

Understanding Homesickness: A Review of the Literature

By Talita Ferrara, M.S.

Abstract

This article provides a review of the research literature related to the experience of homesickness among college students. Research-based findings of the symptomatology of homesickness, risk factors that increase vulnerability to experiencing this psychological phenomenon, and the effectiveness of treatment strategies aimed at reducing symptoms of homesickness are examined within this literature review.

Introduction

The transition from high school to college is an important milestone in a student's life. For many young adults, this marks their 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, students can also find this transition to be anxiety-provoking and isolating (Thurber & Walton, 2012). Consequently, homesickness is tied to these feelings of isolation and anxiety. 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). This distress operates on a spectrum, ranging from mild to intense symptoms of homesickness with debilitating effects on daily functioning (Fisher, 2017).

Although some level of homesickness is a relatively common experience following a move, studies have yielded a range in prevalence reporting of this phenomenon (VanTilburg, 1996). Differences between studies on measures and definition of homesickness, varying lengths of time participants were away from home, and contextual diversity involving relocation have influenced data on the prevalence (Stroebe, Vliet, Hewstone, & Willis, 2002). In a study on boarding school children ranging from 11 to 16 years old, Fisher, Frazer, and Murray (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 experienced homesickness during their time away from home in boarding school (Fisher, Frazer, & Murray, 1986).

Variation in reporting prevalence of homesickness exists within the contextual framework of higher education. Previous research on first-year residential students' adjustment at a university in the United States, found that 31% of the 198 participants reported experiencing homesickness (Fisher & Hood, 1987). However, a more recent comparable study on first-year college students found that 94% experienced some level of homesickness during their first semester away from home (English, Wei, Davis, & Gross, 2016).

Regardless of the variation in prevalence rate across the literature, homesickness is listed as one of the top complaints of student sojourners (Fisher, 2017). Research supports the assertion that some level of homesickness is a relatively common experience following relocation (VanTilburg, 1996). This phenomenon is a practically universal experience to any person, regardless of age, gender and cultural background, separating from their home (Fisher, 2017; Thurber, 2005). Homesickness is documented in various contexts; including, but not limited to: higher education, boarding school, sleepaway camp, military deployment, migrant workers, and immigration (Eurelings-Bontekoe, Vingerhoets, & Fontijn, 1994; Fisher, 2017; Fisher, Frazer, & Murray, 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, to examine how homesickness evolves during the first semester away at college, and whether there is an association between experiencing homesickness and the students' overall adjustment. The authors' found that students that reported feeling homesick had an overall worst adjustment in college in comparison to students that did not report experiencing homesickness.

Consequently, difficulty adjusting to the new college environment can lead to a student's decision to

prematurely withdrawal from college. Thurber and Walton (2012) have cited that homesick students are "3 times more likely to drop out of school than those who were not homesick" (p. 416). Sun, Hagedorn, and Zhang (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 belongingness and being connected within social and academic groups positively impacts retention rate. The important role of social support and a sense of belonging play in the overall college experience is a concept intertwined with homesickness, which will be discussed further in the literature review.

Given its prevalence, and negative impact on college satisfaction and graduation, the issue of homesickness among college students is an important topic to examine further. This literature review will provide readers a comprehensive understanding of homesickness, with a concentration on the context of higher education. The themes presented from past literature include the symptomology of homesickness, risk factors that increase vulnerability to experiencing this psychological phenomenon, and the effectiveness of treatment strategies aimed at reducing symptoms of homesickness.

Review of Research Literature for Homesickness

Belongingness Theory and Homesickness

One of the first theorists to introduce the importance of belonging in human development was Abraham Maslow (1954). Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs proposed that for us to reach our full potential, we must first meet prerequisites. In order from basic to most sophisticated, Maslow's needs included: physiological (shelter, food), safety (being secure and feeling safe), love and belonging (a sense of feeling connected with and cared by others), esteem (feeling a sense of competence and self-worth), and self-actualization. Maslow argued that if a person did not feel a sense of belonging they would not be able to reach a full and authentic sense of life satisfaction.

Drawing from Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs, the belongingness theory, founded by Baumeister and Leary (1995), proposed 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). Baumeister and Leary suggested that the achievement of interpersonal acceptance leads to feelings of pleasure and fulfillment. On the contrary, when faced with rejection or a loss of previously established social bonds, people experience psychological disturbances.

