as possible in my data. My purposeful sampling included seeking a racially diverse participant sample, to prevent data analysis and interpretation from being limited to only the White lived experience of homesickness (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

I purposefully sampled 5 to 10 student participants from a population of approximately 83 residential first-time students. According to Cohen et al. (2000), 5 to 10 participants is an ideal range for phenomenological research, because it allows for detailed information to be collected while gaining a widespread understanding of participants' lived experiences. I reached out to first-year residential students via email during students' first week in the residence hall. In the email, I introduced myself, my study, and requested that students complete a voluntary screening questionnaire. The screening questionnaire included basic demographic information and a question about whether the student was experiencing a longing for home. I reviewed the information from the screening questionnaires, and via email and telephone, I recruited participants who responded "yes" to longing for home.

Data Analysis

The research data were analyzed throughout the data-collection process. The data analysis began by transcribing interview content verbatim on Rev.com, a confidential

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transcription service. I then read over the transcripts, wrote notes in the margins, and “let the interview breathe and speak for itself” (Seidman, 2013, p. 121). As I continued to read the transcripts, patterns began to emerge, and I separated the data into theory-driven and in-vivo codes (Saldaña, 2012). I inputted the codes and transcripts into Dedoose, a web-based software that I used to help organize my qualitative data. Last, I combined codes to create analytical themes. As recommended by Padilla-Díaz (2015), throughout the data analysis, I focused on what was expressed during the interview and how it was expressed. I searched for the essence or meaning behind the participants’ words.

Limitations and Assumptions

The first limitation of my study was that two participants voluntarily dropped out of the study after the initial interview. Therefore, the data I collected from two of the participants was limited to the participants’ lived experience during their first week away from home. Second, there was a lack of diversity in my participant sample. All the participants in my study identified as female, heterosexual, and 72% identified as White. Third, I recommended that participants keep a personal journal to reflect on their experience with homesickness in between interviews. However, only two out of the seven participants shared with me the content of their student journal.

Definition of Key Terms

The following key terms are defined in the manner in which they were used in my study:

- 1. Homesickness:** “a complex cognitive-motivational-emotional state concerned with grieving for, yearning for and being occupied with thoughts of home” (Fisher & Hood, 1988, p. 426).

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2. **Belongingness/Belonging:** “students’ perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling care about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus as faculty, staff, and peers” (Strayhorn, 2019, p. 4).
3. **First-time student:** “a student who has no prior postsecondary experience attending any institution for the first time at the undergraduate level. This includes students enrolled in academic or occupational programs. It also includes students enrolled in the Fall term who attended college for the first time in the prior summer term, and students who entered with advanced standing (college credits or recognized postsecondary credential earned before graduation from high school)” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019, p. 10).
4. **On-campus housing:** “Any residence hall or housing facility owned or controlled by an institution within the same reasonably contiguous geographic area and used by the institution in direct support of or in a manner related to, the institution's educational purposes” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019, p. 21).
5. **First-time residential student:** Based on the definitions of first-time student and on-campus housing provided above from the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), this is defined as a first-time student of the college who resides in on-campus housing.
6. **Predominantly White Institution (PWI):** “Means much more than simply the number of White students (50 percent or more) that are enrolled in relation to the number of members of underrepresented groups that are enrolled... [it] signifies the extent to which Whiteness is embedded throughout interconnected organizational practices” (Bourke, 2016, pp. 18-19).

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- 7. Social support:** "Support which is provided by other people and arises within the context of interpersonal relationships" (Cooke et al., 1988, p. 211). Forms of social support include emotional support, instrumental support, informational support, and appraisal support.

Conclusion

This chapter introduced my dissertation study. I dedicated each of the four subsequent chapters in my dissertation to a specific content area. Chapter Two provides a review of the current literature on homesickness, explores the study's theoretical framework, and explains how this study addresses the gap in the current literature. Chapter Three describes the research methods, sampling process, data collection and data analysis procedures, trustworthiness of the study, ethical considerations, and my role as a researcher. Chapter Four reviews the research findings. Chapter Five discusses the implications and limitations of my study as well as areas of future research. Last, following the references section, in the appendices, I present the Institutional Review Board approval letter, the recruitment questionnaire, and the interview protocols for this study.

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Chapter 2: Literature Review

The transition from high school to college is an important milestone in a student's life. For many young adults, this transition marks students' first time being away from home for an extended period (Thurber & Walton, 2012). Although the experience of pursuing a college degree and achieving a sense of autonomy from one's family of origin can be exciting and invigorating, residential students living on campus can also find the transition to be anxiety provoking and isolating (Thurber & Walton, 2012). Fisher and Hood (1988) defined *homesickness* as "a complex cognitive-motivational-emotional state concerned with grieving for, yearning for and being occupied with thoughts of home" (p. 426), while Thurber and Walton (2012) described *homesickness* as "the distress or impairment caused by an actual or anticipated separation from home" (p. 415). The symptoms associated with homesickness range from mild to severe (Fisher, 2017).

Although some level of homesickness is relatively common following a move, researchers have found a range in the prevalence of this phenomenon (VanTilburg, 1996). The range in the prevalence of homesickness is partially caused by differences on measures and definitions of homesickness, varying lengths of time participants were away from home, and the contextual diversity involving relocation (Stroebe et al., 2002). For instance, in a study on boarding school children ranging from 11 to 16 years old, Fisher et al. (1984) found a mere 16% prevalence rate when the term 'homesickness' was missing from the questionnaire. However, two years later, a similar study in context and participant demographics found 71% of students

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experienced homesickness during their time away from home in boarding school (Fisher et al., 1986).¹

Likewise, variation in the prevalence of homesickness also exists in higher education. In a study on first-year residential students' adjustment at a U.S. university, researchers found that 31% of the 198 participants reported experiencing homesickness (Fisher & Hood, 1987). However, in a more recent comparable study on first-year college students, researchers found that 94% of students experienced some level of homesickness during their first semester away from home (English et al., 2016).

Regardless of the variation in prevalence rates across the literature, homesickness is listed as one of the top complaints of student sojourners (Fisher, 2017). Researchers support the assertion that some level of homesickness is relatively common following relocation (VanTilburg, 1996). Homesickness is a common experience to any person separating from home, regardless of age, gender, and cultural background (Fisher, 2017; Thurber, 2005). Homesickness is documented in various contexts, including higher education, boarding school, sleepaway camp, military deployment, domestic migration, and immigration (Eurelings-Bontekoe et al., 1994; Fisher, 2017; Fisher et al., 1986; Hack-Polay, 2012; Tartakovsky, 2007; Thurber, 2005).

As residing on a university campus rises in popularity, so has the interest in better understanding how homesickness impacts the overall college experience (Fisher, 2017). English et al. (2016) collected quantitative data from 174 undergraduate students weekly throughout the first 10 weeks of the semester. The students completed questionnaires assessing their level of homesickness, adjustment, and emotional experience. The researchers used the data from the

¹ Portions of Chapter Two were previously published: Ferrara, T. (2020). Understanding homesickness: A review of the literature. *Journal for Leadership and Instruction*, 19(1), 8-15. For the copyright release, reference Appendix E.

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questionnaires to examine how homesickness evolved during the first semester away at college and whether there was an association between experiencing homesickness and the students' overall adjustment. English et al. found that students who reported feeling homesick had an overall worse academic and social adjustment in college in comparison to students who did not report experiencing homesickness.

Consequently, difficulty adjusting to the new college environment can lead to a student's decision to prematurely withdraw from college. Thurber and Walton (2012) cited that homesick students are "3 times more likely to drop out of school than those who were not homesick" (p. 416). Sun et al. (2016) supported this assertion, concluding that the distress linked to homesickness is associated with smaller chances of student retention in higher education. In a search to better understand the specific factors linked to college retention, researchers found that, in comparison to students that graduated from college, the students that left college prior to graduation reported being more socially isolated (Daugherty & Lane, 1999). Likewise, Strayhorn (2019) emphasized how achieving a sense of belonging and being connected within social and academic groups positively impacts retention rates. The important roles that social support and a sense of belonging play in the overall college experience is a concept intertwined with homesickness, which is discussed further in the literature review.

In addition to retention rates, the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected college students' mental health and college enrollment (Son et al., 2020). According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2020), undergraduate college enrollment was down 4.4% in November 2020 compared to November 2019. In April 2020, a few months after COVID-19 emerged in the United States, Son et al. (2020) conducted a study on 195 students attending a university in the United States. The results of the study indicated that 71% of

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participants reported increased anxiety and stress and 86% of students experienced decreased social connectedness and increased isolation as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Son et al., 2020). Considering the negative affects COVID-19 has had on college students' mental and emotional well-being (Son et al., 2020), I was interested in learning how the COVID-19 pandemic would impact the trajectory of the homesick experience.

Given its prevalence and negative impact on college satisfaction and graduation, the issue of homesickness among college students is an important research topic. In this chapter, I provide readers with a comprehensive understanding of homesickness, with a focus on higher education. First, I introduce the theoretical framework I selected to frame my study, followed by the themes across the existing literature on homesickness. The three major themes are symptomology, risk factors, and coping strategies. Chapter Two concludes with a discussion on how I aimed at bridging the gaps and limitations from earlier studies.

Belongingness Theory and Homesickness

One of the first theorists to introduce the importance of belonging in human development was Abraham Maslow (1954). In the hierarchy of needs, Maslow proposed that for people to reach their full potential, they must first meet certain prerequisites. In order from basic to most sophisticated, Maslow's prerequisites included physiological needs (e.g., shelter, food), safety (e.g., security), love and belonging (e.g., personal connections, feeling cared by others), esteem (e.g., competence, self-worth), and self-actualization (e.g., realization of one's full potential, self-acceptance). Maslow argued that if a person did not feel a sense of belonging, that individual would not be able to reach a full and authentic sense of life satisfaction.

Drawing from Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs, Baumeister and Leary (1995) founded belongingness theory, in which they proposed the need to belong is "a need to form and

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maintain at least a minimum quantity of interpersonal relationships, is innately prepared (and hence nearly universal) among human beings” (p. 499). The theorists suggested that the achievement of interpersonal acceptance leads to feelings of pleasure and fulfillment.

Conversely, when people are faced with rejection or a loss of previously established social bonds, people experience psychological disturbances. Baumeister and Leary theorized that the desire to feel pleasure and avoid emotional pain motivates the human behavior to seek interpersonal acceptance.

The authors asserted that two conditions must be met for a person to satisfy the need to belong:

First, people need frequent personal contacts or interactions with the other person.

Ideally, these interactions would be effectively positive or pleasant, but it is mainly important that the majority be free from conflict and negative effect. Second, people need to perceive that there is an interpersonal bond or relationship marked by stability, affective concern, and continuation into the foreseeable future. (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 500)

As presented in the excerpt above, a person needs to have positive interpersonal relationships and direct and frequent contact with social support figures to successfully meet one's belongingness need. Social support is defined as “support which is provided by other people and arises within the context of interpersonal relationships” (Cooke et al., 1988, p. 211). Therefore, social support may include family members, peers, community members, and other supportive figures. Through the lens of belongingness theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), the physical separation from home encountered by first-year residential students may be perceived as a loss of pre-established personal contacts and consequently present a deficit in the person's need to belong.

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Furthermore, Baumeister and Leary (1995) suggested that once humans establish a strong interpersonal bond, they will actively resist its dissolution. When the dissolution of pre-existing bonds does occur, Baumeister and Leary presumed that the people impacted by the dissolution would experience psychological disturbances, such as feelings of loneliness and social isolation. Likewise, when a student relocates from home to college, the student undergoes a sudden reduction in physical contact with previous social networks (Watt & Badger, 2009). For instance, prior to college, a student may feel a sense of belonging with one's family unit and childhood friends. Conversely, during the initial transition to college, that same student is now living in a new environment surrounded by unknown people (Watt & Badger, 2009). Even though technology may allow for video-chatting opportunities, the physical presence of previous support is no longer accessible on a regular basis due to the physical separation of being away at college (Watt & Badger, 2009).

Adding to the dilemma, the importance of feeling a sense of belonging is heightened during situations when people find themselves in an unfamiliar environment, such as the transition into college (Strayhorn, 2019). Further supported by Thurber and Walton (2012), "the university environment also stirs nearly every student's innate desire to belong" (p. 416). In essence, the perceived dissolution of pre-existing bonds due to physical separation from home, paired with the innate desire to feel socially connected, is viewed as the manifestation of homesickness among college students (Watt & Badger, 2009).

Students experiencing homesickness during their first semester away at college may feel a sense of grief from the perceived loss of their social support (Fisher, 2017). Hendrickson et al. (2011) found that international college students with a higher number of friends from their home country in their host country reported less homesickness in comparison to international students

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who were lacking peer support from home in their host country. The participants that felt socially connected also reported a higher level of satisfaction with their college experience. Hendrickson et al. concluded that engagement with familiar customs fostered a sense of belonging and consequently served as a protective factor against homesickness.

Belonging is so integral to the homesick experience, that even when relocating to economically better conditions, migrants are vulnerable to psychological distress and a yearning for home (Fried, 1966). As addressed by Fried (1966), “the sense of belonging someplace, in a particular place which is quite familiar and easily delineated” (p. 363), is central to emotional well-being. Amid urban renewal, Fried (1966) suggested that the psychological distress experienced by the majority of those who relocated partially stemmed from an interruption in migrants’ sense of belonging.

In higher education, Landa et al. (2019) utilized quantitative assessment tools to measure the quality of participants’ relationships and the occurrence of homesickness. Findings indicated that higher quality relationships in college was associated with lower reports of homesickness among 168 first-time residential students. Landa et al. emphasized the important role social connectedness at college plays in the trajectory of the homesickness experience. Using the lens of belongingness theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), I presumed that as students familiarize themselves with their new college surroundings and begin to build new meaningful attachments, students would achieve a sense of belonging in their new environment and feelings of homesickness would lessen accordingly.

Themes Across the Literature

Although homesickness impacts sufferers’ physical and mental health, the American Psychiatric Association (2013) does not directly recognize homesickness in the latest version of

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the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5). The DSM-5 (APA, 2013) is a "classification of mental health disorders with associated criteria designed to facilitate a more reliable diagnoses of these disorders" (p. xli). Some of the features of homesickness are evident in disorders found in the DSM-5 such as adjustment disorder, but homesickness itself is not listed as a mental disorder. Adjustment disorder is defined by the DSM-5 (APA, 2013) as "the presence of emotional or behavioral symptoms in response to an identifiable stressor/s, which occurred within three months of the beginning of the stressor/s" (p. 286). Mental health professionals can perceive the most severe form of homesickness as a manifestation of adjustment disorder.

In addition to using the DSM-5 (APA, 2013) as a diagnostic tool, mental health professionals reference the DSM-5 to help identify and implement effective treatment options. The multi-purpose nature of the DSM-5, and the exclusion of homesickness from this resource, creates specific challenges in defining, understanding, and treating homesickness. A better understanding of the homesick experience can provide stakeholders clarity on whether homesickness is a normal human experience that should not be pathologized, or if homesickness is a form of adjustment disorder that warrants a higher level of intervention and treatment. Accordingly, researchers have explored the symptomology, risk factors, and effective coping strategies associated with the homesickness phenomenon.

Symptomology

Symptoms of homesickness operate on a spectrum ranging from mild to severe. The symptoms of homesickness can impact sufferers' physical, cognitive, and psychological functioning (Fisher, 2017). Researchers have noted the multi-faceted features of homesickness across cultures, race, age, and contexts (Eurelings-Bontekoe, 1994; Fisher, 2017; Fisher et al.,

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1986; Hack-Polay, 2012; Tartakovsky, 2007; Thurber, 2005). In the review of the literature on symptomology, I explore the most common manifestations of homesickness related to the impairment of physical, cognitive, and psychological functioning. These symptomologies are not exhaustive, nor absolute, and different sufferers can report varying levels of intensity in their personal experience and perceptions.

Physical Symptoms

The disruptive and stressful experience of homesickness can generate a higher risk of ill health (Fisher, 2017). Physical ailments include the disruption in sleep and appetite, increased risk of infection, and gastrointestinal issues (Fisher, 2017; VanTilburg, 1996). The stressful nature of homesickness is linked to an increase in arousal. Consequently, high arousal, which impacts blood circulation, may lead to physical ailments such as headaches or dizziness (Fisher, 2017). In a study, Fisher et al. (1986) found a positive association between the frequency of physical ailments and homesickness among boarding school children.

The start of college can be a time when first-year students struggle with balancing high academic demands, course schedules, social life, and the overall transition from high school to college (Strayhorn, 2019). In conjunction, first-year students struggling with homesickness may also perceive a lack of control over their ability to overcome homesickness and have a positive college experience (Fisher, 2017; Strayhorn, 2019; VanTilburg, 1996). Fisher (2017) suggested that situations categorized by “high demand and low control” are associated with “raised effort and distress and high catecholamine and cortisol” (p. 57). These hormonal changes are associated with a suppression of the immune system, which can lead to frequent illness and infection. Therefore, first-year college students experiencing homesickness are susceptible to a range of physical ailments.

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Cognitive Symptoms

The cognitive symptoms of homesickness can manifest as pervasive thoughts about longing for and a desire to return home, and pessimistic views about the new environment (VanTilburg, 1996). In a cross-cultural study, Stroebe et al. (2002) found that in the United Kingdom and Netherlands, college students' rumination about home was a characteristic associated with homesickness. Researchers have studied the potential negative impact of homesickness on the college experience, particularly within the academic setting (Burt, 1993; Fisher, 2017; VanTilburg, 1996). In some instances, researchers have found that homesick university students experienced a reduction in attentional ability (Burt, 1993) and higher scores on the Cognitive Failures Questionnaire (Fisher et al., 1985). The Cognitive Failures Questionnaire measures the presence of absent-mindedness (Fisher et al., 1985). However, other researchers did not find a statistically significant difference in cognitive failure between non-homesick and homesick university students (Fisher & Hood, 1987).

