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The problem with homesickness: A new way of coming home

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The problem with homesickness: A new way of coming home

by

Carolyn J. Duven

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education

Program of Study Committee:
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The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this dissertation. The Graduate College will ensure this dissertation is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2018

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my student participants. Their vulnerability paved the way for my study to take shape and for me to reach my educational goals. My study is also dedicated to all first-generation students who are embarking on their higher education journey. You can do this.
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This dissertation responds to two aspects of the homesickness literature: its characterization as a mental health concern, and its lack of empirical attention in the United States. The purpose of this study was to develop a theoretical understanding of homesickness oriented to an affirming and sociocultural lens, and to do so in the context of current higher education settings in the U.S. Using grounded theory and arts-based inquiry methodologies, homesickness was explored from multiple perspectives by using participant data. The results challenge previous deficit-oriented theoretical frameworks of homesickness, noting it instead as a natural developmental process the participants underwent as a part of their college transition experience.
CHAPTER 1. THE PROBLEM WITH HOMESICKNESS

Going to college was a given for Jordan. She was accepted to top schools, and had developed a strong network of peers and confidants in high school as a student athlete. Determining which institution to attend was difficult. Institutional choice ultimately came down to the matter of cost, and Midwest State University (MSU) offered Jordan a scholarship covering tuition. While Jordan’s high school experience provided her with a challenging academic program that prepared her for her collegiate classroom experiences, she hadn’t anticipated the adjustment and struggles related to being in a new place. Jordan was homesick.

The Problem

Transitioning to college is a daunting task for any student. Coming to college demands that individuals leave behind their previous accommodations, relationships, and identities to establish who they are in relation to the new environment. As a student affairs professional, I watch college students arrive on campus and begin the process of learning what it means to be a student. My professional training has told me that homesickness is terrible, and that it needs to be cured as soon as possible. If a student is
homesick, it is my responsibility to solve the problem for the student, and to ensure that homesickness concerns are addressed as soon as possible.

Over time, I have come to question the ways that homesickness has been described to me through professional training, research literature, and everyday conversations. On campuses where I have worked, students have completed surveys and, in response, I have developed outreach plans. Through this process, I have found that most students experience homesickness. Little research or innovative programming exists to address homesickness even though (Fisher, 1989; Fisher & Hood, 1987; Scopelliti & Tiberio, 2010; Stroebe, van Vliet, Hewstone, & Willis, 2002; Thurber & Walton, 2012; Tognoli, 2003; Verschuur, Eurelings-Bontekoe, Spinhoven, & Duijsens, 2002) homesickness is indeed generally understood as a common experience especially for individuals going to college.

The problem with the current state of the homesickness literature and programming is that students experiencing homesickness are being treated as though they have a contagious disease rather than experiencing a common aspect of the college going experience. My conversations with the students I serve have reinforced that they struggle with the idea that being homesick means they are “ailing” in some way (i.e. they aren’t being successful students). Those conversations also reveal the importance of the relationships and perceptions of those around the individual with homesickness in reinforcing (or not) this idea. They made it clear that how the individual acted, disclosed, and managed being homesick were all rooted in the socialization of the person. It is this importance of the social context that is not well noted in the literature.
The literature will show that homesickness has been studied from various perspectives. The relationship between homesickness and mental health concerns (Fisher & Hood, 1987, 1988; Fisher, Murray, & Frazer, 1985) has been examined, as has its occurrence in particular audiences such as international students (Flett, Endler, & Besser, 2009; Hannigan, 1997; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007; Stroebe et al., 2002), as well as its particular consequences (Van Tilburg, Vingerhoets, Van Heck, & Kirschbaum, 1999). These studies use quantitative methodologies such as surveys and questionnaires to examine homesickness. Developed to measure general emotional and health related phenomenon, most of the instruments were not created with the specific purpose of measuring or analyzing homesickness.

In terms of the research that has focused on developing homesickness assessments and questionnaires (Archer, Ireland, Amos, Broad, & Currid, 1998; Vingerhoets & Van Heck, 1997), few studies have actually adopted these instruments for empirical use. Additionally, the surveys that do exist were developed in European countries. Stroebe et al. (2002) noted that homesickness symptoms, manifestations, and causes differ across cultural boundaries. If homesickness varies across national and cultural borders, then homesickness needs to be examined from the cultural and environmental context of the country where it is happening [of its occurrence]. The lack of instruments developed to evaluate homesickness in the United States means that continued research regarding homesickness is necessary.

The way homesickness is characterized in the current literature frames those who are homesick as suffering from a deficiency. Homesickness is described as a psychological malady; those who are homesick are not able to be as successful as those
who are not (Burt, 1993; Thurber & Walton, 2012; Verschuur, Eurelins-Bontekoe, & Spinhoven, 2004). Interestingly, the literature also notes that homesickness is a common experience shared by the young and old alike (Fisher, 1989; Fisher, Frazer, & Murray, 1986; Fisher & Hood, 1987; Matt, 2011; Thurber & Walton, 2007, 2012; Thurber & Weisz, 1997). In the work that follows, I challenge the notion that homesickness is a flaw. Instead I assert that homesickness is a universal developmental process of defining one’s own home.

The Purpose

My goal is to examine homesickness from outside the bounds of previously determined and rigid theoretical constructs that do not fully explicate the phenomenon of homesickness. In order to accomplish my goal of examining homesickness, I adopted a constructivist approach to grounded theory methods. The constructivist approach allowed me to examine the phenomenon of homesickness from the perspective of those who are homesick, and construct my understanding of the phenomenon using their life experiences. I also sought to use non-traditional research methodologies to challenge the ways that researchers and participants create and understand data.