Consequently, the desire to feel pleasure and avoid emotional pain is what is believed to motivate human behavior to seek interpersonal acceptance (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Baumeister and Leary (1995) asserted that two conditions must be met for a person to satisfy their 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 (p. 500).

As presented by Baumeister and Leary (1995), people not only need to have positive interpersonal relationships, but direct and frequent contact with attachment figures is necessary in order for people to successfully meet their belongingness need. The physical separation from home encountered by first-year resident students may be perceived as a loss of pre-established personal contacts, and consequently present a deficit in the person's need to belong.

The belongingness theory goes on to suggest that once people establish a strong bond, individuals will actively resist its dissolution (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). When the dissolution of pre-existing bonds occurs, Baumeister and Leary presumed people would experience psychological disturbances, such as feelings of loneliness and social isolation. When a student relocates from home to college, they undergo a sudden reduction in contact with previous social networks (Watt & Badger, 2009). For instance, prior to college, a student may feel a sense of belonging with their family unit, and friends they have had since elementary school. Conversely, during the initial transition to college, that same student is now living in a new environment surrounded by foreign people (Watt & Badger, 2009). 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 belongingness is heightened during situations when a person finds themselves in an unfamiliar environment, and in particular during 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 going through homesickness during their first semester away at college may be feeling a sense of grief from the perceived loss of their support network (Fisher, 2017). Research on international students found

that participants with a higher number of friends from their home country in their host country reported less homesickness, and a greater sense of being socially connected (Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011). The students that felt socially connected, also reported a higher level of satisfaction with their college experience. As an international student in a foreign culture, socially engaging with familiar customs may have fostered a sense of belonging in the host nation.

It is interesting to note that even when relocating to economically better conditions, people may experience psychological distress and a yearning for home (Fried, 1966). As addressed by Fried (1966), "It is the sense of belonging someplace, in a particular place which is quite familiar and easily delineated, in a wide area in which one feels 'at home'" (p. 363). In the midst of urban renewal, Fried (1966) suggested that the psychological distress experienced by the majority of those who relocated partially stemmed from an interruption in their sense of belonging.

From the lenses of the belongingness theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) one may presume that as a student becomes more familiar with their new college surroundings, and begins to build new meaningful attachments, the student is likely to experience a sense of belonging in their new environment, and feelings of homesickness would lessen accordingly.

Themes Across the Literature

Although homesickness has an impact on sufferers' physical and mental health, the latest version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5) published by the American Psychiatric Association (2013) does not recognize this phenomenon. 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). The reasoning for the exclusion lies in the notion that experiencing feelings of homesickness following a move can be an initial natural response to relocation, and not a mental health disorder (Fisher, 2017; Thurber, 2005). However, when the longing for home persists, and homesickness reaches the severe end of the spectrum, its symptoms can have a devastating impact on sufferers (Fisher, 2017; VanTilburg, 1996).

In addition to assisting mental health professionals to diagnose a mental illness, the DSM-5 (APA, 2013) can also facilitate the identification and implementation of potentially effective treatment modalities (APA, 2013). The multipurpose nature of the DSM-5, and the exclusion of homesickness from this resource creates specific challenges in defining, understanding and treating homesickness. Previous research has focused on exploring the symptoms, risk factors, and effective coping strategies associated with this phenomenon.

Symptomology of Homesickness

Symptoms of homesickness operate on a spectrum ranging from mild to severe with a potentially incapacitating impact on physical, cognitive, and psychological functioning (Fisher, 2017). The multi-facet features of homesickness are present across cultures, race, age, and contexts (Eurelings-Bontekoe, 1994; Fisher, 2017; Fisher, et al., 1986; Hack-Polay, 2012; Tartakovsky, 2007; Thurber, 2005). The review of the literature on the symptomology of homesickness serves the purpose of exploring the most common manifestations of this phenomenon in impairment of physical, cognitive, and psychological functioning. It is crucial to note that these symptoms are not inclusive, 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 has been suggested to generate a higher risk of ill-health (Fisher, 2017). Physical ailments, including disruption in sleep and appetite, increased risk of infection, and gastrointestinal issues is seen in people suffering from homesickness (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 among boarding school children, homesickness was positively associated with the frequency of experiencing non-traumatic ailments (Fisher, 2017).

The start of college/university may be met with high demands in the aspects of learning and following a new academic schedule, instruction style, and content, adapting to a new social life, and overall adjusting to the demands of the transition (Strayhorn, 2019). In conjunction with these high demands, first-year students 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). Keeping this in mind, situations that are categorized by "high demand and low control" are associated with "raised effort and distress and high catecholamine and cortisol" (Fisher, 2017, p. 57). These hormonal changes are associated with a suppression of the immune system, thus leading to more frequent illness and infection. In this sense, a range of physical ailments are identified as a significant and potentially debilitating symptom of homesickness.