Regardless of the inconsistent results on the association between cognitive failure and homesickness, Fisher and Hood (1988) argued that "cognitive states associated with fundamental themes of missing and longing for home drive varying emotional and motivational states" (p. 317). In other words, the consistent negative cognitive processing associated with homesickness has a negative impact on sufferers' psychological health. Likewise, Aaron Beck (1970), founder of cognitive therapy, proposed that "systematic study of self-reports suggests that an individual's belief systems, expectancies, and assumptions exert a strong influence on his state of well-being, as well as on his directly observable behavior" (Beck, 1970, p. 184). Sufferers of homesickness experience consistent negative thoughts about their new environment (VanTilburg, 1996). As suggested by Beck (1970), these negative thoughts can have a negative impact on sufferers'

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behavioral and psychological functioning. In severe cases, cognitive symptoms of homesickness can develop into pervasive mental health issues (Thurber & Walton, 2012).

Psychological Symptoms

In addition to physical and cognitive symptoms, homesickness is also marked by emotional and psychological disturbances, including depressed mood, loneliness, and anxiety (Fisher, 2017; VanTilburg, 1996). In comparison to the general college student population, homesick students are more likely to exhibit symptoms of anxiety and depression (Fisher et al., 1985; Fisher & Hood, 1987, 1988). In reference to anxious symptoms, sufferers of homesickness often feel nervous, panicky, and experience excessive worry (Fisher, 2017). In relation to symptoms of depression, sufferers of homesickness may socially withdraw and experience low self-esteem and loneliness (Thurber & Walton, 2012).

In a quantitative study on Dutch adults, Verschuur et al. (2004) reaffirmed that depression and anxiety are characteristics of homesickness. In addition, the researchers found that depressive symptoms in childhood was indicative of an increased susceptibility to experiencing recurring homesickness from childhood through adulthood. Researchers have cited the psychological disturbances associated with homesickness across cultures, age groups, and gender (Fisher 2017; Stroebe et al., 2002).

Homesickness is a complex phenomenon marked by varying levels of impairment in a person's physical, cognitive, and psychological functioning (Fisher, 2017). Homesickness is associated with physical ailments, pervasive thoughts about home, depression, and anxiety (Fisher, 2017; Stroebe et al., 2002; Thurber & Walton, 2012). Researchers have suggested that symptoms of homesickness can have adverse effects on a sufferer's overall functioning (Thurber & Walton, 2012).

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Risk Factors

While symptomology defines how homesickness impacts sufferers, the risk factor refers to the specific populations and conditions that increase a person's vulnerability to the homesick experience. Researchers have identified locus of control (Fisher, 2017), geographic distance (Sun et al., 2016), and racial demographics (Sodowsky & Plake, 1992) as potential risk factors for homesickness.

Locus of Control

During relocation, newcomers are likely to feel some lack of control over their new environment (Strayhorn, 2019). Therefore, perceived control is an important aspect of a successful adjustment following relocation. According to Fisher (2017), locus of control can be defined as a person's perceived ability to change the new environment (e.g., make friends, overcome homesickness) or one's level of control over the initial decision to relocate (e.g., choosing a college based on parental preference).

Thurber and Weisz (1997) explored the relationship between homesickness, adjustment, and perceived control in children (ages 8-16) attending a two-week sleepaway camp. Results indicated that children who perceived low control over the trajectory of homesickness and the decision to temporarily separate from home were more likely to experience homesickness. In higher education, Fisher et al. (1985) found that college students in the United Kingdom who reported having the primary responsibility of choosing to attend a specific college were less likely to experience homesickness, in comparison to students who felt pressured to attend a specific college because of parental influences. However, locus of control was not an influential factor in a study on homesickness in children attending boarding school (Fisher et al., 1986).

Geographic Distance

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Geographic distance away from home is another potential risk factor of homesickness (Fisher, 2017). Researchers have predicted that the further away people are from their home, the more likely they are to experience homesickness, because hypothetically, increased distance from home results in less frequent physical contact with the people and places that homesick students long for (Fisher et al., 1985; Sun et al., 2016). Consequently, researchers suggest that the students' inability or difficulty contacting home and social support puts sojourners at a higher risk of suffering from homesickness (Fisher, 2017).

In a quantitative study on first-year university students in the United Kingdom, researchers found a significant association between homesickness and geographic distance from home. Participants that were further away from home were more likely to experience feelings of homesickness (Fisher et al., 1985). A more recent quantitative study on over 10,000 first-year students attending the University of Missouri over three years confirmed Fisher et al.' findings. Sun et al. (2016) discovered that due to geographic distance away from home, out-of-state students, in comparison to students attending university in their home state, were at a greater risk of experiencing homesickness.

However, like the contradictions in research pertaining to locus of control, in a study on boarding school children, researchers did not find an association between geographic distance from home and experiences of homesickness (Fisher et al., 1986). Likewise, Brewin et al. (1989) reported that the relationship between geographic distance from home and homesickness among first-year students in their quantitative study was not statistically significant. However, Brewin et al. noted that the prevalence of homesickness in their sample, at 39%, was lower than the 60% to 79% prevalence range referenced in other studies on first-year college students. Brewin et al. hypothesized that the lower prevalence of homesickness in their study was linked to the fact that

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in their sample, the average distance from home was 200 miles, as opposed to the 300 miles distance in studies where the prevalence of homesickness ranged from 60% to 79%. Therefore, even though Brewin et al. did not find a statistically significant relationship between distance from home and homesickness, the researchers speculated the participants' distance from home did result in a lower overall frequency of homesickness in their sample.

Demographics

Researchers have presented mixed results in reference to the impact of demographics on homesickness. The research results have ranged from no statistically significant differences across race, gender, and age group, to females and individuals under the age of 18 reporting a higher prevalence of homesickness (Sun et al., 2016). Other researchers have cited race as a risk factor associated with the homesick experience due to increased discrimination (Sodowsky & Plake, 1992). Researchers have suggested that experiences of micro-aggression, racism, and a lack of racial representation at PWIs “lead underrepresented students to perceive their campus community as one in which individuals from their background are neither accepted nor regarded as important contributors, undermining their sense of belonging” (Wittrup & Hurd, 2019, p. 2).

Previous researchers have highlighted the inequality in discrimination among racial groups on college campuses (Biasco et al., 2001; Poyrazili & Lopez, 2007; Stayhorn, 2019). Poyrazili and Lopez (2007) found that European international students reported less discrimination on college campuses, in comparison to non-European international students. Likewise, Biasco et al. (2001) noted that the darker the students' skin color, the more likely students were to experience discrimination. Although Biasco et al. and Poyrazili and Lopez confirmed the concerning disparity in belonging between students of color and White students, the researchers did not directly connect race as a risk factor for homesickness.

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However, Sodowsky and Plake (1992) made the association between race and the homesick experience in their seminal work. In a mixed-methods study, Sodowsky and Plake utilized quantitative instruments to measure acculturation and instances of discrimination. The researchers used open-ended survey questions to examine themes of self-identity and transition to a new culture. Sodowsky and Plake found that in comparison to White international students, students of color were more likely to experience prejudice in their host nation. In addition, perceptions of prejudice were positively associated with homesickness. Therefore, Sodowsky and Plake suggested that international students of color were more vulnerable to the homesickness experience than White international students.

Coping Strategies

The research presented so far on belongingness, symptoms, and risk factors of homesickness provides a better understanding of the homesick experience. The next section of Chapter Two reviews the literature on effective treatment options and coping strategies of homesickness, including mental health counseling (Saravanan et al., 2017), social connections (Denovan & Macaskill, 2013), and a sense of belonging in the new environment (Watt & Badger, 2009).

Mental Health Counseling

Mental health counseling is often recommended as a treatment option to people struggling with the intense longing for home (Fisher, 2017). Although research is limited, Saravanan et al. (2017) empirically tested the effectiveness of counseling in treating homesickness. International students presenting with symptoms of homesickness and depression in Malaysia experienced a significant improvement in their mental health state after receiving seven sessions of cognitive behavior therapy (Saravanan et al., 2017). However, as addressed by

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Saravanan et al., counseling is not an available option for all students either due to lack of access or personal and cultural preferences.

Social Connections and Belonging

In pursuit of a comprehensive understanding of effective treatment modalities, Saravanan et al. (2019) conducted a follow-up study examining the coping strategies used by international students suffering from homesickness who were reportedly not interested in receiving counseling. Out of the 520 international students that reported experiencing homesickness and depression, 9 were found to have effectively treated their condition solely using self-administered coping strategies. Saravanan et al. conducted semi-structured interviews with the 9 students to learn what self-help interventions assisted the students in overcoming homesickness and depression. Some of the common themes found from the interviews included talking to a trusted peer, engaging in social and physical activities, and engaging in positive self-talk. Therefore, even though these 9 students did not receive clinical support from the college counseling center, their symptoms of homesickness were alleviated partially through the enhancement of social supports.

Likewise, in an interpretative phenomenological study on the college first-year experience, Donovan and Macaskill (2013) identified a common theme that an initial lack of social support at college worsened feelings of homesickness. On the contrary, as students began to develop a solid social support system in their new environment, they began to feel a sense of belonging and adjustment (Denovan & Macaskill, 2013). The interconnected role that social support and belonging play in treating homesickness was further supported in Thurber's (2005) quantitative research.

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Thurber (2005) tested the effectiveness of a multi-modal homesickness prevention package on boys ranging from 8 to 16 years old who were spending two weeks away from home at a summer camp for the first time in their lives. As the name of the approach suggested, Thurber's treatment package concentrated on preventive measures of addressing homesickness. In reference to social support, prior to the departure to summer camp, all the participants received an introductory telephone call from a camp staff member. Thurber suggested that these telephone calls would assist campers in feeling a sense of connection with at least one person at the campsite prior to the campers' arrival. Thurber hypothesized that these preventive strategies would lead to less experience of homesickness among campers, in comparison to the campers from the previous year who did not have access to the prevention package.

The severity of homesickness between the control group and the treatment group was statistically significant. Thurber (2005) concluded, "psychoeducation, social support, explicit coping instruction, caregiver education, practice time away from home, and surrogate caregiver training can reduce homesickness" (p. 555). Quantitative data from Thurber's study further highlight the vital role social connections and a supportive environment play in reducing the negative effects of homesickness.

The interconnection between social support and belonging at college is presented by Strayhorn (2019):

In terms of college, sense of belonging refers to students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling care about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus as faculty, staff, and peers. (p. 4)

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Researchers have found that a lower perceived sense of belonging at college is predictive of a higher likelihood of experiencing homesickness. For example, Sun et al. (2016) proposed, “once students feel more integrated to the university context, they are more likely to feel accepted, which will reduce the degree of homesick distress” (p. 955). However, Sun et al. did not empirically test the remediating effects of college integration and belonging on homesickness.

On the other hand, Watt and Badger (2009) did test the direct impact of belonging on homesickness. In a two-part study, Watt and Badger first explored the association between homesickness and the need to belong, followed by an experimental study seeking to prove a causal relationship between these two variables. Participants of the study were international students from 42 distinct countries, studying across five different universities in Australia and ranging from 18 to 45 years old. Watt and Badger measured homesickness and the need to belong using quantitative tools. For instance, the researchers used participants’ reported number of friends as the measurement for students’ level of social support on campus.

Although Watt and Badger (2009) found a positive association between homesickness and the need to belong, they were not able to support the substitution hypothesis. In the substitution hypothesis, Watt and Badger had predicted that social connections in a new place could fulfill the need to belong by replacing the connections from back home. Therefore, homesickness would dissipate once students formed social support at college. However, the measurement of social support in this study raises the question of whether the quantity or quality of relationships is more impactful in determining students’ level of satisfaction and fulfillment with their social support.

Gap in the Literature

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At the conclusion of a feature analysis of homesickness, Fisher et al. (1985) claimed that “homesickness is not a unitary concept; rather, it is a term that encompasses a wide range of individual thoughts, feelings, and attitudes, focusing primarily upon the former home and family” (p. 191). Qualitative measurements of homesickness and belonging through interviews would enable researchers to gain a deeper perspective of the complexity and subjectivity of the homesick lived experience. As indicated by Firmin et al. (2009), a qualitative research design provides “more in-depth explorations of student perspectives regarding this topic than typically could be garnered via other research approaches, such as surveys” (p. 58). This research seeks to qualitatively address the limitations in the current literature by gaining insight into the nature of relationships formed at college and the role these connections and belongingness play in the homesick experience.

As students started college in Fall 2020, they were faced with an added obstacle of achieving social connectedness in an environment that was physically isolating because of social distancing and new COVID-19 safety regulations (Laskowski, 2020). Health and safety restrictions—including a limited number of social gatherings, the sudden transition to online courses, and the requirement of wearing protective face coverings—resulted in college freshmen feeling a sense of loneliness, anxiety, and a lack of connection with the campus community (Laskowski, 2020). Although not directly connected with COVID-19, in a longitudinal quantitative study, Browman et al. (2019) found that social connectedness and involvement in non-academic activities were positively associated with college belonging and well-being among 882 undergraduate first-time college students. Conversely, the high frequency of social media use was negatively associated with belonging at college.

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Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a significant surge in social media use and a general reduction in social connectedness among college students (Laskowski, 2020). Since the COVID-19 virus is currently new, research on its impact on homesickness and the overall college experience is extremely limited. Therefore, this study sought to understand how social distancing and online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the belongingness and homesickness processes among first-year residential college students.

Concluding Remarks

Chapter Two presented a review of the existing literature on homesickness, which identified common symptoms and risk factors associated with the phenomenon, as well as effective coping strategies to assist with recovery. Homesickness is a condition that can negatively impact a person's physical, cognitive, and psychological well-being (Fisher, 2017). Although homesickness is prevalent among individuals regardless of race, age, and gender, risk factors including geographic distance from home, perceived locus of control, and race have been linked to a potential increase in the vulnerability to homesickness (Fisher, 2017; Fisher et al., 1985; Sodowsky, & Plake, 1992; Sun et al., 2016). Cognitive behavioral therapy and achieving a sense of belonging through social connections in the new environment have been found to alleviate symptoms of homesickness (Saravanan et al., 2017; Sun et al., 2016).

Although researchers have contributed valuable information to understanding homesickness, there is a need for the qualitative investigation of this phenomenon. Sun et al. (2016) made the following recommendations at the conclusion of their quantitative research:

Future researchers must continue to enhance scholars' understanding of the homesick experiences that either facilitate or hinder students' development and growth in college.

We suggest future researchers conduct a small-scale study, taking a qualitative approach

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to understand why some students suffer great distress after arriving at college...Future researcher could take a longitudinal approach and collect data multiple times during students' transition process. In so doing, educational researchers and practitioners could gain more insight into first-year college students' behavior and performance. (p. 955)

My study is aligned with this area of research by providing a more detailed and personal look into homesickness among first-year residential college students throughout students' first semester away from home. Instead of translating sufferers' feelings into numerical values and relationships, I conducted three in-depth semi-structured interviews to better understand the symptoms, risk factors, and effective coping strategies related to the homesick lived experience.

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Chapter 3: Methodology

Chapter Three presents the research methods utilized to conduct this phenomenological qualitative study. In this phenomenological study, I sought to understand homesickness through the reported experiences of first-time undergraduate students living in the residence halls of a private Catholic college in the Northeast region of the US. As outlined in Chapter Two, belongingness theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) frames the study, constructs its methodology, and situates the findings.

This chapter is organized into four major headings: study overview, research design, research methods, and summation. The major headings are further divided into subsequent categories. The study overview is subdivided into the problem statement, theoretical framework, purpose of the study, and research questions. Next, the research design section provides a thorough explanation of why phenomenology was chosen to answer the research questions, and I introduce my philosophical worldview and my role as the researcher. In the research methods section, I include the sampling process/participants/setting, data-collection procedures, data-analysis procedures and coding scheme, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. Last, in the summation section, I provide a general overview of the topics discussed throughout Chapter Three and conclude with an implication statement.

Study Overview

This section identifies the reasons why homesickness among college students is an important topic to study, recaps the theoretical framework, and concludes with a review of the purpose of the study and the research questions.

Problem Statement

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Homesickness, defined as “a complex cognitive-motivational-emotional state concerned with grieving for, yearning for and being occupied with thoughts of home” (Fisher & Hood, 1988, p. 426), is a phenomenon frequently experienced by those that permanently or temporarily move away from home. Although this phenomenon operates on a spectrum, some level of homesickness is near universal to anyone relocating (Thurber & Walton, 2012).

In higher education, researchers have cited upwards to 94% of residential students experiencing some level of homesickness (English et al., 2016), while other researchers have identified homesickness as one of the top complaints among first-year college students (Fisher, 2017; Thurber & Walton, 2012). In addition to the prevalence of homesickness during college students’ first semester away from home, homesickness is associated with overall college dissatisfaction, poor adjustment, and increased drop-out rates (Sun et al., 2016; Thurber & Walton, 2012). In its mild form, homesickness can be viewed as normative. However, if left untreated, homesickness has the potential to cause severe distress on sufferers, including depression, anxiety, absent-mindedness, and physiological impairments (Fisher, 2017). Considering its prevalence and detrimental impact on college retention and overall well-being, it is important for researchers to learn more about the topic of homesickness among first-year residential college students.

Theoretical Framework

In this phenomenological study, I examined homesickness through the lens of belongingness theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), which states that the “need to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of interpersonal relationships, is innately prepared (and hence nearly universal) among human beings” (p. 499). The theorists suggested that when these crucial interpersonal relationships are severed, through relocation for instance, a person can

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experience psychological distress. This psychological distress can be interpreted as the homesickness phenomenon (Watt & Badger, 2009). From the theoretical lens of belongingness, I was interested in further investigating the role that achieving a sense of belonging played in the trajectory of the homesick experience.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how first-time undergraduate students living in the residence halls of a private Catholic college in the Northeast experienced feelings of homesickness over the span of their first semester away from home. Drawing on belongingness theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), the research questions guiding the study were as follows:

1. How do first-time undergraduate students living in the residence halls of a private Catholic college in the Northeast experience feelings of homesickness?
2. What contributing factors help or hinder these students in overcoming homesickness?
3. According to students, what role does belongingness in the new environment play in the trajectory of the homesick experience?
 - 3a. How does social distancing and online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic play a part in the belongingness and homesickness processes?

Research Design

As previously noted, the vast majority of researchers have studied homesickness through quantitative means of questionnaires, surveys, and standardized assessment tools. Although past researchers have added to our understanding of the symptoms, risk factors, and coping strategies associated with homesickness, most researchers have attempted to place a numerical representation to sufferers' personal lived experience. In addition, the limited qualitative

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researchers who have studied homesickness among college students had interviewed their participants after the initial transition into college, when participants' homesickness had dissipated (Denovan & Macaskill, 2013; Saravanan et al., 2019).

To address the gap in the existing literature on homesickness, I carefully selected a research design that would shed light on some of the unanswered questions pertaining to this phenomenon. Previous quantitative researchers have attempted to reason and quantify the homesick experience. On the contrary, I chose a phenomenological research design for my study, because the design provided a platform for the phenomenon of homesickness to be understood directly from those experiencing homesickness as they were experiencing it. In addition, this phenomenological study contributes to the existing body of literature by showing the lived experience of homesickness throughout three different points of residential students' first semester away at college. The series of interviews examine the progression of homesickness of how the phenomenon worsened or improved.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) defined *phenomenology* as “a design of inquiry coming from philosophy and psychology in which the researcher described the lived experiences of individuals about the phenomenon as described by participants” (p. 13). In reference to Creswell and Creswell's quote, in my study, the phenomenon was homesickness and the participants were those that self-identify as experiencing some level of homesickness. The subjective experience of sufferers was central to understanding the phenomenon of homesickness. Phenomenological researchers place a strong emphasis on the subjective and experiential human experiences (Denovan & Macaskill, 2013), and this emphasis was the principal reason why I chose a phenomenological research design for my study.

Philosophical Worldview

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The philosophical worldview of *social constructivism*, which guided the aim of this study, was explained by Vagle (2018) in this way:

The philosophical assumption is that the individual is being, becoming, and moving through the lifeworld in intersubjective relationships with others and with intentional relationships with other things. The phenomenologist, then, is not studying the individual but is studying how a particular phenomenon manifests and appears in the lifeworld. (p. 23)

Ontologically, I operated from a relativism approach, in which reality is socially constructed and there is no singular reality. Through this phenomenological study, I honored and represented the different viewpoints of distinct participants in my study.

My epistemological belief, or relationship between myself and sufferers of homesickness, was one of multiple realities. In other words, my reality and the realities of the participants in my study impacted each other on some level. In essence, myself as the researcher and the first-time undergraduate residential students suffering with homesickness, were co-creators of the results of my study. I conducted this research from a multiple-realities viewpoint, in which I searched for general themes that emerged, while taking into account how a person's unique lived experience with homesickness shaped his or her reality.

Role of the Researcher

This dissertation was inspired by my own experience of homesickness when I emigrated from Brazil to the United States as a child. In my professional life, as the director of a college mental health counseling center, I have come across numerous students struggling with homesickness during their transition into college. I have counseled students that have been impacted in different degrees by homesickness. Some of my previous clients were able to adjust

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to college within the first couple of days; while others took weeks, months; and some made the decision to leave college and transfer to a college closer to home. My place of employment was also the setting of my research study. In subsequent sections of Chapter Three, I provide a detailed ethical consideration of this dual relationship and rationale for choosing my workplace as the research setting.

My personal experience with homesickness, and my role in the college community where my study took place, positioned me as an insider researcher. However, I was also an outsider researcher, because I was not experiencing homesickness when I conducted the study. I was also an employee of the college and not an undergraduate residential student like my participants.

Although my personal and professional experiences with homesickness presented innate biases, my experiences also granted me a certain level of empathy toward the participants in my study. As recommended by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), it is important to approach phenomenological study with empathic neutrality, which is an approach where qualitative researchers respond to participants with a non-judgmental and responsive stance. Even though I did not share my personal experiences with the students, my lived and professional experience with homesickness assisted me in achieving empathic neutrality. Consequently, it is my perception that the participants in my study felt a sense of safety and comfort disclosing their authentic lived experience during data collection.

Research Methods

In this portion of Chapter Three, I share my sampling process, including participant recruitment and selection, and the setting for the research. This is followed by a discussion of data collection and data analysis, including coding scheme, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

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Sampling Process, Participants, and Setting

The goal was to attain a sample size of approximately 5 to 10 students, following a purposeful sampling plan of 83 first-year residential students. As suggested by Vagle (2018), there is no magic number to how many participants are needed in phenomenological research. However, as advised by Cohen and colleagues (2000), the sample variation of 5 to 10 participants was small enough to reveal in-depth information about each participant's experiences with homesickness and large enough to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. In my study, data saturation was reached at 7 participants. The sample consisted of 71% female and 88% New York state hometown residents. In terms of racial identity, 43% identified as White, 24% Latinx, 24% as two or more races, 4% Asian, 2% Black, 2% that wished to not disclose their racial identity, and 1% American Indian.

Selection criteria for my research sample included being a first-year, first-time undergraduate student living in any of the three residence halls of a private Catholic college in the Northeast that self-identified as experiencing some level of longing for or missing home. Since homesickness relates to a physical separation from home (Fisher, 2017), only students living in the residence halls on campus were included in the study. As suggested by Seidman (2013):

We seek to come as close as possible to the participant's lived experience, as we select participants for our study, we choose to interview participants if at all possible who are currently engaged in those experiences that are relevant to the study. (p. 20)

Therefore, I only invited students to be a part of my study who reported experiencing some level of longing for or missing home during their first week away at college. In addition, considering the central role "home" plays in the homesick experience, I ensured that only students who could

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consent to be a part of a study without parental permission were included in the research. Thus, I only recruited students who were 18 years and older.

Prior to recruiting participants for this study, I obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board at Molloy College (Appendix A). I reached out to all first-year residential students, regardless of home state, via email during their first week in the residence hall. The email introduced my role as a researcher and asked students to complete a brief screening questionnaire on a voluntary basis (Appendix B). The screening questionnaire included basic demographic information and a question pertaining to whether the student was longing for home since being away at college. For students that responded “yes” to longing for home, the questionnaire asked if they consented for me to reach out to them via telephone and/or email to provide additional information about the research. Following students’ responses, I reached out to those who confirmed longing for home and consented to being contacted via telephone with an invitation to participate in the study. Students that did not respond to initial telephone communication were contacted via email as well. In addition, I provided students, via email, with a copy of the Informed Consent form (Appendix C) for the study.

My purposeful sampling included seeking a racially diverse participant sample. Since Black, Latinx, and Asian college students are more vulnerable to the homesick experience in comparison to White students due to discrimination and micro-aggressions, I strived to include a representative sample of Black, Latinx, and Asian students in my study (Gopalan & Brady, 2019; Poyrazili & Lopez, 2007; Sadowsky & Plake, 1992; Strayhorn, 2019).

At the start of my initial interview with students, I reviewed the Informed Consent form (Appendix C), answered any questions students had about the Informed Consent form, and obtained their electronic signature. During each interaction with participants, I identified my role

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as researcher and provided participants with available mental health services on and off campus. The information I provided helped students differentiate between my role as director and researcher, while also making sure students were introduced to the counselor that would be available to offer mental health assistance if needed. The distinction between my roles at the college ensured that I did not engage in a dual relationship as clinician and researcher. Furthermore, the information I provided confirmed that the participants in my study had access to free and confidential clinical support if needed.

I selected my place of employment as the setting for my research because of my connection with the college. Bodgan and Biklen (2007) advised qualitative researchers to “interact with their subjects in a natural, unobtrusive, and nonthreatening manner” (p. 37). As the director of the mental health counseling center, I was someone that the incoming first-year, first-time students were familiar with, because of my presence at summer student orientation, and residential student move-in day activities. Prior to each interaction I had with participants, I clarified that research interviews were not counseling sessions and differentiated my role as a researcher versus a clinical counselor. Based on the content of my research interviews, I believe the participants felt comfortable sharing their personal homesickness encounters with me, partially because of my primary role at the college.

Data-Collection Procedures

My data-collection procedure included a three-interview video series (Appendix D) conducted via Zoom. As opposed to a single interview, the three-interview series allow “both the interviewer and participant to explore the participant’s experience, place it in context, and reflect on its meaning” (Seidman, 2013, p. 20). I conducted audio-taped, semi-structured video interviews at three different points of the participants’ first semester away at college (week 1-2,

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week 6-7, and during the final week living on campus). These interview weeks were selected partially because of Bell and Bromnick's (1998) study on homesickness among first-year university students. Bell and Bromnick found that the participants in their study experienced a significantly higher level of homesickness during the first two weeks of starting college, in comparison to six weeks into the semester. Even in the initial honeymoon phase, generally marked by excitement in the new environment, it is common for people to still feel a sense of homesickness (Owuso et al., 2014). The series of interviews helped me examine the progression of homesickness, including how feelings of homesickness worsened or improved as the semester progressed.

During the research interviews, my goal was to "come as close as possible to understanding the true 'is' of participants' experience from their subjective point of view" (Seidman, 2013, p. 17). As recommended by Seidman, I focused the first interview on building rapport and on exploring participants' experiences since starting college. The first interview was comprised of questions pertaining to the participants' initial feelings on campus, background information, home life, social life, history with homesickness, being away from home, and feeling a sense of belonging in participants' home environment. After I obtained initial rapport and background information, I focused the second interview on exploring the participants' experience with homesickness. For instance, I wanted to understand how residential students' homesickness had shifted from the initial weeks at college. In addition, I inquired about potential new relationships, students' sense of belonging, and what the participants were doing to reduce feelings of homesickness.

Last, the third interviews were conducted before Thanksgiving break, when students were concluding their time living on campus for the Fall 2020 semester. The content of the third

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interviews was similar to the content of the second interviews. However, in the third interviews, I added questions related to participants' plans of continued enrollment at the college and living arrangements for the Spring 2021 semester. During the third interviews, I focused on reflecting on the participants' meaning of homesickness, sense of belonging, and participants' overall experience of the first college semester. Even though two students dropped out of the study prematurely, I still analyzed the content of their first interview, and I disclosed the number of participants that dropped out in the data analysis.

Semi-structured video interviews gave me the flexibility to deviate, if needed, with probes or follow-up questions. In addition, I used a research journal to collect information pertaining to students' nonverbal communication during interviews, which may not be captured through audio recording. I also used the research journal to reflect on personal biases that emerged during my research study. Likewise, I encouraged participants to keep a digital personal journal to help capture their experience in between the interviews. Due to COVID-19 safety restrictions, at the conclusion of the third interview, participants were asked to email me their digital personal journal. Although a specific time frame for the duration of phenomenological interviews does not exist, Siedman (2013) advises researchers to choose the interview length prior to data collection. Prior to data collection, I aimed for 60-minute interviews, because I gauged this length of time would be long enough to gain an abundance of information but short enough to maintain participants' interest.

According to Quinney et al. (2016), "the role of the participant, the language they used, and levels of trust and rapport are all directly influenced by the space in which the interview is conducted" (p. 3). The interview location should be a confidential, quiet, and a neutral space that fosters rapport building and authentic communication. Due to health and safety regulations in

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response to the COVID-19 pandemic, I conducted my research interviews via video through Zoom healthcare platform. I assured the participants that my location was private and confidential, and I encouraged participants to do the same when choosing their interview location.

Data Analysis and Coding Scheme

I collected data via audio-taped, semi-instructed video interviews; my researcher journal; and students' digital journals. First, I transcribed all interview content verbatim. I read the interview transcripts, and in the margins, I wrote questions and comments that came to mind. As advised by Seidman (2013), the transcripts included both verbal and nonverbal material, such as indicating when there was a long pause during the interview. During this review, I reduced the data inductively. In other words, I reviewed the data with an open mind, which consequently "let the interview breathe and speak for itself" (Seidman, 2013, p. 121).

Next, I separated the data into chunks, such as belongingness and symptoms of homesickness. Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommended that researchers "triangulate different data sources by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes" (p. 200). Likewise, I reviewed and triangulated all the data from interview transcripts, research journal, and student journal, to get a general sense of the information I collected. At this point in the analytical process, I noticed patterns that emerged across participants' interviews. I utilized the information from the patterns that emerged to create codes. These codes were not permanent. On the contrary, as I analyzed new information from research interviews, I altered the codes accordingly.

Once I finished creating research codes, I inputted the codes in Dedoose. I then labeled sections of the interview transcripts with the appropriate codes. For instance, I assigned the code

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“physical symptoms” for a section in the transcript where a participant was sharing their experiences with nausea and fatigue. Some of the additional codes included college social support, coping strategies, triggers, and home social support. The data analysis resulted in a total of 43 codes across three interviews.

In the final step of the analytic process, I combined the 43 codes into three organizational themes: (a) risk factors, (b) the homesick experience, and (c) belongingness. The generation of organizational themes allowed me to make meaning out of the data. For instance, I combined codes of physical symptoms, psychological symptoms, cognitive symptoms, triggers, and coping strategies into the theme of the homesick experience. Table 1 shows a visual representation of the codes and organizational themes.

This analytical approach addressed the research questions by examining themes of how participants experienced feelings of homesickness over time. The three organizational themes allowed me to interpret the data and answer my research questions. Throughout the data analysis, I remained true to my phenomenological research design, following Vagle’s (2018) advice of “understanding that you are crafting a text, not merely coding, categorizing, making assertions, and reporting” (p. 110).

Table 1

Coding Scheme and Organizational Themes

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Organizational Themes

A. Risk Factors

B. The Homesick Experience

C. Belongingness

Initial Codes		
Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3
1A. locus of control 1A. past experience being away from home 1A. thoughts about college prior to arrival 1A. distance from home 1A. COVID-19	2A. distance from home 2A. COVID-19	3A. COVID-19
1B. paradoxical experience 1B. longing for 1B. physical symptoms 1B. homesick experience 1B. cognitive symptoms 1B. psychological symptoms 1B. triggers 1B. coping strategies	2B. longing for 2B. physical symptoms 2B. homesick experience 2B. cognitive symptoms 2B. psychological symptoms 2B. triggers 2B. coping strategies	3B. physical symptoms 3B. homesick experience 3B. cognitive symptoms 3B. psychological symptoms 3B. triggers 3B. coping strategies 3B. homesick progression
1C. experience of belonging 1C. college social support 1C. home social support 1C. communicating with technology 1C. first impressions of college	2C. experience of belonging 2C. college social support 2C. home social support 2C. experience at college	3C. experience of belonging 3C. college social support 3C. home social support 3C. experience at college

Trustworthiness

As a means of increasing trustworthiness of the study, I had prolonged engagement in the field through my three-part interviews with students within a three-month span. In addition, I utilized member checking with participants by sharing my emerging themes via email and asking for participants to review the content for accuracy. Lastly, I engaged in peer debriefing with the faculty in my dissertation committee by sharing my organizational themes for review and accuracy.

Ethical Considerations

The primary ethical consideration for my study stemmed from my dual role at the college where I conducted my research as both a researcher and the director of the mental health counseling center. I took three steps to proactively address any ethical dilemmas that could

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emerge from my dual role. First, while recruiting participants and before each interview, I made it clear to students that during those interactions, I was acting within my role as researcher. In addition, I reminded participants of the clinical counselors that were available for mental health assistance if needed. Second, my dual roles at the college could have created a power imbalance where students may have felt pressured to be a part of the study or share their personal experiences. To address this concern, I reminded students, verbally and in the informed consent, that participation in the study was voluntary and that students could choose to stop participation in the study at any time.

Third, the possibility of data emerging that reflected my place of employment in a negative light was a prospective ethical dilemma. As customary in phenomenological interviewing, I did not refute or question information shared by participants. I also included data on disconfirming evidence. For example, in my data analysis, I included reports of when a participant I interviewed did not report a connection between homesickness and belongingness, or when a student did not report an improvement of homesickness over time. I utilized probing to draw out more information about participants' experiences, but I did not ask leading questions, and I did not share my personal opinions about homesickness or the processes and procedures at the college. Instead, I utilized my research journal to reflect on my personal biases and opinions.

In addition to my dual role at the college, the essence of phenomenological research creates an ethical consideration of the potential vulnerable state of participants (Vagle, 2018). Phenomenological researchers ask participants to share personal information about their internal experience (Vagle, 2018). As an ethical researcher, throughout my study, I stayed committed to "implicitly recognizing, acknowledging, and affirming the dignity of our participants" (Seidman, 2013, p. 143). I achieved this goal by keeping the participants' well-being as a priority

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throughout the study. In addition, I followed the college's established crisis response protocol in the event that a participant might exhibit significant mental health concerns. Prior to data collection, I proactively planned that if a participant was uncomfortable seeking mental health services in the same facility where I worked, a clinical counselor from the college's mental health counseling center would assist with referring the participant to a community-based mental health resource.

Summation

Homesickness, a phenomenon with the potential to negatively impact and disrupt the college experience, has been underrepresented in qualitative research (Fisher, 2017). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how first-time undergraduate students living in the residence halls of a private Catholic college in the Northeast experienced feelings of homesickness throughout their first semester away from home.

This chapter described the research methods utilized to conduct my phenomenological qualitative study. After providing an overview of my study, explained why I chose phenomenology as my research design and detailed my research methods section, including the philosophical worldview, role of the researcher, sampling process/participants/setting, data-collection procedures, data-analysis procedures and coding scheme, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. Phenomenology is a "constant state of becoming" (Vagle, 2018, p. 11). Through collecting data from sufferers' spoken words throughout their first semester away at college, the objective was to better understand how feelings of homesickness progress over time.