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 on homesickness, rumination about home was a characteristic associated with college students in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands (Stroebe, et al., 2002). Implications

have been made suggesting the potential negative impact rumination about home, a characteristic of the homesick experience, can have on the college experience, particularly within the academic setting (Fisher, 2017). Researchers have sought to understand if these pervasive thoughts have a negative impact on further cognitive functioning. The results are mixed, where in some instances a reduction in attentional ability (Burt, 1993), and higher scores on the Cognitive Failures Questionnaire (Fisher, Murray, & Frazer, 1985) were both linked to homesick university students. However, Fisher and Hood (1987) did not find a statistically significant difference in cognitive failure between non-homesick and homesick university students.

Nonetheless, the consistent negative cognitive processing regarding the new setting experienced by the homesick person has been suggested to further complicate the sufferers' psychological health. As evident in Fisher and Hood's (1988) assertion that "cognitive states associated with fundamental themes of missing and longing for home drive varying emotional and motivational states" (p. 317). This notion is further supported by Aaron Beck (1970), founder of cognitive behavior therapy, who 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). In other words, consistent negative thoughts about the new environment can have an impactful influence on the person's behavior and psychological functioning.

Psychological Symptoms

As previously suggested, cognitive symptoms of homesickness can potentially develop into pervasive mental health issues (Thurber & Walton, 2012). Emotional and psychological disturbances represented through depressive mood, loneliness, and anxiety are found in sufferers from homesickness (Fisher, 2017; VanTilburg, 1996). In particular, seminal work by Fisher and Hood (1987, 1988), and Fisher, Murray, and Frazer (1985) have found that homesick university students are more likely than non-homesick counterparts to exhibit symptoms of anxiety and depression. The psychological disturbances associated with homesickness, particularly in the form of depression, have been witnessed across cultures, age groups, and gender (Fisher 2017; Stroebe, et al., 2002).

In a quantitative study on Dutch adults, Verschuur, Eurelings-Bontekoe, and Spinhoven (2004) concluded that not only was depression and anxiety characteristics of homesickness, but the most vulnerable group susceptible to recurring homesickness from childhood through adulthood exhibited more depressive symptoms than the control group. Therefore, this finding suggests a positive association between depression and homesickness.

Research on the symptomology of homesickness has supported the assertion that homesickness is a complex phenomenon marked by varying levels of impairment in a

person's physical, cognitive, and psychological functioning (Fisher, 2017). Studies to date have presented an association between homesickness, and physical ailments, pervasive thoughts about home, and depression (Fisher 2017; Stroebe, et al., 2002; Thurber & Walton, 2012). Furthermore, research has been suggestive of the adverse effects these symptoms can have on a sufferers' functioning (Thurber & Walton, 2012).

Risk Factors for Homesickness

While research on symptomology explains how homesickness impacts sufferers, studies on risk factors draw readers' attention on specific populations that may be more vulnerable to experience this phenomenon. Locus of control (Fisher, 2017), geographic distance (Sun, Hagedorn, & Zhang, 2016), and demographics (Sodowsky & Plake, 1992) are studied as potential risk factors for homesickness.

Locus of Control

As suggested by Fisher (2017), perceived control is an important aspect of a successful adjustment following a transition where a newcomer is likely to feel some level of temporary lack of control over their new environment. When defining the locus of control, research has perceived it as a lack of control over sufferers' ability to change their current environment, and also as a lack of control over the initial decision to relocate (Fisher, 2017).

In a study on children, age 8-16, attending a two-week sleepaway camp, Thurber and Weisz (1997) explored the relationship between homesickness, adjustment, and perceived control. Results found that children who perceived low control over the trajectory of homesickness and the decision to temporally separate from home, were more likely to experience homesickness. However, contrary to these findings, the locus of control was not an influential factor for homesickness in children attending boarding school (Fisher, Frazer, & Murray, 1986).

In a higher education context, Fisher, Murray, and Frazer (1985) found that university students in the United Kingdom that reported having the primary responsibility of choosing to attend that particular university were less likely to experience homesickness, in comparison to students that felt pressured to attend university by parental influences.