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Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents the results and findings. Most participants spoke about homesickness as a paradoxical experience composed of mixed emotions. Participants reported that the common triggers of homesickness were reminders of home, a lack of activities and connections at college, and being physically alone. Second, feeling a sense of comfort in the new environment alleviated symptoms of homesickness. First-year residential students were seeking a level of comfort of belonging within the residence halls, their interpersonal relationships, the college community, and their overall new environment. Third, achieving a sense of belonging went beyond establishing interpersonal relationships at college, as previously suggested by Baumeister and Leary (1995). Although belonging was categorized by social support on campus, for three participants, belonging was also centered on feeling comfortable in their new physical and tangible environment (e.g., the physical structure of their college room, comfort of the bed, location of their physical belongings). Fourth, the COVID-19 pandemic prolonged the homesick experience and served as an obstacle that students needed to navigate through to achieve a sense of comfort in their new environment and therefore overcome homesickness.

In this chapter, I review the summary of the sample. Second, I share my first finding of the paradoxical nature of the homesick experience and common triggers of homesickness by introducing the trajectory of homesickness. I then discuss my second finding of how comfort in the new environment played a key role in reducing symptoms of homesickness. Next, I explain the trajectory of feeling a sense of belonging throughout the three months of data collection and review my third finding of how comfort in one's physical environment impacted one's sense of belonging. Last, I examine the fourth finding of the overarching impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on students' homesick experience and sense of belonging on the college campus.

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Summary of the Sample

All seven participants in my study identified as female, and 71% identified as White. Participants' distance from home ranged from 10 miles to 800 miles, and only one participant identified as an out-of-state student. Table 2 shows a summary of the sample.

Table 2

Summary of Participants

Name	Race	Major	Distance from Home	# of Interviews	1st time Homesick
Alexis	Black	Speech Pathology	50 miles	3	No
Beth	White	Nursing	10 miles	3	Yes
Carla	Latinx	Nursing	17 miles	3	Yes
Courtney	White	Biology	800 miles	3	Yes
Julia	White	Music Therapy	28 miles	3	Yes
Danielle	White	Music Therapy	13 miles	1	Yes
Fiona	White	Education	57 miles	1	No

In this section, I introduce the seven participants with pseudonyms for research confidentiality, including demographic and background information. I also provide a brief overview of each participant's unique lived experience with homesickness and belonging as first-year students living on campus during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Alexis

Alexis was an 18-year-old, Black, female, speech language pathology major, who lived in the residence hall with a roommate during the Fall 2020 semester. Her hometown was about 50 miles away from campus, where she lived with her mother, 5-year-old brother, and 13-year-old sister. She described having a close relationship with her mother, and having a small but active social life back in her hometown. She also reported having a close relationship with her boyfriend of one year, who was commuting to a different college. Alexis shared that her mother

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did not have a preference on which college she attended but that her mother reportedly encouraged her to live on campus to get the “college experience.”

About one year ago, Alexis went to a sleepaway camp for about one month. She reported experiencing homesickness during her time at sleepaway camp. Prior to attending college, Alexis struggled with anxiety, particularly when she was dealing with an unfamiliar situation. At college, Alexis’ homesickness started to kick in a few days after living on campus, after the honeymoon period passed. In the first interview, Alexis reported that her symptoms of homesickness started with a thought or reminder of home, missing her mother, and longing for the physical comfort of her house. Her cognitive symptoms were followed by a series of physiological and psychological responses, including feeling empty, lost, nauseous, and sluggish. Initially, Alexis’ homesickness led to her having trouble concentrating in class and not wanting to engage in social activities.

Alexis’ homesickness progressively improved throughout the semester. During the first interview, things that helped alleviate Alexis’ homesickness were distractions (e.g., schoolwork, being around other people). By the second interview, she spoke more about how her interpersonal relationships with her roommate and her resident assistant helped alleviate her symptoms of homesickness. Alexis spoke about these relationships as more than just a distraction. She identified her relationship with her roommate as “inseparable” and spoke about how her resident assistant and people in her wing “helps me get through it.” By the third interview, when Alexis reported no longer experiencing homesickness, she shared that what helped her overcome homesickness was getting used to her new living situation and finding comfort in herself and in her physical environment on campus.

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Throughout all three interviews, Alexis shared how COVID-19 negatively impacted her ability to make more connections at college. She expressed feeling irritable wearing a mask and having to follow the residence hall safety regulations. Alexis made a direct statement stating that she felt that her homesickness would have improved after the first interview if it were not for COVID-19. She stated that COVID-19 decreased the opportunity for social activities and limited her ability to leave her room and engage more with the college community.

In addition, Alexis spoke about feeling a sense of belonging within her wing in the residence hall, making social connections with her roommate and resident assistant. However, she reported that COVID-19 created a barrier in her ability to build a sense of belonging with the greater college community and consequently prevented relationships she did make from growing beyond “surface kind of relationships.” Although Alexis reported feeling a sense of belonging in her residence hall and making interpersonal connections with White and racially diverse students, she did speak about the original shock she experienced coming from a racially diverse high school to a PWI where most students did not physically look like her.

The sense of belonging and comfort that helped Alexis overcome homesickness was not so much centered on deep interpersonal relationships but more on feeling a sense of comfort in her physical space and finding ways to comfort herself through self-soothing activities. At the end of semester, Alexis shared that she did not want to return home and wanted to stay at college because she had her own quiet physical space at the college.

Beth

Beth was an 18-year-old, White, female, nursing major who lived in the residence hall on campus with a roommate during the Fall 2020 semester. She played on the college’s field hockey and lacrosse teams. Her hometown was about 10 miles away from campus, where she lived with

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her mother, father, three younger brothers, and one younger sister. She described her house as fun, always having something to do with her siblings, and overall having a close relationship with her family. Beth reported that her parents' number-one choice college was the one that she ultimately chose to attend. In her hometown, Beth described herself as a "social butterfly" and stated she was actively involved in school sports, student government, and extracurricular activities. Her boyfriend was also a first-time residential student at a different college.

Prior to college, the longest Beth had been away from home was a vacation with her grandmother for about 10 days. She reported college was the first time she experienced homesickness. Beth's homesickness started shortly after moving into the residence hall. She recalled feeling very alone and described her roommate's frequent absences as a trigger to her homesickness. Her initial symptoms of homesickness were crying, feeling sad, and thinking that her siblings would forget her and would make memories without her. Initially, Beth's symptoms led to difficulty concentrating on schoolwork and trouble sleeping. After about one week on campus, Beth began to make friends with other athletes in the residence hall and started to build her "little community." Initially, being preoccupied and physically being around people helped reduce Beth's homesickness.

During the second interview, Beth reported an improvement in her homesickness. She noted that the frequency and intensity of her sadness and crying had decreased and reported no longer fearing her siblings would forget her. She attributed the decrease in homesickness to the increased sense of belonging she felt with the field hockey team and fellow residents. During the third interview, Beth was in the middle of a 14-day quarantine on campus after exposure to a COVID-19 positive individual. She reported that being in quarantine directly worsened her homesickness. While in quarantine, Beth stated that her homesickness had returned to the same

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level of severity as her first week on campus. Aside from quarantine, Beth shared how COVID-19 negatively impacted her homesickness and made it difficult for her to feel a sense of belonging with her professors and classmates. Beth ultimately decided to move back home and commute to college for her Spring 2021 semester.

Carla

Carla was an 18-year-old, Latinx, female, nursing major who lived in the residence hall on campus with a roommate during the Fall 2020 semester. Her hometown was about 17 miles away from campus. Carla reported experiencing discrimination living in a predominantly White community throughout her childhood. Although her college of choice was also PWI, Carla reported being excited to see people who looked like her on campus. She noted that the student body at the college was more racially diverse than the residents of her hometown. According to Carla, her parents' admiration for her college of choice strongly influenced her college decision.

At home, Carla lived with her mother, father, and two younger brothers. She described a difficult relationship with her father, stating that they "butt heads on everything." However, Carla shared having a very close relationship with her mother and "telling her everything." Going away to college was Carla's first time being away from home. She recalled never having sleepovers at her grandparents' or friends' houses prior to moving into the residence halls. Carla described her hometown as competitive and stated she made the personal choice of being selective about people that she trusted and brought into her inner circle.

Carla reported suffering from anxiety since childhood and shared that at times it was difficult for her to untangle what symptoms were related to her anxiety versus homesickness. Carla experienced mixed emotions of excitement about being at college and sadness about missing home. At the start of the semester, Carla reported that her symptoms of homesickness

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would start with overthinking about what was happening at home and fear that her family would forget her. Like Alexis, Carla's cognitive symptoms led to an "uncomfortable, unsettling feeling" in her stomach, nausea, feelings of loneliness, and abandonment. Initially, Carla's homesickness made it difficult for her to concentrate on schoolwork. She reported being alone in her room, seeing social media posts from her family, and hearing other students talk about missing their home as triggers. Conversely, talking to her mother about her homesickness alleviated her symptoms.

As the semester progressed, Carla reported an improvement in her homesickness. She identified that by the second interview, she was not experiencing the physical symptoms of homesickness anymore. Instead, she reported feeling homesick only when she was upset or "full of sad emotion" about something that happened at school (e.g., peer disagreements). By the second interview, Carla's relationship with her roommate deepened, and she reported her symptoms of homesickness would lessen not only when she spoke with her mother about them but also when she disclosed her stressors with her roommate.

One week prior to returning home, Carla reported she had reached the "end of the homesickness journey." She attributed the close bond she made with friends at college as the main factor that helped her overcome homesickness. By the final interview, Carla reported not looking forward to going home, because she would miss her college friends and, like Alexis, she would miss having her own physical space on campus away from distractions.

Carla reported achieving a sense of belonging with the friends she made in the residence hall. However, she reported not feeling a sense of belonging with the whole college, stating, "It's been hard to come together as a community" due to COVID-19. Although she reported achieving a sense of belonging among the friends she made in the residence hall, Carla shared experiencing

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micro-aggression at college during the presidential election. Carla recounted, “I’ve always been an outcast when it comes to my ethnicity.” Although Carla did not make a connection between her experience with micro-aggression and her experience with homesickness, she did reflect on the shock she feels every time she experiences discrimination.

Courtney

Courtney was an 18-year-old, White, female, biology major, and student athlete on the field hockey team. She was an out-of-state student and lived in the residence hall on campus with a roommate during the Fall 2020 semester. Her hometown was approximately 800 miles away from campus. At home, Courtney lived with her mother, father, and 15-year-old sister. She described her relationship with her family as “really good” and reported sharing “pretty much everything” with her parents. Although her parents would have preferred her to be closer to home, Courtney ultimately made her college choice based on her positive experience during an overnight trip at the college for field hockey recruitment. Her social life at home consisted of a small, close group of friends, and her boyfriend of two and a half years that was attending a different college in the same state as her college of choice.

Prior to arriving on campus, Courtney had never been away from home for an extended period. She reported college was the first time she experienced homesickness. Courtney’s homesickness began shortly after moving into the residence hall. Due to COVID-19 restrictions and because her family was traveling to campus from out of state, her parents were not able to come inside of the residence halls with her during move-in day. Courtney recalled this as a painful experience. She reported during the first few days at college, her homesickness manifested as a paradoxical experience of sadness about missing home and excitement about being at college. As per Courtney, her homesick symptoms came in waves and did not impact

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her functioning. During the second interview, Courtney's homesickness decreased, and she reported crying and missing home less frequently. At the last meeting, Courtney stated that her homesickness had "plateaued." She reported mostly feeling happy on campus and well adjusted, yet at times still missing home.

Courtney's homesickness was triggered by being physically alone and not having a distraction to occupy her time. For instance, Courtney experienced homesickness when other residential students went home for the weekend or for a weekday meal with their parents. Courtney indicated that these situations served as a reminder that she lived an airplane ride away from home and was not privileged to the same opportunity as residential students that lived close to home.

Conversely, attending class, doing homework, spending time with college friends, and feeling socially connected alleviated Courtney's homesickness. She reported attending several events in the residence hall and joining a few clubs and organizations on campus. During the third interview, Courtney reflected that initially she questioned whether she belonged at college. However, as she began field hockey practice, built her interpersonal connections, and joined clubs, she began to feel a stronger sense of belonging at college.

In addition, Courtney shared how COVID-19 had a direct negative impact on her transition to college due to the additional health and safety restrictions placed on out-of-state students such as her parents not being allowed to come into her residence hall during move-in day and her not being able to fly home for a long weekend because she would need to quarantine once back on campus. During the last interview, although Courtney reported feeling excited to go home, she also was sad and would miss her college friends over winter break.

Julia

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Julia was an 18-year-old, White, female, music therapy major, and student athlete on the track team. She lived in the residence hall on campus with a roommate during the Fall 2020 semester. Her hometown was about 28 miles away from campus, where she lived with her mother, father, younger brother, and younger sister. She reported being “very close” with her family and having an active social life back home with “a lot of friends.” Although Julia’s mom graduated from the college Julia was attending, she reported her mother encouraged her to go to an out-of-state school to “branch out.” However, Julia ultimately made her college choice based on its proximity to home and its reputable music therapy program.

Prior to attending college, Julia had never been away from home without her family for an extended period. She reported this was her first time experiencing homesickness. Her homesickness began on the ride to college, where Julia reported crying and feeling a strong longing to return home. She reported the first few days at college were the hardest. During this time, Julia reported her homesickness manifested into feeling overwhelmed, crying, feeling fatigued, unmotivated, and having difficulty sleeping. Julia identified being bored or alone as the main triggers to her homesickness.

Consequently, when classes began and Julia started to engage more socially on campus, she reported a decrease in her homesickness. She spoke about how having friends at school and running track made her not want to go home as much. Before the second wave of COVID-19, Julia had a small window of time where she felt like she belonged more at school than home, and this was when she reported her homesickness was at an “all-time low.” Once COVID-19 cases began to increase, classes moved to remote learning, and track practice was cancelled, Julia’s feelings of belonging at college decreased and her homesickness increased once again. In

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addition to social supports, Julia identified her tangible environment (e.g., the comfort of her bed, the location of her physical belongings) as integral components of her sense of belonging.

Danielle

Danielle was an 18-year-old, White, female, music therapy major, who lived in the residence hall on campus with a roommate during the Fall 2020 semester. Her hometown was about 13 miles away from campus, where she lived with her mother, father, and older brother. Danielle described having a good relationship with her family, especially her mother. Danielle reported her parents did not have a preference of where she attended college and told her that they would support whichever decision she made. Danielle ultimately chose her college based on the reputation of the music therapy program, which she planned on pursuing. Socially, Danielle described herself as quiet and reserved. She reported having a small but close group of about three friends from her childhood.

Prior to arriving on campus, Danielle had been away from home once for a one-week vacation with friends. However, she reported that college was the first time she experienced homesickness. Danielle listed her level of comfort and familiarity with her travel companions as the reason why she did not experience homesickness during her one-week vacation away from home. Although Danielle reported being nervous leading up to her move-in date, she reported her homesickness “really hit” on her first day on campus, right after her parents left the residence hall.

Danielle reported feeling excited to live on campus on her own and consequently was surprised when she found herself homesick. She mainly longed for the familiarity, comfort, and routines from home. Danielle presented her symptoms of homesickness as a paradoxical experience of longing for home and enjoying living on campus. Even though Danielle was not

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able to identify triggers to her homesickness, she noted that talking to family and going home on weekends to visit her friends helped alleviate her symptoms of homesickness.

Danielle expressed difficulties with online learning, disappointment with the lack of physical presence of other students on campus, and frustrations with wearing a face mask. Consequently, Danielle indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic worsened her homesickness. Even though Danielle felt a stronger sense of belonging with her family and friends from home, she did report feeling like she belonged among other music therapy majors.

After several attempts via email and telephone to schedule a second interview with Danielle, she responded via email: "I'm so sorry for not responding sooner but I will not be doing a second interview. I did enjoy doing the first one with you!" I responded to Danielle's email:

It is great to hear from you! I really appreciate your response. Would you mind me asking why you are choosing to not participate in the second interview? I do understand this is a busy time for students and want to assure you that the second interview will be shorter than the first.

However, Danielle did not respond to my follow-up email, and consequently, we did not have the opportunity to conduct a second or third interview.

Fiona

Fiona was an 18-year-old, White, female, education major, and student athlete on the soccer team. She lived in the residence hall on campus with a roommate during the Fall 2020 semester. Her hometown was about 57 miles away from her college campus, where she lived with her mother, father, and younger brother. Fiona described her relationship with her family and friends from home as "all very good" and reported being able to talk to them about

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“everything.” Fiona stated that her mother “really encouraged” her to attend her college of choice due to its proximity to home.

During her childhood, Fiona went to a one-week long sleepaway soccer camp. Like her experience at college, Fiona recalled at sleepaway camp she also felt the paradoxical experience of longing for home while also having fun in her new environment. Fiona’s homesickness started shortly after her arrival on campus. She reported crying and feeling “shell-shocked” on some days, while on other days she felt happy and excited about being at college. Her triggers of homesickness were being alone or when she spoke with her family and was reminded of home. On the other hand, spending time with her new college friends gave Fiona a reported sense of comfort and consequently alleviated her homesickness.

Fiona described feeling a sense of belonging at college, primarily among other residential student athletes. Although she reported that COVID-19 did not directly impact her feelings of homesickness, Fiona did point out the discrepancy of having to socially distance on campus but not at home. Following the first interview, I attempted to follow up with Fiona a couple of times via email and telephone to schedule our second interview. She responded via email stating, “Unfortunately I will not be continuing the study. I am sorry I am just really busy and a lot is going on. Thank you for the opportunity.” Unfortunately, as per Fiona’s request, I was not able to conduct a second or third interview with her.

The Homesick Experience

This section offers the trajectory of homesickness across the span of the three-part interview series, regarding the first finding, which states that homesickness was a paradoxical experience for participants and that common triggers of homesickness were reminders of home and a lack of connection at college. Although participants shared some common homesickness

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symptoms, triggers, and coping strategies, they each had their own unique lived experience. The second finding is that when students felt a sense of comfort within the college community and environment, their feelings of homesickness subsided.

The Trajectory of Homesickness

The initial interviews took place at the start of the Fall 2020 semester, during the first or second weeks after participants had moved into their room in the residence halls on campus. During the initial interviews, most participants spoke about homesickness as a paradoxical experience filled with mixed emotions, in which they had feelings of sadness and longing for home while being excited about living on campus. As Carla reflected on her first couple of days on campus, she reported, “It was definitely an adjustment, but I’m definitely having a good time. It’s weird.” Likewise, Beth recalled, “I was excited to go back [to campus] because I really wanted to live on...I did really want to live on campus. But it was disheartening, knowing that I didn’t really have anyone here.”

Alexis, Danielle, and Fiona also shared this common theme of mixed emotions in reference to their homesick experience. Alexis stated, “Sometimes I’ll have a really good day here. I’ve only been here a few days. I’ll have a really good day and then I’ll just cry and I don’t know why.” Fiona mirrored this paradoxical experience:

Last weekend I went home for a day or two, and then I came back, and the second day back I was like, ‘Wow, I just want to go home again.’ But now I’m like, ‘Oh, I want to be here with my friends.’ It just depends on the day.

Similarly, Danielle shared, “One moment I’m like, ‘Yeah, I don’t ever want to leave this place.’ The other next moment I’m like, ‘I need to go home now.’ So yeah, my emotions definitely go up and down a lot.”

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In addition to identifying their homesickness as a paradoxical experience, all participants reported encountering psychological symptoms related to crying and feelings of sadness and loneliness when homesick. However, as supported by Fisher's (2017) description of homesickness operating on a spectrum, the intensity and frequency of homesick symptoms differed from each unique participant's lived experience during the first interview. For example, Alexis described her homesick symptoms of sadness and loneliness as "literally having a dark cloud over my head the whole time." Likewise, when asked about her symptoms, Beth stated, "I just cried a lot." Courtney provided a more detailed visual representation of her homesickness symptoms:

I have this really fuzzy blanket. I like to go into the blanket. I wrap it around my head and I sit there, lay down, and I call it my sad burrito blanket. Or, some people don't cry a lot. I cry a lot. If I'm sad, I cry, a lot of time.

While Alexis, Beth, and Courtney spoke about their symptoms of homesickness as ongoing and having a strong impact on their daily functioning, the excerpt below shows a less intense variation of the symptoms of homesickness during interview one:

Fiona: It's not a sad and upset feeling now. It's in the middle. I don't know how to explain it. It's not a sadness of feeling, but it's just like a wanting or a desire.

Researcher: Yeah. So for you, the feeling is more of a longing.

Fiona: Yes.

Researcher: So it's not as strong as a sadness or feeling super down, but it's this longing for wanting to be at home.

Fiona: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

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Researcher: And have these symptoms that you're describing, the thoughts about "What would I be doing at home now?" or this longing, have they impacted your functioning at all?

Fiona: No.

Most participants also reported symptoms of anxiety, pervasive thoughts of wanting to return home, and fear their families would forget about them. Beth stated, "I was nervous that my siblings were going to forget about me. I noticed that when I felt that they would create new memories with each other and that I would be out of the loop." Similarly, Carla shared her fears that her family would forget about her:

It's just maybe a little bit of uncomfortable of feeling as if they're [family] going to forget about me or if I keep calling too much, they're going to miss me too much, or what am I missing out on? What's going on in my brothers' lives that I'm not able to see being here?

In addition, more than half of the participants experienced physical symptoms related to feeling nauseous, fatigued, or having difficulty sleeping and concentrating when experiencing homesickness. When asked to describe her feelings of homesickness during the first interview Julia shared:

Definitely emotional, crying, upset. Just feeling bummed out. And then definitely in the beginning, physical too. I was very exhausted and fatigued, which...I was having trouble sleeping. I kept waking up in the middle of the night, like eight times. I was having trouble sleeping and just was tired throughout the day; it was very hard for me to function.

Likewise, Alexis experienced initial physiological homesickness symptoms related to fatigue:

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I slept in maybe like the fourth or fifth day, and I slept in because I didn't have classes till afternoon. Because I felt...I didn't feel sick. I just felt kind of nauseous. I felt sluggish and I didn't want to get up in between my body feeling tired and sluggish. And me thinking in my head, I want to go home.

Similar to Alexis' reported nausea and fatigue, Carla also recalled a connection between her thoughts of longing for home and physical well-being, "So between me thinking things and then I start to feel nauseous, because when I start overthinking, I get nauseous and I'm just like no, now I'm going to throw up." The research participants' varying psychological, cognitive, and physical symptoms of homesickness supports the existing literature on the symptomology of homesickness, which states that homesickness is marked by varying levels of impairment in a person's physical, cognitive, and psychological functioning (Fisher, 2017; Stroebe, et al., 2002; Thurber & Walton, 2012).

During the first interview, the two main triggers of homesickness identified by students were situations that reminded the student of home as well as a lack of activities and social connections on the college campus. Alexis recalled the smell of a diffuser or eating mac and cheese triggering her homesickness by reminding her of her life back home with her mother. Alexis went on to identify the connection between reminders of home and her symptoms of homesickness as, "It doesn't start as physical; it always starts mentally. I will start talking about home. And that's when I feel it...like actually, my body...like I feel empty and lost sometimes." In addition, social media and technology played a role in triggering students' homesickness as instant reminders of home. When asked what triggers her homesickness, Fiona responded, "Probably just when I'm FaceTiming my mom. Today she was in my room." Likewise, Carla

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shared, “seeing my mom post on her Facebook, pictures of my brother going somewhere and I’m just like, I should’ve been there, and stuff like that.”

In addition to reminders of home, a lack of activities, connections, and being alone were also triggers of homesickness during the first interview. When asked what triggers her homesickness, Julia reported, “when I’m just alone in my room, I guess, which is probably why my room doesn’t feel like home, because I’m always upset when I’m in my room, just thinking about home.” Likewise, when asked what triggers her homesickness, Beth reported, “whenever my roommate goes home.”

As previously noted, Fiona and Danielle voluntarily chose to withdraw from the study after the first interview due to reported scheduling conflict and/or lack of interest in continuing with the research study. However, for the other five participants that returned for the second and third interviews, all five reported that their homesickness had decreased significantly from the first interview (weeks 1-2 away from home) to the second interview (weeks 6-7). When asked to compare her homesickness from the first interview to the second, Courtney responded, “I feel like it’s gotten better. I feel like as time goes on, I’m adjusting to this is the new normal, basically.” Likewise, Carla stated, “It definitely has gotten better,” while Alexis reported, “I’ve been okay. It’s [homesickness] better than before.”

Although there was an improvement in their symptoms, during the second interview, all participants reported still feeling some level of homesickness. However, the students noted that the phenomenon was not impacting their functioning to the same frequency and intensity as it was during the first two weeks away at college. Julia reported that her homesickness symptoms were “happening less frequently.” Carla shared Julia’s sentiment, stating that her symptoms are

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“not frequent anymore, so it's a little bit easier to deal with.” Beth provided a more in-depth explanation of how her symptoms shifted from the first to the second interview:

I just feel like within the first week, I just was constantly wanting to go home. Maybe it was the same intensity, and I just don't realize because it was so constant; it just felt like a whole cloud over my head. Now, since then, I don't really feel that emotion 24/7.

Although participants continued to experience varying psychological, cognitive, and physical symptoms, the frequency and intensity of these symptoms decreased from the first interview to the second interview. The noted reduction in homesick symptoms from the first to the second interview supports Bell and Bromnick's (1998) study, which found significantly higher levels of homesickness among first-year university students living in the residence halls on campus in the first two weeks of starting college in comparison to six weeks into the semester.

Like the first interviews, reminders of home continued to be triggers of homesickness for about half the participants. Beth reported that her homesickness was triggered when her mom would send Beth a picture of the activities that family was doing while Beth was away at college. Beth reported that reminders that life at home was going on without her felt like “a slap in the face even though it's not.” In addition to reminders of home, during the second interviews, more than half the participants reported that when they experienced a negative emotion at college or felt out of their comfort zone, it triggered their homesickness. Julia's homesickness was triggered when she experienced “frustrations with schoolwork.” Alexis associated frustrations with COVID-19 safety regulations as triggers to her homesickness. In the excerpt below, Carla compares her triggers from the first interview to the second interview:

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Currently, it's not like the first time we spoke when it was like, if I saw something, I'm like, I want to go home now. It's probably only when I'm very emotional, when I have a lot of emotions all at once. That's probably my only trigger for my homesickness now. Based on participants' reporting, it appeared that when participants felt an unpleasant emotion, they missed the comforts of home, and this consequently triggered their homesickness. The role that comfort played in the homesickness experience is discussed in more detail in the next section.

During the third interview, which took place anywhere from one day to one week until participants were set to move back home for the remainder of the semester, Carla and Alexis reported no longer experiencing homesickness. Courtney reported that her homesickness had remained the same from interview two to three. Beth and Julia reported their homesickness had worsened from the second to third interview. The three students that were still experiencing homesickness during the third interview described the symptoms as mainly psychological, as opposed to cognitive or physiological. Beth stated, "I just get really emotional. I get really sad, and then I cry." Likewise, Julia reported her homesick symptoms were focused on "feeling upset or frustrated." Courtney stated, "I kind of feel sad."

Out of the three students that still felt homesick during the last interview, reminders of home continued to be reported as the main trigger of homesickness. Courtney stated:

I feel like it's just certain things, like sometimes when you're talking to your friends and you're telling stories and stuff comes up, it just reminds you of being home. So, I feel like whenever we tell stories, or we talk about stuff, I feel like that's when it [homesickness] comes up more. Because it makes you remember.

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Likewise, Beth shared talking to her family at home can be a trigger when she hears what is happening at home without her. As she put it, “hearing that they're [family members] together makes me long to be with them.”

How did Alexis and Carla overcome homesickness? Why did homesickness symptoms worsen for Julia and Beth from October 2020 to November 2020? I discuss the role the COVID-19 pandemic played in prolonging the homesick experience when reviewing the fourth main finding of the study. Next, I discuss the significance of comfort in the homesick experience, including how achieving a sense of comfort helped Carla and Alexis overcome homesickness.

The Significance of Comfort

This section focuses on the second finding of the study, which states that feeling a sense of comfort in the new environment alleviated symptoms of homesickness. As early as the first interviews, when participants had only been away from home for one or two weeks, a common pattern emerged of participants identifying a connection between feeling homesick and experiencing a lack of comfort at college, while missing the comforts of being home.

In this excerpt, Carla compared the lack of initial comfort at college, versus the comfort she felt at home during the initial interview:

I think my comfort from home comes more from my family and me being comfortable with my environment. I've been there for so long, I know I'm in a safe place. I know, if anything, I can go to my parents and I know I have the same here, but it's probably a sense of comfort and opening up. It's hard to reach out to someone if you're having trouble; you don't want to sound like you're bringing a minute issue and making it a big deal. So, I definitely am very comfortable at home and I feel emotionally safe, but I don't

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want to make it seem like [name of college], I don't feel emotionally safe. I definitely do; it's just harder for people to reach out and say, "This is wrong."

Carla highlighted the initial difference in her level of comfort at home versus college. She used words such as *safe* and *comfortable* to describe her home life, while pointing out how harder it is to reach out for help at college due to a lack of comfortability and familiarity with the environment. Danielle mirrored these sentiments when speaking about her relationship with her family back home:

When you're with people that you've known for a longer period of time and you basically grew up with them, it's kind of like, no matter where you are, you have that sense of comfort. Yes. You have that sense of comfortability with them and knowing that it's always going to be all right.

As the first interview continued, Danielle predicted, "I don't know if I would continue seeing them [family] as much going forward; it would just be as I get more comfortable here [at college] that I may just not want to be at home as much." Danielle felt hopeful that as she became more comfortable in her new college community, she would not miss home as much and would not crave the same level of frequency in her contact with her family. Danielle made a direct connection between feeling comfortable in her new environment and her homesick experience.

Similarly, during the first interviews, all seven participants identified feeling more comfortable and less homesick when they were around other people at college. When asked what helped lessen her homesickness, Fiona responded, "Probably just my friends [from college]. They'll just be like, "Oh let's go hang out." Not to avoid it [feeling homesick], but to feel more comfort." Likewise, Beth stated, "I literally felt like by myself, but once I made that little group

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of friends, I just felt so much better and so much more comfortable and honestly so much happier.” Courtney also shared the connection between comfort with college friends and homesickness, stating, “I feel more comfortable being around them [new friends at college]. When we do stuff, it makes it [homesickness] go away because we're talking about stuff or we're laughing about something or we're playing Uno.” As noted, increased comfortability at college decreased feelings of homesickness. In addition, connecting with social supports on campus was one way to increase one's comfort level in the new environment.

During the second interviews, coping strategies for alleviating homesickness continued to be centered around feeling comfortable in participants' new college community. In comparison to the first interview, by the second interviews, interpersonal relationships at college appeared to have reached a deeper level of comfort and intimacy. Carla stated:

My roommate knows I'm very full of emotion, so she knows how to talk me down and be like, 'This isn't the end of the world. You're going to be fun. We'll get through this. You're feeling this and you have the right to feel that.' And that definitely has made it a little bit better with someone acknowledging the feelings [of homesickness] you're having and understanding it.

Likewise, Alexis shared, “My roommate, me and her are inseparable, and my RA, some of the people on my wing are really what helps me get through it [homesickness].” Although she did not feel a close relationship with her roommate, Beth also shared how the social support she was building at the college, within the track team, helped her feel more comfortable in her new environment and less homesick. Beth stated, “Being more comfortable and feeling like I've created a support system here has definitely helped with the homesickness, because it's like I don't really feel that upset anymore all the time.”

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All five participants that completed the second interview reported that their homesickness had lessened in comparison to the first interview. In addition, all five participants also reported establishing an increased level of comfort, belonging, and interpersonal connections at college from interview one to interview two as evident in the quotes above. It is suggestive that the deepened connections and increase comfortability on campus had a direct influence on the reduction of homesickness from interview one to interview two.

Although all five participants shared a similar trajectory of lessened homesickness from interview one to interview two, during the final interviews, participants differed in their lived experience. Alexis and Carla both reported no longer feeling homesick during the third interview. Achieving a sense of comfort in their college community was identified as a central role in helping both Carla and Alexis overcome homesickness. For example, Alexis concluded, "I feel like the only time I really, really missed home is when I needed some sort of comfort, but now, I can find comfort in myself. I don't have to go home for that anymore." Alexis' level of comfort with herself in her new environment grew to a point where she felt like she no longer needed the comforts of home to feel satisfied with her college life. Likewise, when asked to describe her homesick experience, Carla shared:

Probably, well, I would start it where I would say I was very homesick. I didn't feel like I could go home because I might have wanted to stay home. Then it went to me being able to feel like I can go home, but still very unsure. With the picking up of work and the picking up of my social life and everything, it led me to realize this is my home right now, and everything I need to do or everything like my friends and everything are all here. I would say I began to realize that there's really no reason for me to go home anymore.

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As reflected in Carla's excerpt, college became such a place of comfort that Carla began to define her residence hall on campus as her new home. Consequently, Carla reported no longer experiencing homesickness during our third and final interview.

As evident in the above excerpts from students' lived experiences, the second finding of my study was that feeling a sense of comfort at college [comfort with peers, oneself, or the physical structure of their resident hall room] alleviated symptoms of homesickness. On the contrary, a lack of comfort in the new environment increased students' longing for home. One of the main factors that decreased participants' level of comfort at college was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Belongingness

Similar to the phenomenon of homesickness, my research findings highlighted the complexity of belongingness. *Belonging* can be defined as a "perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling care about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus as faculty, staff, and peers" (Strayhorn, 2019, p. 4). My third research finding showed that the lived experience of achieving a sense of belonging is unique to the individual and goes beyond interpersonal connections. This section first reviews the trajectory of belonging during the three-part interview series. I then expand on the study's third finding that belongingness is comprised of social connections as well as comfortability in a person's physical and tangible environment.

The Trajectory of Belonging

Initially during the first interviews, all seven participants felt some degree of belonging at college. However, six out of the seven participants reported feeling a greater sense of belonging

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with their families at home than in their college environment. When I asked participants to compare, between home and college, where they felt a greater sense of belonging, Beth responded, “Probably my family and friends at home.” Likewise, Julia answered the same question stating, “My family at home. I feel a sense of belonging with my friends here [at college], but it's still very iffy.”

As the semester progressed, during the second interviews, all five participants began to feel an increased sense of belonging at college in comparison to their first interview. Factors attributed to the increased sense of belonging included joining clubs, getting involved with athletics, deepening their friendships at college, and becoming more comfortable with their physical surroundings. In the following excerpt, Courtney reflected on how establishing interpersonal relationships through getting involved on campus influenced her sense of belonging:

So, I feel like at the beginning I kind of, at first, I kind of questioned it [belonging at college]. But then I have field hockey and I have the friends and I was getting involved on campus, which I'm still involved on campus. I've joined more clubs than I can actually probably handle. But I've joined a lot of clubs and I'm involved with them. And then I have field hockey that I'm a part of. At first, I didn't know if I was clicking with them. But as time's going on, I feel like I'm getting closer to them. So, I feel like I belong more to [name of college] now than I did before.