Geographic Distance

A person's geographical distance away from home following a move is another risk factor, where researchers have predicted that the further away someone is from their home, the more likely they would be to experience homesickness (Fisher, 2017). The reasoning for this speculation has rested on the rationale that the longer the physical distance from home, the less frequent physical contact a person has with the people and settings they miss. Consequently, this inability or difficulty with contacting home and attachment figures is suggested to place sojourners at a higher risk of suffering from homesickness (Fisher, 2017).

Specifically, in higher education, a quantitative study on first-year university students in the United Kingdom found a significant difference between homesickness and geographic distance from home. Students 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, further supported this assertion (Sun, et al., 2016). Sun et al. found that due to their 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, similar to the comparison in the locus of control, a study on boarding school children did not find a significant difference in geographic distance from home and experiences of homesickness (Fisher, et al., 1986). In addition, Brewin, Furnham, and Howes (1989) did not find an association between geographic distance from home and homesickness among first-year students in their quantitative study. However, the authors also noted that the prevalence of homesickness in their sample at 39 percent was lower than the 60s to 70s percent prevalence found in other studies on first-year college students. Brewin et al. (1989) hypothesized that the lower prevalence found in their study is linked to the fact that in their sample the average distance from home was 200 miles, while previous studies reporting a 60s to 70s percent prevalence had an average distance from home of 300 miles.

Demographics

In reference to the impact demographics plays on homesickness, research has yielded mixed results. These results have ranged from no statistically significant differences to females and individuals under the age of 18 reporting higher prevalence of homesickness (Sun, et al., 2016). Other researchers have cited, due to increased perceived discrimination, race as a risk factor associated with the homesick experience (Sodowsky & Plake, 1992).

The disparity in perceived discrimination among racial groups on college campuses is highlighted by previous research. Poyrazili and Lopez (2007) found that European international students reported less perceived discrimination on college campuses, in comparison to non-European international students. Likewise, Biasco, Goodwin, and Vitale (2001) found that the darker the person's skin color, the more likely they were to experience discrimination. Although these studies were suggestive of a lack of belonging experienced by students of color, they did not directly connect race as a risk factor for homesickness.

However, seminal work by Sodowsky and Plake (1992) made the association between race and the homesick experience. In a mixed methods study, Sodowsky and

Plake utilized quantitative instruments to measure acculturation and perceived prejudice by participants. Open-ended survey questions were used to examine themes of self-identity and transition to a new culture. Sodowsky and Plake found that in comparison to European international students, students of color were more likely to perceive prejudice in their host nation. In addition, perceptions of prejudice were also found to be positively associated with homesickness. Therefore, the research findings suggest that international students of color were more vulnerable to the homesickness experience than European international students.

Although previous research has identified race as a risk factor to homesickness, a recent study by Sun, et al., (2016) contradicted Poyrazili and Lopez's (2007) findings. In a quantitative investigation, Sun, et al. concluded that students of color did not report a significant difference in homesickness in comparison to white peers, despite residing in a university with predominately white students.

Coping Strategies

The research presented thus far has concentrated on studying symptoms and risk factors of homesickness. Although these findings help provide a better understanding of homesickness, the studies fall short of producing applicable information. Specifically, information pertaining to the effectiveness of treatment modalities for homesickness among college students is not well documented. Respectfully, we turn our attention to a review of the literature that suggests that mental health counseling (Saravanan, Alias, & Mohamad, 2017), social connections (Denovan & Macaskill, 2013), and achieving a sense of belonging in a new environment (Watt & Badger, 2009), are crucial ingredients in alleviating homesickness.

Social Support and Belonging

Mental health counseling is often recommended to those struggling with the intense longing for home (Fisher, 2017). Although research is limited, the benefits of counseling have been empirically tested in treating homesickness. In particular, international students presenting with symptoms of homesickness and depression in Malaysia were found to experience a significant improvement in their mental health state after receiving seven sessions of cognitive behavior therapy (Saravanan, et al., 2017). However, as addressed by Saravanan et al. (2017), counseling is not an available option for all students either due to lack of access, or personal and cultural preferences.

Pursuing a comprehensive understanding of effective treatment modalities, Saravanan, Alias, and Mohamad (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. The authors asserted that

information could help counselors and college administration develop an effective treatment to assist homesick students. Out of the 520 international students away at college in Malaysia diagnosed with homesickness and depression, nine were found to have effectively treated their condition solely using self-administered coping strategies. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the nine 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 participants did not receive support from the counseling staff, their symptoms of homesickness were alleviated partially through the enhancement of social supports.