Similarly, Carla and Beth attributed their belonging on campus to social support, including college peer groups and athletic teams.

During the third and final interviews, participants began to make connections between feeling a sense of belonging at college and their experience with homesickness. Three out of the

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five students that completed all three interviews drew a direct connection between their feelings of belonging at college and their homesick experience, as this excerpt from Carla shows:

I feel like my feelings of belonging with my friends has definitely lessened my homesickness, because I feel like, at home, I feel like I belong because I'm like a vital part of the family. My mom's like, "My birthday wasn't the same without you." I'm like, "I know, I'm the life of the party." How could it be?" I definitely feel like I belong at home, but I feel like...feeling like I'm a part of something like a family here makes me feel like I also belong here and less homesick.

Similarly, during our final interview, Julia reflected on the connection between belonging and homesickness:

Researcher: I said if you had to compare, would you say that you feel a sense of belonging more at [name of college] or a sense of belonging more at home? So that social connectedness.

Julia: I would say right now home, because of everything going on (COVID-19), there was a part...a little part where I was like, oh, I definitely belong more at school right now, but now it's home.

Researcher: And when you felt like you belonged more at school, what was happening with your homesickness at that time?

Julia: It was low, all-time low.

Similar to the international college students in Watt and Badger's (2009) study, for the participants in my study, achieving a sense of belonging in the new environment also alleviated symptoms of homesickness. Watt and Badger's research focused on Baumeister and Leary's (1995) definition of *belonging* as a phenomenon rooted in interpersonal relationships. My third

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research finding adds to the existing literature by introducing a dimension of how one's physical environment also influences one's sense of belonging.

Redefining Belongingness

The third main finding of this study redefines the process of achieving a sense of belonging. As originally presented by Baumeister and Leary (1995), belonging has a strong connection with establishing and maintaining "at least a minimum quantity of interpersonal relationships" (p. 499). My study supported this claim, finding that participants attributed their sense of belonging and comfort at college to the peer relationships they established.

Based on participants' lived experience, having something in common with others was a central element of achieving belonging through interpersonal relationships. Students reported feeling more comfortable to initiate conversations with peers when they shared something in common with the other person. The shared identity ranged from being a student-athlete, having the same major, race, gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity, home state, or being an on-campus residential student. For instance, student-athletes Beth and Julia both spoke about the close bond they built with their teammates and athletic trainers because of their shared interest in sports. Alexis mentioned feeling a sense of belonging and community when she joined a club for her major, and Carla reflected on the common socio-economic status among her peer group in college.

In addition, some participants spoke about sharing different parts of themselves to fit in and make connections. Out-of-state student Courtney reported sharing with people at college that she grew up in Upstate New York prior to her move to South Carolina, which made her feel less of an outsider. Alexis, a student of color, shared how she navigated making connections at a PWI:

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I feel like sometimes, depending on who I'm trying to talk to...because I'm Dominican, and Native American, and African American; I'm a mixture of a lot of other things but those are the main, and depending on who I'm talking to...I'll tell them about a certain one. So I feel like that's helped me with certain people because there's a lot of Hispanic people at [name of college], they might not be darker, but there's a lot that I've seen...I think that's helped me make relationships with those people that identify maybe the same as me.

For the participants in my study, establishing interpersonal relationships and finding commonality among peers were instrumental parts of achieving belonging in college.

However, in addition to interpersonal relationships, my study's finding builds on Baumeister and Leary's (1995) proposed process of achieving a sense of belonging. My third finding suggests that for some individuals, feeling a sense of belonging, in addition to interpersonal connections, was also grounded in a sense of comfort, safety, and pleasure in one's physical, tangible environment. For instance, during her first interview, Julia reported, "I don't really feel like I belong in my own room [at college], sometimes, though, which is strange." However, during her second interview, Julia shared, "Like I mentioned before, when I went home, I felt all my stuff was here. So, I felt more of a sense of belonging here than I did at home." As evident in her quotes, Julia's sense of belonging was deeply connected with her tangible possessions and physical environment, as opposed to her interpersonal connections.

Likewise, during our third interview, Alexis stated, "I don't want to go home. I want to stay here [college] for the fact that I have my own space." Similar to Julia, Alexis' sense of belonging on campus was partially influenced by her feeling of comfort in the physical space of her residence hall bedroom. Although belonging was centered on establishing interpersonal

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connections, tangible items and physical structures also played a key role in the process of achieving a sense of belonging in a new environment.

The Overarching Impact of COVID-19

Throughout the data collection, the college administration implemented safety regulations to reduce the likelihood of COVID-19 transmission on campus. Some of these regulations included regular COVID-19 testing for residential students, a “no outside guest” policy in the residence halls, and completion of daily self-health screening. Unfortunately, even with these safety regulations in place, positive cases of COVID-19 increased in the regional area of the college as the Fall 2020 semester progressed. According to the New York Times’ “Tracking Coronavirus in New York: Latest Map and Case Count,” which collects data from state and local health agencies and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the average number of new COVID-19 cases in the college’s county of residence at the start of the Fall 2020 semester was 36 new cases. By November 6, 2020, the number of new COVID-19 cases in the same county had jumped to 246. I refer to the surge in positive COVID-19 cases as the second wave of COVID-19.

The fourth and final main finding of my study was that the COVID-19 pandemic prolonged the homesick experience and served as an obstacle that students needed to navigate through to achieve a sense of comfort in their new environment. All five participants that completed the duration of the study expressed that the health restrictions, including wearing masks, social distancing, and increased online learning and virtual extracurricular activities, in some way, inhibited their ability to feel a sense of belonging with the greater college community, created an obstacle in making social connections and feeling comfortable in their new environment, and consequently had an impact on their homesick experience.

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During the second interview, half of the participants suggested that if it were not for COVID-19, they believe they would have overcome homesickness within the first two weeks of college. Contrary to Alexis' and Carla's lived experiences, Beth and Julia reported a worsening of their homesickness from interviews two to interviews three. Both Beth and Julia identified the increase in COVID-19 cases, which hit the regional area of the college in between the second and third research interviews, as the main contributor to their decrease in comfort and belonging at college and increase in homesickness. During our third interview, Beth was in the middle of a college-mandated quarantine as a result of exposure to a COVID-19 positive student. In this excerpt, Beth recalled the drastic shift in comfort, belonging, and homesickness she experienced before and during the quarantine:

I found my friends. I found my group of people. I felt excited to move in. I feel like I keep going back this, but I was able to find a group of people that I was comfortable with; that made me want to stay on campus. I found a friend that I was excited to room with. Now I don't feel that.

Beth described her experience in quarantine as "Not good. Just straight up not having a good time. I have cried a lot. I know the first interview, I said that I cried a lot. This is worse. I just kind of feel stuck." When Beth was feeling comfortable with her new college friends, she felt excited and not homesick about being on campus. On the contrary, when Beth went into quarantine, she no longer felt comfortable and instead was isolated and homesick. Beth's experience in isolated quarantine was so impactful that during an email follow-up four months after our final interview, Beth wrote:

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I'm doing well! Lacrosse has started up and I'm really enjoying it! I decided to move off campus and commute from home. I miss the convenience of living on campus but I'm happy to be home and not live in fear of being quarantined on campus haha!

I responded to her email inquiring, "Did your feelings of homesickness have an impact in your decision to no longer live on campus, or not really"? To which, Beth replied, "Yes! especially when I was completely isolated from them and everyone else when I was out into a two week quarantine."

Although Julia did not have to quarantine during her time living on campus, she also reported how the increase in COVID-19 cases led to feelings of frustration at college and consequently a longing for the comforts of home. The excerpt below highlights the shift in comfort and homesickness Julia experienced from interview two to interview three:

Researcher: Like when things [homesickness symptoms] were getting a little bit better, why do you think they [homesickness symptoms] were getting better?

Julia: Well, at first, I think it was distraction. And then that just became a new normal of routine and then just being comfortable with the people around me and my room. So it went from a distraction to comfort.

Researcher: Comfort. So, the comfort with the people that you were seeing, people that you were seeing in class, the track team. And then the second wave comes, these restrictions are in place, and you feel your homesickness worsening?

Julia: Yes.

During our third interview, Julia went on to speak about the comforts she missed from home. Julia said she missed the "comfort in like the home I always knew, my room and then also my family." For Beth and Julia, COVID-19 directly influenced their desire to no longer live on

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campus and commute for the spring semester. Beth did ultimately decide to move back home out of a “fear of being quarantined on campus” again.

In addition, the virtual nature of club meetings turned some participants off from actively participating in extracurricular activities and getting more involved on campus. Alexis shared, “I’m not very a virtual event type girl. I like to see people in person; I speak better in person.” Likewise, Beth stated, “There was a virtual club fair, but you couldn’t walk around. You couldn’t talk to people...In high school, I was involved in literally everything under the sun. I just didn’t feel like I could connect with people virtually.”

Furthermore, during the third interview in November, some students shared how the cancellation of their athletic season, increased health and safety restrictions, and switch from some of their in-person classes to an online format due to a rise in COVID-19 cases in New York state, increased their feelings of social isolation and longing to return home. As noted on Julia’s personal journal entry on November 9, 2020:

So COVID numbers are going back up. They say the “second wave” is here. Restrictions and bar curfews are now in place and I feel like we are going backwards. At this point I just want to be home. These restrictions are just making living here not worth it. We really are missing out. My homesickness was getting way better, but now I am back to square 1.

As evident from participants’ lived experience, the COVID-19 pandemic prolonged participants’ feelings of homesickness, partly because the restrictions associated with the pandemic made it more challenging for students to connect, socialize, and feel a sense of belonging and comfort in the campus community.

Conclusion

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The findings of this phenomenological study revealed participants' lived experience with homesickness, belonging, and the additional complexities that the COVID-19 pandemic added to students' transition from high school to college. First, homesickness was viewed as a paradoxical experience, and common triggers included reminders of home and feeling socially isolated. Second, the word *comfort* was central to the homesickness lived experience. For participants, being comfortable in their new surroundings, both physical and interpersonal, alleviated symptoms of homesickness. Third, the phenomenon of belongingness went beyond establishing interpersonal connections and involved feeling a sense of comfort in one's physical and tangible surroundings. Fourth, the COVID-19 pandemic prolonged the homesick experience and potentially emphasized the role a person's tangible environment played in achieving a sense of belonging.

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Chapter 5: Conclusion

Homesickness, a phenomenon defined as “a complex cognitive-motivational-emotional state concerned with grieving for, yearning for and being occupied with thoughts of home” (Fisher & Hood, 1988, p. 426), impacts college student sojourners, along with other individuals spending a prolonged time away from home (Thurber & Walton, 2012). Although the symptoms associated with this phenomenon range in intensity, frequency, and context, in higher education, homesickness has been linked with lower retention rates and an overall dissatisfaction with the college experience (Fisher, 2017). Considering the prevalence and detrimental impact of homesickness, I was interested in learning more about this phenomenon, with the intention of applying the findings of my study to help college students overcome homesickness and have a more fulfilling college experience.

Drawing on belongingness theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), this study set out to answer several questions:

1. How do first-time undergraduate students living in the residence halls of a private Catholic college in the Northeast experience feelings of homesickness?
2. What contributing factors help or hinder these students in overcoming homesickness?
3. According to students, what role does belongingness in the new environment play in the trajectory of the homesick experience?

3a. How does social distancing and online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic play a part in the belongingness and homesickness processes?

I chose a phenomenological research design to answer my research questions because I was interested in learning about students' lived experience with homesickness and noted a lack of qualitative research in the current literature on homesickness. In addition, the current

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qualitative literature on homesickness lacked a research design that showed the progression of homesickness over time. Therefore, to address this gap, I interviewed first-year college residential students from a private Catholic college in the Northeast that were experiencing homesickness during three different moments of their first semester away from home.

Summary of Findings

From the data collection and analysis, I noted that homesickness operated on a spectrum. Some participants in the study reported that homesickness significantly impacted their functioning. Others spoke about homesickness as a longing for home that did not impact their overall functioning. In addition, symptoms of homesickness ranged from psychological, cognitive, to physical symptoms, with different participants experiencing a unique combination of symptoms including anxious state, depressed state, sadness, difficulty concentrating, persistent thoughts about home, socially isolating, nausea, and tiredness.

The first finding showed that homesickness was a paradoxical experience composed of excitement about being in a new place and longing for the comfort and familiarity of home. In addition, common factors that triggered homesickness for first-time residential students at college were reminders of home, lack of social connections, and being physically alone. The second finding highlighted the importance of comfort in the homesick experience. All five participants that completed the three-part interview series noted an improvement in their homesickness from interview one to interview two. Likewise, all five participants reported an increased level of comfort at college from the first to the second interview. During the data analysis, I noted that as participants began to feel an increased sense of comfort at college, their feelings of homesickness began to dissipate.

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As participants reflected on their lived experience, comfort for most of the participants signified a sense of belonging and familiarity in their interpersonal relationships at college and at home. Students spoke about feeling a sense of comfort with their fellow residential students or their teammates in athletics. In addition to interpersonal relationships, for three participants, comfort also meant a sense of physical comfortability in their environment at college and at home.

The third finding of the study added to belongingness theory. Baumeister and Leary (1995) suggested that humans have an innate need to belong and will resist the disbanding of pre-existing bonds. Baumeister and Leary identified interpersonal connections and relationships as the sole contributor to achieving a sense of belonging. These interpersonal relationships encompass connections from home as well as connections in the new environment. In my third finding, I expanded on belongingness theory and suggested that in addition to interpersonal relationships, the physical and tangible environment also plays a role in achieving a sense of belonging.

The fourth finding explored the overarching impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on the homesick experience. Health and safety regulations because of the COVID-19 pandemic prolonged participants' homesickness. Half of the participants reported that if it were not for COVID-19, they believe their homesickness would have fully resolved by our second interview. In addition, I question whether the COVID-19 pandemic and increased time students spent in their dormitory room consequently heightened the impact students' physical and tangible environment had on their sense of belonging.

Implications

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In Chapter Two, I noted the lack of qualitative research on the homesickness phenomenon. In the recommendation section of several quantitative studies on homesickness (Firmin et al., 2009; Fisher & Hood, 1987; Sun et al., 2016), researchers suggested a need for a more in-depth qualitative exploration of the homesick experience. This depth of understanding was an intentional contribution I hoped to make when beginning my study. However, the implications of the study also included the unexpected contributions of adding new dimensions to the belongingness theory and providing a view of homesickness in the unique context of a global pandemic.

Depth of Understanding

Through a three-part interview series across a three-month span, this phenomenological study added to the existing literature an in-depth understanding of how students experience homesickness. My exposure time in the field with students benefited the study by helping me build rapport with participants, providing information on the progression of homesickness, and allowing me to probe on emerging findings from one interview to the next. As discussed in Chapter Four, homesickness was described as a paradoxical experience with participants' reporting conflicting emotions between longing for home and feeling excited about being at college. The comprehensive nature of my study also resulted in an understanding of the complexity of the homesick experience, including its symptoms, risk factors, and coping strategies that alleviated homesickness. My findings supported the existing literature in terms of homesickness presenting itself with a mixture of physical, cognitive, and psychological symptoms ranging in intensity and frequency.

However, the in-depth nature of my study expanded on what we know about homesickness symptoms by exploring the progression of these symptoms over the span of three

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months. The three-interview series of my study provided information on how students' lived experience progressed from their first week at college to their final week of the semester away from home. All participants reported a reduction in homesick symptoms from the first to the second interview. In addition, the level of symptom-intensity varied across the research sample. During the first interview, three out of the seven participants reported that their symptoms of homesickness significantly impaired their functioning. On the other end of the spectrum, Fiona spoke about her homesickness as a simple longing that did not have an impact on her functioning. A single interview qualitative study would have missed the important progression of students' lived experience. Likewise, since homesickness operates on a spectrum (Fisher, 2017), I believe qualitative inquiry is a better methodology to capture the varied intensities of this phenomenon over time, which allows for a representation of the distinction between participants' lived experience.

Defining Belongingness

Baumeister and Leary's (1995) belongingness theory, which served as the theoretical framework of my study, places a strong emphasis on the role interpersonal relationships play in the development of belonging. Baumeister and Leary asserted that humans have an innate need to belong and that this need is fulfilled by establishing positive and stable interpersonal relationships. In addition, Baumeister and Leary suggested that human beings will resist the termination of these established interpersonal relationships and social supports. Previous researchers have supported the central role interpersonal relationships play in one's sense of belonging, particularly during relocation (Hendrickson et al., 2011; Landa et al., 2019; Watt & Badger, 2009).

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The findings of this study support the key role interpersonal relationships have on one's sense of belonging. For instance, when discussing their sense of belonging, all research participants spoke about peer relationships they were creating at college. These peer relationships ranged from interacting with roommates, joining clubs, participating in athletic teams, or becoming friendly with other people who lived in the residence halls. For the majority of the participants, their sense of belonging at college was directly connected with the friendships they had made on campus.

However, my study also adds to the existing literature regarding the importance of a person's physical environment on their sense of belonging. As discussed in Chapter Four, three participants of my study spoke about reaching a sense of belonging on the college campus by establishing comfort in their tangible and physical environment, such as their actual on-campus residence room, as opposed to the other participants whose sense of belonging was solely connected with building interpersonal relationships at college. Although Julia made connections with peers in athletics, when speaking about her sense of comfort and belonging, she concentrated on tangible items such as missing her bed at home or feeling like she belonged at college because all of her physical possessions were now on the college campus as opposed to home. The findings of my study expand on the belongingness theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), suggesting that in addition to interpersonal connections, one's tangible possessions and environmental factors can aid or impair a person's ability to feel a sense of comfort and belonging during relocation.

Moreover, as discussed in Chapter Two, Watt and Badger (2009) defined sense of belonging as the number of friends students made in college. Consequently, when comparing the relationship between belonging and homesickness, Watt and Badger's findings were limited to

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their quantified definition of sense of belonging. However, my qualitative study allowed me to learn that sense of belonging can also be reached through comfort in one's environment.

Therefore, hypothetically, a participant in my study could have a limited number of friends but still feel a sense of belonging through their sense of comfort in their new physical surroundings.

Sense of comfort was found to be a key part of alleviating students' symptoms of homesickness.

My phenomenological study added this crucial contribution to the existing literature on

homesickness. Suggestions on how this information can be applied in the practical sense are discussed in the recommendation section of this chapter.

Dimension of COVID-19

In addition to providing an in-depth understanding of the homesickness phenomenon and expanding on belongingness theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), my study adds to the existing literature on students' lived experience of homesickness while starting college in the midst of a global pandemic. I was able to gain an understanding of how COVID-19 restrictions (e.g., online courses, face masks) impacted participants' lived experience with homesickness and sense of belonging on the college campus.

As discussed in Chapter Four, the COVID-19 pandemic was an overarching influencer, identified by students as directly prolonging their homesick experience and presenting challenges in establishing a sense of belonging within the larger college community. Participants cited COVID-19 safety regulations, such as wearing face coverings, social distancing, and primarily virtual learning and social events, as barriers to building social connections at college. Perhaps one of the reasons why some participants' physical and tangible environment became such an important part of their sense of belonging was rooted in the fact that in comparison to pre-COVID-19, the residential student body as a whole was spending more time in their residential

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dormitory rooms than previous years. Consequently, the increased time in the dormitory room and decreased time with in-person interactions may have placed a stronger emphasis on the importance of finding comfort and a sense of belonging with one's physical and tangible space than it would have in normal circumstances.

Limitations

There were three main limitations in my phenomenological study. First, with seven participants completing the first interview and five participants completing all three interviews, I missed the progression of the homesick experience of two of my participants because they prematurely dropped out of the study.

Second, the participants in my study all identified as female, heterosexual, attended the same college, and most identified as White (five out of seven). The lack of diversity limited the different perspectives and lived experiences of homesickness I was able to obtain. Although only two participants were students of color, the duration of my exposure with each of these participants through their completion of three 60-minute interviews added to a better understanding of the unique lived experience of students of color attending a PWI. One of the students of color in my study reported experiencing micro-aggressions at college, and the other student of color in my study reported feeling a sense of culture shock when she arrived at a PWI. The existing literature on the college experience of students of color attending a PWI indicates that in comparison to White students, students of color are at a higher risk of experiencing discrimination and micro-aggression at college. Consequently, due to discrimination and micro-aggression, students of color attending a PWI are at an increased risk of experiencing lack of belonging and homesickness (Biasco et al., 2001; Poyrazili & Lopez, 2007; Sodowsky & Plake, 1992). Although both Alexis and Carla reported overcoming homesickness during the third

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interview, considering the existing literature, the micro-aggressions they experienced and lack of racial diversity at their college of choice could have worsened the intensity and prolonged the duration of their symptoms of homesickness. Alexis and Carla added to my study a valuable narrative of the homesick lived experience of a person of color.

Third, although I encouraged all seven participants to complete a student journal in between interviews to provide an additional set of data to analyze, only two of the participants shared the content of their participant journal with me. Therefore, I triangulated the data of my interview transcripts and researcher journal to increase trustworthiness.

Trustworthiness

There were three main ways I increased the trustworthiness of my study. First was a prolonged engagement in the field, as I conducted a three-part interview with participants throughout a three-month period. In comparison to a single interview, a three-interview series “allows both the interviewer and participant to explore the participant’s experience, place it in context, and reflect on its meaning” (Seidman, 2012, p. 20). My prolonged time in the field increased the likelihood of capturing the authentic essence of participants’ lived experience with homesickness.

In addition, member checking was utilized with participants. I emailed all the participants in my study a draft of Chapter Four and asked for feedback on accuracy of my interpretation of their lived experience. Three out of seven participants responded to my email. All three participants that responded were in agreement that I had accurately captured their lived experience with homesickness. Lastly, throughout the data collection and analysis process, I shared with my dissertation chairperson my interview transcripts, emerging codes, and organizational themes, for review, accuracy, and increased the trustworthiness of the study.

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In addition, I utilized triangulation, analysis data from interview transcripts, and my research journal to increase trustworthiness. My research journal was also applied as a means of reflexivity. As someone who has experienced homesickness on a personal level, the research journal was an instrument to reflect on my personal biases and responses to the interview content. At the conclusion of each interview, I wrote thoughts that came to mind on my research journal (e.g., personal impressions of participant, emotional response, personal biases, questions). Through reflexivity, I increased the trustworthiness of the research by accounting for my innate biases and assuring that these biases would not impact my data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

Implications for Action

As someone who experienced homesickness at personal and professional levels, one main reason for choosing the specific topic of homesickness as my dissertation research was to apply my findings to help sufferers of this phenomenon. In this section of Chapter Five, I propose implications of these actions for students, legal guardians of college students, and administration and faculty of higher education institutions.

Students

As noted in the existing literature (Fisher, 2017), and in my study, homesickness had a negative impact on students' emotional well-being, social connections and, at times, academic success. All participants shared the psychological symptoms of sadness and crying associated with homesickness. In addition, half of the participants discussed during the first interview how they would avoid social activities and would self-isolate when they were feeling homesick. Last, two participants indicated that their homesickness made it difficult for them to concentrate on

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their schoolwork. I devote this section of Chapter Five to explore actions students can take to relieve their symptoms of homesickness.

In Chapter Four, all five participants who completed the entire 3-interview series reported an improvement in their homesickness from the first interview to the second interview, and two participants reported no longer experiencing homesickness by the third interview. Students' increased sense of comfort in their residence halls, physical environment, and in their interpersonal relationships at college contributed to an improvement in homesick symptoms. Therefore, it is important for students to consider a sense of comfort when selecting what college to attend. As noted in my research, both comfortability in interpersonal relationships and in the physical environment impacted the homesick experience. When high school students go on college tours, they should pay close attention to their comfortability and sense of belonging when engaging with other college students and employees, as well as consider the physical comfort of the residence halls, classrooms, and other campus structures.

Likewise, once college students arrive on campus for their first year, they can gravitate toward interpersonal activities that promote inner comfortability. For some participants in my study, achieving this sense of comfort and belonging came from sharing commonalities with their peers (e.g., being on the same sports team, being of the same race, joining the same club, growing up in the same town). For other participants, achieving a sense of comfort and belonging derived from their physical and tangible environment. Therefore, college residential students can decorate their residence room in a way that is comfortable for them, both aesthetically (e.g., artwork, knickknacks) and physically (e.g., comfortable bedding, lighting, room temperature).

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During our third interviews, one of the last questions I asked participants was what advice they would give to a first-year student about fitting in and finding their comfort place at college. Beth responded:

I would say join something that you're interested in. Honestly, I had trouble making friends just walking around the residence halls or walking in the AR [the cafeteria on-campus] or around campus. Most people, it's hard to approach them, at least right now with COVID. Everyone's wearing masks, and you can't really talk. You can't really just walk up to people and be like, "Hey." It's just an awkward thing to do right now. If you at least join a club or a sport, you'll have a community of people that you'll at least have one thing in common with. Then as time goes on, you'll learn more about them. I think that going to RA events is pretty important, too, because you can at least meet people who are living on campus, which is good because it stinks to be alone.

Mirroring Beth's response, all five participants highlighted the importance of making friends, joining clubs, and doing activities on campus as their main piece of advice for first-year students.

Parental Guardians

Although students are primary stakeholders in my study, parental guardians are often financially and emotionally invested in their student's college success. Considering the adverse symptoms of homesickness (Fisher, 2017) and its association with an increased risk of dropping out of college (Thurber & Walton, 2012), parental guardians can apply my study's findings to best support their child through the homesick experience.

Throughout all three interviews, most participants identified that a common trigger to their homesickness was when they were confronted with reminders of home and the activities that were happening at home without them. Participants shared that although at times it was

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comforting speaking with a parental unit, specific images on social media or reporting during telephone calls or facetimes regarding family gatherings that were happening while the student was at college were particularly triggering to the student's homesickness symptoms.

Carla, a participant who initially feared that her family would forget about her while she was at college, recalled during our third interview a comforting conversation she had with her mother who had offered reassurance that things at home were still the same and that she was not missing out on much by being away at college.

As their child is initially transitioning to college life, parental guardians should consider limiting their social media posts and reporting of the activities that are happening at home during the child's absence. Instead, telephone conversations and visits should be focused on what is happening for the child at college and reassuring that the child is still a part of the family unit and will continue to be a part of the family memories.

Higher Education Institutions

Previous research on homesickness has supported the prevalence of the phenomenon among college students (Fisher, 2017; Thurber & Walton, 2012; VanTilburg, 1996) and the negative impact that homesickness can have on student retention (English et al., 2016; Sun et al., 2016; Thurber & Walton, 2012). Reflective of the impact homesickness can have on student retention, one of the participants in my study reported that her experience with homesickness directly influenced her decision to not return to living on campus for the Spring 2021 semester. Although the student in my study lived close enough to college where commuting was an option, if her home had been further away, this student would have likely transferred to a different school. Implications for action, discussed in this section of Chapter Five, can aid higher education institutions with strategic planning for enrollment and retention.

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As reflected in the research findings, comfort was a central element of the homesick experience. When participants spoke about longing for home, they spoke about missing the comforts of home, including physical comfort and the comfortability of being around their family and friends. Likewise, as participants began to feel an increased sense of comfort at college, their feelings of homesickness began to subside. The restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, including face coverings, social distancing, and increased online learning, created a barrier in building interpersonal relationships. However, in addition to peer relationships, students' physical comfort also impacted their sense of belonging and homesickness. Therefore, as higher education institutions work toward retaining first-year students, they should focus some of their efforts on elements of the campus that can promote a sense of comfort for students. This sense of comfort should be targeted on physical and interpersonal aspects of the college environment.

In terms of the interpersonal aspects of comfort, most participants in my study spoke about how building social connections on campus increased their sense of comfort. These relationships were primarily fostered with fellow residential students, athletic teammates, and resident assistants. Therefore, colleges and universities should target their efforts toward student-engagement activities that promote social interactions to facilitate social connections among first-year students. These social events should create a sense of inclusivity where a diverse student body can feel that their identity is represented by the college.

In addition, training on understanding homesickness and how to respond to students' needs should be offered to college employees, not only for residence life and student affairs staff, but also to faculty and the greater college community. Trainings can focus on identifying the symptoms associated with homesickness, which as noted in the findings, can include a

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combination of physical (e.g., nausea, tiredness), cognitive (e.g., pervasive thoughts about home), and psychological (e.g., sadness, anxiety, depression) impacts ranging in severity from mild to pervasive symptoms that impact students' functioning.

In addition, these trainings should cover topics on how college employees can foster connections with students and aid in building their sense of comfort and belonging on campus. Beth shared in her second interview how a supportive chat with one of her faculty members when she was in quarantine helped alleviate her feelings of isolation and increased her sense of belonging. Likewise, most participants spoke about the important role their resident assistant, athletic trainer, or other college employee had on helping them feel a sense of connection at college. Through gaining a better understanding of the phenomenon of homesickness, employees can gain a sense of empathy for some students' lived experience. These trainings can aid in students' comfortability with college, which in turn can potentially assist in alleviating homesick symptoms and increase the likelihood of student retention.

In addition to the interpersonal aspect of comfort, higher education institutions should also focus their attention on the physical comfort of their campus. Some of the participants in my study spoke about comfort in terms of missing the softness of their bed, the taste of their family's home-cooked meal, or the smell of incense that created a sense of comfort and feeling of home. Moreover, findings highlighted the important role the physical environment plays in achieving a sense of belonging. Accordingly, higher education personnel should pay attention to the quality of dormitory room beds, aesthetic appeal of the room layout, and quality and diversity of food service offerings. In addition, residential students should be encouraged to decorate their room in a way that provides them comfort (e.g., their bedding, general room décor). Physical comfort can

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also be addressed by colleges and universities in terms of classroom setup with appropriate lighting and room temperature.

Areas for Future Study

Although this study provided in-depth and valuable information about the complexities of the phenomenon of homesickness, there are a few areas for future research that could grow upon my research's findings. One area for future study would be a replica of my research conducted when there is no pandemic and safety regulations. It would be interesting to see if students' physical and tangible environment would still have an influence on reaching a sense of belonging when interpersonal face-to-face interactions are not limited by face coverings, social distancing, or the fear of virus transmission.

As reflected in the limitations section of Chapter Five, this study was conducted in a PWI private college and the research sample lacked racial diversity. The two students of color in my study, Carla and Alexis, did report either experiencing culture shock or micro-aggressions during their first semester at college. Although their lived experiences added the valuable narrative of students of color to the research findings, most of my research participants identified as White. Therefore, for future studies on homesickness and belonging, it would be good to recruit only students of color attending a PWI. Through semi-structured interviews, the phenomenological research would concentrate on gaining a better understanding of how micro-aggressions impact participants' sense of belonging, comfort level, and trajectory of the homesick experience for students of color attending a PWI.

Another limitation of my study was the lack of students' response to the digital journal I recommended for each participant to utilize and share with me at the conclusion of the data-collection process. Although I received only two journal entries, the information provided a more

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comprehensive view of the participants' lived experience. I was able to get a sense of the students' lived experience through their written words. Accordingly, future research can use participants' journal entries in a more intentional manner. For instance, the researcher could provide specific timelines of when participants are expected to write in their journals and when the journal entries will be collected. In addition, instead of collecting the journal entries at the conclusion of the data collection, the researcher could gather the journal entries throughout the data-collection process.

Last, my phenomenological study was rooted in exploring the essence of students' lived experience with homesickness. The information I obtained in this research is valuable to mental health clinicians because it highlights the potential detrimental impact homesickness can have on sufferers' emotional and mental state. However, my study was not focused on the specific effectiveness of treatment interventions for homesickness, so the study's contribution to clinical psychology is lacking.

Therefore, future research could involve participants who are self-reporting homesickness and are also receiving mental health treatment. Unlike Saravanan et al.'s (2017) study on the effectiveness of seven sessions of cognitive behavioral therapy in treating homesickness and depression, future studies can have an in-depth longitudinal case study design. This would allow the data to be collected throughout students' four years at college from participants who have received mental health services to alleviate their homesickness and would provide useful information to the field of clinical mental health counseling. Such a study would offer a more in-depth understanding of homesickness, the short-term and long-term effectiveness of clinical interventions, and how homesickness symptoms progress and potentially evolve into a more pervasive mental illness.

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In addition, as the director of a college counseling center, I would be interested in creating a treatment program to address homesickness among college students. Similar to Thurber's (2005) multi-modal homesickness prevention package, the treatment program I design would implement the findings from my study, including but not limited to strategies aimed at fostering a sense of comfortability and belonging for students in the new campus environment. Future research could be focused on testing the effectiveness of the homesickness treatment program.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the contributions of my study's findings, the trustworthiness of my research design, the limitations of my findings, implications for action, and suggested areas of future research. When I originally embarked on my dissertation journey, I was seeking to understand the lived experience of first-year college residential students experiencing homesickness. As someone who faced homesickness in personal and professional settings, I hoped my study would provide an in-depth understanding of the complex phenomenon of homesickness. I anticipated that a deeper understanding of the homesick experience could be applied by parental guardians, higher education administration, and students, to help alleviate homesickness and promote a more positive and successful college experience. My study's findings not only provided a deeper understanding of first-year college residential students' lived experience with homesickness but also added to Baumeister and Leary's (1995) belongingness theory.

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Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval

Molloy College IRB
Approval Date: July 1, 2020
Expiration Date: July 1, 2023



1000 Hempstead Ave., PO Box 5002, Rockville Center, NY 11571-5002
www.molloy.edu

Kathleen Maurer Smith, Ph.D.
Dean, Graduate Academic Affairs
T: 516.323.3801
F: 516.323.3398
E: ksmith@molloy.edu

DATE: July 1, 2020

TO: Talita Ferrara, BA, MS
FROM: Molloy College IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [1619923-1] Understanding the Homesick Experience Through the Narratives of First-Year College Resident Students

REFERENCE #:
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE: July 1, 2020

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # 2 ,criteria # 2

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Molloy College IRB has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations. However, exempt research activities are subject to the same human subject protections and ethical standards as outlined in the Belmont Report.

This acknowledgement expires within three years- unless there is a change to the protocol.

Though this protocol does not require annual IRB review, the IRB requires an annual report of your exempt protocol (Expedited and Exempt Research Protocol Annual Report Form) which is available on the IRB webpage.

If there is a proposed change to the protocol, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to inform the Molloy College IRB of any requested changes before implementation. A change in the research may change the project from EXEMPT status and requires prior communication with the IRB.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

If you have any questions, please contact Patricia Eckardt at 516-323-3711 or peckardt@molloy.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

Sincerely,

Patricia Eckardt, Ph.D., RN, FAAN
Chair, Molloy College Institutional Review Board

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Appendix B**Recruitment Questionnaire**

Please answer the following questions honestly and to the best of your ability. The information disclosed will remain private, and your participation is voluntary. Thank you!

Name: _____

Telephone number: _____

Email: _____

Age: _____

Gender: _____

Race/Ethnicity: _____

Major: _____

Hometown State: _____

Since arriving at Molloy College, have you experienced any degree of missing home and/or longing for home? (please circle one)

Yes

No

If Yes, can Talita Ferrara contact you via telephone and/or email to speak to you further about potential participation in a study? By agreeing to be contacted you are not making a commitment to being a participant in the study. (please circle one)

Yes

No

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Appendix C

Informed Consent

Division of Education/Ed.D. Program
1000 Hempstead Avenue- P.O. Box 5002
Rockville Centre, NY 11570
516-323-3166

Title of Study:

Understanding the Homesick Experience Through the Narratives of First-Year College Resident Students

This study is being conducted by: Talita Ferrara, doctoral candidate at Molloy College, phone number (516) 323-3484 and email tferrara@molloy.edu and Dr. Allison Roda, Professor of Education at Molloy College, phone number (516) 323-3128 and email: aroda@molloy.edu .