Likewise, in an interpretative phenomenological analysis of the first-year experience in higher education, a common theme emerged suggesting that initial lack of social support worsened feelings of homesickness. However, as students began to develop a solid social support system at college, they began to feel a sense of belonging and adjustment (Denovan & Macaskill, 2013).

The role support and belonging play in treating homesickness is further supported in Thurber's (2005) quantitative research, which tested the effectiveness of a multimodal homesickness prevention package on boys ranging in ages eight to 16 who were spending two weeks away from home at a summer camp for the first time in their lives. As the name suggested, Thurber's treatment package concentrated on preventive measures of addressing homesickness. Among other factors, social support played a key role in Thurber's prevention package. Prior to the departure to summer camp, all of the participants received an introductory telephone call from a camp staff member. The rationale behind this strategy suggested that these telephone calls would assist campers in feeling a sense of connection with at least one person at the campsite prior to arrival. Thurber hypothesized that these preventive strategies would lead to less homesickness among campers, in comparison to the campers from the previous year who did not have access to the prevention package.

Results confirmed that the severity of homesickness varied significantly from the control group to the treatment group. Thurber (2005) concluded that the campers that received the prevention package experienced less intense homesickness. Quantitative data from this study further highlights the vital role social connections and a supportive environment play in reducing the negative effects of homesickness.

As noted in the literature review thus far, social support and belongingness are intertwined. Strayhorn (2019) asserted:

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 cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus as faculty, staff, and peers (p. 4).

Researchers found that a lower perceived sense of belonging at college was predictive of a higher likelihood of experiencing homesickness (Sun, et al., 2016). Based on these results, Sun et al. (2016) speculated that "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, the researchers did not empirically test the remediating effects of college integration and belonging on homesickness.

Watt and Badger (2009), on the other hand, did attempt to 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 were international students from 42 distinct countries, ranging from 18 to 45 years old, studying at five different universities in Australia. Homesickness and the need to belong were both measured using quantitative tools, with participants' reported number of friends being indicative of the students' level of support on campus.

Although the researchers found a positive association between homesickness and the need to belong, they were not able to support the substitution hypothesis, which suggested that social connections in a new place can fulfill the need to belong by replacing the connections from back home. According to the substitution hypothesis, homesickness will dissipate once social support is formed (Watt & Badger, 2009). However, the measurement of social support in this study raises the dilemma of whether quantity or quality holds more weight in determining social support satisfaction.

Reflecting on the complex definition of belongingness provided by Strayhorn (2019), measuring a sense of belonging by merely accounting for the number of friends seems insufficient and oversimplified.

Gap in Literature and Concluding Remarks

A review of the existing literature on homesickness identifies 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 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 vulnerability to homesickness (Fisher, 2017; Fisher, et al., 1985; Sodowsky, & Plake, 1992; Sun, et al., 2016).

As a means of helping sufferers, cognitive behavior therapy, and achieving a sense of belonging through social connections in the new environment are helpful during relocation (Saravanan, et al., 2017; Sun, et al., 2016).

At the conclusion of their study, which involved an analysis of homesickness, Fisher, et al., (1985) found 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). The complexity and subjectivity of the homesick experience bring to question whether standardized quantitative tools provide an accurate assessment of this phenomenon. Reflective of this inquiry, some of the seminal work on homesickness introduced in this literature review yielded contradicting results (Fisher, et al., 1985, 1986; Fisher & Hood, 1987). Perhaps one of the reasons these studies are finding conflicting data lies in their method of investigation.

Accounting for the personal nature of this phenomenon, qualitative measures through interviews may enable researchers to gain a deeper perspective of the unique experience of individual sufferers of homesickness. As indicated by Firmin, Johnson, and Basham (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).

Echoing the need for qualitative investigation, previous quantitative researchers have recommended future studies to focus on concepts best investigated through qualitative measures. Sun, et al., (2016) made the following recommendations:

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 to understand why some students suffer great distress after arriving at college...Future researchers 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).

This review of research literature related to homesickness among college students presents valuable information that can aid mental health clinicians, and higher education administration in developing appropriate treatment options and resources to assist college students to overcome feelings of homesickness and to have a successful college experience.

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- Talita Ferrara, M.S., LMHC, is Director of the Student Personal Counseling Center at Molloy College in Rockville Centre, NY. She is also a doctorate student at Molloy College's Educational Leadership for Diverse Learning Communities (Ed.D.) program.