Key Information about this study:

This consent form is designed to inform you about the study you are being asked to participate in. Here you will find a brief summary about the study; however you can find more detailed information later on in the form.

The purpose of this independent study is to understand how first-time undergraduate students living in the residence halls of a private catholic college in the northeast experience feelings of homesickness.

You will be asked to participate in one 60-minute interview. However, if further clarification is needed, you will be asked for a second or third individual interview.

A possible risk you may face is reliving unpleasant memories from your past and/or present. Discomfort may arise from sharing your personal challenges and difficulties, which can elicit uncomfortable feelings such as sadness, guilt, anger, fear, frustration, loneliness, and helplessness. In the event this should happen, I will either move to the next section of the interview or stop the interview completely and schedule a follow up at a later date.

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The research that will be collected in this study is confidential. Pseudonyms will be given to the individuals participating in the interviews. I will be the only person who will know the relationship between the pseudonyms and the participant. All information will be locked and stored at my residence while electronic documents, codings, and transcriptions will be password protected. All information will be shredded and discarded after 3 years.

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

You are asked to take part in this study because of your self-reported experience with longing for/missing home since arriving in the residence hall.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to meet for a 60-minute interview. You will discuss your personal experiences with homesickness since arriving at college. You will discuss your relationships with your family, peers, and fellow student residents on campus. You will be asked to review the transcripts when completed for the purpose of understanding your experience.

Where is the study going to take place, and how long will it take?

The study will take place via Zoom at a mutually agreed date/time. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes.

What are the risks and discomforts?

A possible unforeseen risk may entail reliving unpleasant memories from your past and/or present. Discomfort may arise from sharing your personal challenges and difficulties, which can elicit uncomfortable feelings such as sadness, guilt, anger, fear, frustration, loneliness, and helplessness. In the event this should happen, I will either move to the next section of the interview or stop the interview completely and schedule a follow up at a later date.

What are the expected benefits of this research?

A benefit to participants is the opportunity for them to share their stories. It might result in mental health professionals and higher education administrators understanding how they can best support students that are homesick.

Do I have to take part in this study?

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Your participation in this research is your choice. If you decide to participate in the study, you may change your mind and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are already entitled.

What are the alternatives to being in this study?

You may choose not to participate as an alternative to being in this research.

Who will have access to my information?

With assistance from the researcher, all data (research journal, interview transcripts, audio transcripts) will be kept in a locked file cabinet stored at my residence. I will analyze all of the information to determine and develop themes and pattern within the data. The analysis will be used to either answer the research question or develop questions that should be answered in future studies. All information stored electronically will be on a password protected laptop. You will be given a pseudonym upon participation. I will be the only person who will know the relationship between the you and the pseudonyms.

Your pseudonym will be: _____

How will my [information/biospecimens] be used?

Collected data may be used for additional research by other investigators without additional consent.

To ensure that this research activity is being conducted properly, Molloy College's Institutional Review Board (IRB), whose members are responsible for the protection of human subjects' rights for all Molloy-approved research protocols, have the right to review study records, but confidentiality will be maintained as allowed by law.

Can my participation in the study end early?

Participation in this study is voluntary.

Will I receive any compensation for participating in the study?

Once you have completed your 60-minute interview you will be entered for a chance to win a \$100 Amazon gift card. One participant will be randomly selected to win the \$100 Amazon gift card.

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What if I have questions?

Before you decide whether you'd like to participate in this study, please ask any questions that come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact Talita Ferrara at 516-323-3484 or tferrara@molloy.edu, or Dr. Allison Roda at 516-323-3128 or aroda@molloy.edu.

What are my rights as a research participant?

You have rights as a research participant. All research with human participants is reviewed by a committee called the *Institutional Review Board (IRB)* which works to protect your rights and welfare.

If you have questions about your rights, an unresolved question, a concern or complaint about this research you may contact the IRB contact the Molloy IRB office at irb@molloy.edu or call 516 323 3000.

Will the interview be recorded?

Since I am not able to write as fast as participants' talk, the interview will be recorded for the purpose of assisting me to transcribe what you say accurately. The recording will be stored electronically in a password protected laptop. You will be given a pseudonym upon participation. I will be the only person who will know the relationship between you and the pseudonyms. The recording will only be used for the purpose of the study. The recording will be deleted and destroyed 3 years following completion of the study.

You are freely making a decision to participate in this research study. Signing below indicates you agree to the recording of research interview.

Your signature

Date

Your printed name

Date

Documentation of Informed Consent*:

You are freely making a decision to participate in this research study. Signing this form indicates:

- 1. You have read and understood this consent form**
- 2. You have had your questions answered**
- 3. You have had after adequate time to make a decision**
- 4. You have decided to participate in the study**

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5. You give your consent to be audio-recorded during the interview session**You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.**

Your signature

Date

Your printed name

Date

Signature of researcher explaining study

Date

Printed name of researcher explaining study

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Appendix D**Interview Protocol****Interview One**

For all respondents: The research study will be explained by the Principal Investigator to all participants, the consent will be read, and participants will be given the opportunity to ask any questions. After participant questions have been answered, the subject will electronically sign the consent form and will receive a signed and dated copy via email.

Brief Study Description: The study seeks to understand how first-time undergraduate students living in the residence halls of a private catholic college in the northeast experience feelings of homesickness.

Narrative: Hello, my name is Talita Ferrara and I want to thank you for agreeing to meet with me today for this interview. My primary role on the Molloy campus is to serve as the Director of the Student Personal Counseling Center. Although during this interview I will be asking you questions regarding your personal and emotional experience at Molloy, I want to remind you that this is not a counseling appointment. If you feel that you would benefit from speaking to a counselor you can contact the Student Personal Counseling Center at 516-323-3484 and speak to one of our clinical counselors.

The purpose of this interview is to understand how first-year undergraduate students residing in the residence halls on the Molloy College campus experience feelings of homesickness. There are no correct or wrong ways to respond to the questions. I encourage that you answer the questions honestly and openly.

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I would like to tape record this interview if that is okay with you. I can't write fast enough, and I want to make sure I get everything that you are saying. The purpose of audio recording the interview is for me to make sure I recall the information you share accurately. The information you disclose during this interview is confidential and your name will not be included along with your responses.

Introduction:

1. Can you start by stating your first name, where you are from, and where you currently live on campus?

2. What made you decide to attend Molloy College?

Probe: Did the community or culture at Molloy impact your decision? Do you know anyone from home that goes to Molloy? Do you have friends or relatives that live on Long Island or graduated from Molloy? Were there other colleges/universities you almost attend instead of Molloy? Which ones?

3. What is the best place you have visited on vacation or day trip?

Probe: What did you like about this place?

Living on Campus:

4. What made you decide to live on campus as opposed to living off campus?

Probe: Did your parents or legal guardians have a preference on where you lived?

How did they feel about your decision to live on campus?

5. What were your first impressions of the other students living on campus?

Probe: How are the other students living on campus like you? How are they different?

6. What did you imagine it would be like to live on campus prior to your arrival?

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Probe: What has it been like living on campus since your arrival?

Family and Friends at Home:

7. What do you miss most about home and why?
8. How would you describe your family?
 - a. When you are home who do you live with?
 - b. What is your relationship like with the people you live with at home?
 - c. Have you ever been away from home before?

Probe: Sleep away camp, boarding school, study abroad program? Why or why not? What was that experience of being away from home like; or what prevented you from being away from home in the past? How is this experience similar or the same to your past experiences with being away from home?

Probe: How often do you communicate with your parents or friends from home?

Do you have any friends or family close to Molloy?

9. How would you describe your social life back home?

Probe: Do you have any close friends from home? How many? Did they go to college too? Are they living on campus? So far, how would you compare your experience living on campus to theirs?

Belonging:

10. Do you feel a sense of belonging at Molloy? Why or why not?

Probe: Do you have friends at Molloy? Do you feel safe at Molloy?

11. How would you compare your feeling of belonging at home versus Molloy?

Probe: Do you feel like you fit in more with your family and friends from home or with your fellow Molloy students, professors and employees?

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Homesickness:

12. How would you describe your experience at Molloy so far? Have there been any surprises?

Probe: Classes, Friendships, Living, Social Setting, Food, etc.

13. How would you describe your feelings of homesickness, and have you ever felt that way before?

14. In your questionnaire you noted that you have experienced a longing for home, can you tell me more about that?

- a. Can you elaborate on that?
- b. What have been your symptoms?
- c. How have these symptoms impacted your functioning, if at all?
- d. Have you found triggers for these symptoms?
- e. Have you found things, situations, or people that made the symptoms better?
- f. How has the social distancing guidelines as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your homesickness?

Probe: potentially being in a single occupancy room, online classes, limited physical interaction with peers, online orientation.

15. What advice would you give to a new student about what to expect or prepare for living away from home?

16. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with homesickness and/or your experience at Molloy in general so far that I have not asked?

Interview Two

UNDERSTANDING THE HOMESICK EXPERIENCE

Narrative: Hello, my name is Talita Ferrara and I want to thank you for agreeing to meet with me again for our second interview. As a reminder, my primary role on the Molloy campus is to serve as the Director of the Student Personal Counseling Center. Similar to our first interview, although during this interview I will be asking you questions regarding your personal and emotional experience at Molloy, I want to remind you that this is not a counseling appointment. If you feel that you would benefit from speaking to a counselor, you can contact the Student Personal Counseling Center at 516-323-3484 and speak to one of our clinical counselors. As a reminder, the purpose of this interview is to understand how first-year undergraduate students residing in the residence halls on the Molloy College campus experience feelings of homesickness. There are no correct or wrong ways to respond to the questions. I encourage that you answer the questions honestly and openly.

I would like to tape record this interview once again if that is okay with you. The purpose of audio recording the interview is for me to make sure I recall the information you share accurately. The information you disclose during this interview is confidential and your name will not be included along with your responses.

1. Can you give me a recap on how things have been since we last spoke? How have you been?
2. Describe your overall satisfaction with attending Molloy College and living on-campus?
Do you believe you made the right choice to live on campus, why or why not?

Living on Campus:

3. Describe the relationships you have made with the other students living on campus? Roommate? Classmates? Professors or other Molloy staff members?
4. What does a typical weekend look like for you?

UNDERSTANDING THE HOMESICK EXPERIENCE

Probe: Does homesickness worsen, lessen or stay the same over the weekend? Do you usually go home or stay on campus? How about the other students living on campus, do they go home or stay on campus? If unable to go home, describe how that makes you feel.

Family and Friends at Home:

5. Describe your experience maintaining your relationships with family and friends from home since you have been away at college?
6. What do you miss most about home and why?

Probe: How often do you communicate with your parents or friends from home?

Recap:

(Provide recap of participant's answers during the first interview re: homesickness)

Homesickness:

7. In comparison to where you were during our first interview, would you say that your experience with homesickness has gotten better, stayed the same, or has gotten worst?

Probe: What makes you think it has gotten (worst, stayed the same, better)?

8. Are you still experiencing homesickness? How would you describe your experience with homesickness?
 - a. Can you elaborate on that?
 - b. What have been your symptoms?

Probe: physical, cognitive, psychological symptoms?
 - c. How have these symptoms impacted your functioning, if at all?
 - d. Have you found triggers for these symptoms?
 - e. Have you found things or people that made the symptoms better?

UNDERSTANDING THE HOMESICK EXPERIENCE

9. How has the social distancing guidelines as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your experience with homesickness since we last spoke?

Probe: online classes, limited physical interaction with peers, limited size of social gatherings, resident students testing positive for COVID-19.

Some students have told me that starting college was a very difficult experience, while others have said it was an easy transition. Looking back, how would you describe your experience starting college?

Belonging:

10. Belonging can be defined as “students’ perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling care about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus as faculty, staff, and peers” (Strayhorn, 2019, p. 4). Do you feel like you belong at Molloy College?

Probe: Why or why not?

11. Have you formed connections with Molloy students and/or employees/faculty? How are you making these connections, or what have been the obstacles in making these connections?

12. Molloy is considered a mostly White college, and most students in the residence halls identify as White. Thinking about that, how has your racial identity played a part in the connections or lack of connections you are making at Molloy?

Probe: Can you think of other parts of your identity that have helped or hindered your ability to form relationships with other Molloy students? Sexual identification, religious affiliation, ethnicity, language ability, where you’re from, etc.?

UNDERSTANDING THE HOMESICK EXPERIENCE

13. Are you involved in any clubs or organizations on campus?

Probe: Why or why not? Has that helped with your sense of belonging on campus? Do you feel that the clubs or organizations on campus are reflective of your personal identity? Can you elaborate.

14. Have you attended any social events on campus?

Probe: Why or why not? Which events have you attended? What was your experience at these events? In your experience, do the social events on campus reflect your identity? Can you elaborate.

15. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with homesickness and/or your experience at Molloy in general so far that I have not asked?

Interview Three

Narrative: Hello, my name is Talita Ferrara and I want to thank you for agreeing to meet with me again for our third and final interview. As a reminder, my primary role on the Molloy campus is to serve as the Director of the Student Personal Counseling Center. Similar to our first interview, although during this interview I will be asking you questions regarding your personal and emotional experience at Molloy, I want to remind you that this is not a counseling appointment. If you feel that you would benefit from speaking to a counselor, you can contact the Student Personal Counseling Center at 516-323-3484 and speak to one of our clinical counselors.

As a reminder, the purpose of this interview is to understand how first-year undergraduate students residing in the residence halls on the Molloy College campus experience feelings of homesickness. There are no correct or wrong ways to respond to the questions. I encourage that you answer the questions honestly and openly.

UNDERSTANDING THE HOMESICK EXPERIENCE

I would like to tape record this interview once again if that is okay with you. The purpose of audio recording the interview is for me to make sure I recall the information you share accurately. The information you disclose during this interview is confidential and your name will not be included along with your responses.

(Provide recap of participant's answers during the first and second interview)

Recap:

(Provide recap of participant's answers during the first interview)

1. Can you give me a recap on how things have been since we last spoke? How have you been? What have been your experiences as a student at Molloy and living on campus?
2. In comparison to where you were during our second interview, would you say that your experience with homesickness has gotten better, stayed the same, or has gotten worse?

Probe: What makes you think it has gotten (worse, stayed the same, better)?

3. Are you still experiencing homesickness?
 - a. Can you elaborate on that?
 - b. What have been your symptoms?

Probe: physical, cognitive, psychological symptoms?
 - c. How have these symptoms impacted your functioning, if at all?
 - d. Have you found triggers for these symptoms?
 - e. Have you found things or people that made the symptoms better?
 - f. Looking back, how do you feel your homesickness has progressed from when you first arrived on campus to now?
4. How has the social distancing guidelines as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your overall experience as a first-year residential student?

UNDERSTANDING THE HOMESICK EXPERIENCE

Probe: Are you moving back home after Thanksgiving break? How are you feeling about either moving back home and/or staying in the residence halls where very few students will be living?

Belonging:

5. Belonging can be defined as “students’ perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling care about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus as faculty, staff, and peers” (Strayhorn, 2019, p. 4). Do you feel like you belong at Molloy College?

Probe: Why or why not? Did your sense of belonging at Molloy change as the semester went on? Can you elaborate.

Probe: Have you ever felt excluded? Explain.

6. Have you formed any new connections with Molloy students and/or employees/faculty? How are you making these connections, or what have been the obstacles in making these connections?

Probe: Race, sexual identification, other identities?

How would you describe your community of friends? How do your friends connect with your different identities in regards to race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual identification?

7. Since our last interview, have you become involved in any clubs or organizations on campus?

Probe: Why or why not? Has that helped with your sense of belonging on campus? Do you feel that the clubs or organizations on campus are reflective of your personal identity? Can you elaborate.

UNDERSTANDING THE HOMESICK EXPERIENCE

8. Since our last interview, have you attended any social events on campus?

Probe: Why or why not? Which events have you attended? What was your experience at these events? In your experience, do the social events on campus reflect your identity? Can you elaborate.

9. Describe the most important thing that made you feel like you belong (or not) at Molloy.

Future Plans:

9. Are you planning on returning to Molloy College next semester?

Probe: Why or why not?

10. Are you planning on continuing to live on campus next semester?

Probe: Why or why not?

11. Describe the highlight of your first semester? What was the lowlight?

12. Looking back, how do you feel about your decision to start college this fall instead of taking a gap year, or not attending college?

Probe: Why or why not?

13. Is there anything you would have done differently if you had to do it again? Explain.

14. Grand Tour Question: Imagine that I am a new freshman student living in the dorms, what advice would you give me about fitting in and finding my place at Molloy? What advice would you give me about what to do when I feel lonely and miss friends and family from home?

15. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with homesickness and/or your experience at Molloy in general that I have not asked?

UNDERSTANDING THE HOMESICK EXPERIENCE

Appendix E**Copyright Release**

Journal of Leadership and Instruction
SCOPE Publications
100 Lawrence Avenue
Smithtown, New York 11787

Dear Talita Ferrara:

I write to affirm that your article entitled, Understand Homesickness: A Review of the Literature, that we published in the spring 2020 issue of our Journal for Leadership and Instruction may be similar in content and presentation as parts of your doctoral dissertation that you are defending in spring 2022. These similarities do not have any conflict with our publication, and we suggest that you provide a footnote in your dissertation to the sections that are similar and add a reference to your article in the reference section of your dissertation.

We do not perceive any copyright issue if you add the footnote and citation in your dissertation reference section. We hope this letter will resolve this question you posed to us.

Sincerely yours,

Robert J. Manley

Robert J. Manley, PhD
Editor-in Chief