As I have outlined, homesickness is a common yet little researched phenomenon affecting the higher education experience in the United States. My research questions are a starting point to examine homesickness without a previously designed theoretical framework or assessment. The lack of qualitative and constructivist approaches to homesickness underscores the need for research regarding homesickness experiences. Striving to develop a theoretical understanding of homesickness, I asked:
1. What is the homesickness experience like for U.S. students attending college in the U.S.?
2. What commonalities and differences exist across the homesickness experience?
3. How is homesickness defined and constructed by those who self-identify as being homesick?

**The Process**

I begin with a literature review that illustrates the gaps in homesickness-related literature. Specifically, I examine the ways that homesickness is described and measured, theories related to the understanding of homesickness, and populations that are described throughout literature on homesickness. The gaps I identify highlight a lack of differentiation of homesickness experiences across age and social identities, an absence of unifying theories regarding homesickness, and the need for continued research regarding homesickness in the U.S. higher education system. My research questions speak to the kind of information I discovered was needed in the literature.

I then turn to my theoretical and methodological decision-making. In addressing the research questions, after assessing multiple theories and methods of inquiry, I determined that constructivist grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1969) would best suit my goals. The theoretical assumptions of constructivist grounded theory -- that knowledge and reality are socially constructed -- draw from the philosophy of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969). Symbolic interactionism focuses on the social nature of meaning making and the reflective nature of human action. Individuals and collective populations perform action based on past experience, and based on the interpretations of
the actions of those around them. Symbolic interactionism challenges the notion that a previous theory or a neat explanation is required to perform social science research. The human experience is understood to be messy, sometimes unorganized, and constantly changing. While the need to create order and logical explanations is a part of human nature, symbolic interactionism requires the researcher to view the problem at hand from the perspective of those living the phenomenon, and to use data collected from the empirical world to analyze the proposed problem.

When coupled with symbolic interactionism, constructivist grounded theory methods maintain that data collection and analysis are constructions of the researcher and the participants in the study (Charmaz, 2014). I view my researcher position as an information seeker and clarifier. Focusing on constructivist methods, I saw an opportunity in the idea of construction to innovate in my data collection, interpretation, and representation of results.

To this end, I involved arts-based inquiry methods to assist my participants in making meaning of their homesickness experience. The creation of an artifact to represent the experience of homesickness is a new way to explore the phenomenon, and provided me with another source of data to address my research questions. This complemented the more traditional inquiry approaches of survey and interview. I describe my data analysis and memo writing processes before turning to my findings. I conclude by outlining the implications of my study for better serving students in U.S. higher education.

Jordan’s homesickness experience can be used as an analogy for this study. She began her college going experience, unsure of her institutional choice, but confident in
her ability to be successful in college. As she started classes, engaged with others, and started learning about herself, she began to change the way she saw herself. My goal for this study was to explore the lived experience of homesick individuals. This required me to question my methodological choice and develop confidence in a new way forward with grounded theory. Throughout data collection and analysis, my conceptualization of the college going experience and homesickness was challenged by the participants and their experiences. Just as Jordan, while still homesick, is finding ways to make connections and develop skills to help her achieve her goals, the writing of this dissertation is engaging me in deep learning and theorizing about the ways that higher education professionals can best support students, like Jordan, who need us to help them feel at home.
CHAPTER 2. EXAMINATION OF HOMESICKNESS DEFINITIONS, RESEARCH, AND LITERATURE

From my experience working with students like Jordan, I know that understanding homesickness from the perspective of the student is important. Students have unique perspectives on what homesickness means to them that inform my practice and stand to benefit the practice of other student affairs professionals. Current practice is limited due to the prevailing definition of homesickness presented in the literature.

My literature review will describe the current literature regarding homesickness. I will begin with definitions and current theoretical models of homesickness. My research questions investigate the nature of homesickness, so I focus my literature review on detailed examinations of definitions, frameworks, and assessments used to study homesickness. These three areas provide a clear description of how homesickness has been characterized and measured in previous research studies. I will move on to examples of homesickness studies that have been executed in countries around the world. The two studies situated at U.S. institutions, and two studies that examined homesickness across national and cultural borders, are discussed. I focus on these to illustrate the lack of current literature in the U.S. regarding homesickness. The cross-cultural studies exemplify the need to develop culture specific understandings of homesickness.

In addition to exploring homesickness, I will also examine literature related to the college student transition. Acknowledging the need to differentiate between homesickness experiences across populations, I identified the need to include information about the college transition. In my review of the college transition, I include descriptions of interventions to assist with adjustment, trends in college transition research, and the
link between homesickness and transition. In conclusion, I will summarize existing literature and situate the need for my study based on the research currently available.

**Definitions**

Just about any person can anecdotally define what homesickness means to them. “What is homesickness?” is not a difficult question for an individual to answer, but the varied responses and outcomes of homesickness have made it almost impossible to create a universal definition of homesickness. Definitions of homesickness consist of both descriptors of feelings related to homesickness and psychological factors associated with homesickness in the literature. Each definition, often built on previous research, continues to muddy the waters in understanding homesickness as a stand-alone phenomenon.

Multiple studies have used participant responses to try to define homesickness, often finding a multitude of responses that represents the overall feeling of homesickness. Fisher, Murray, & Frazer (1985) surveyed first year students attending a university in the U.K. Both homesick and non-homesick individuals were asked to define homesickness. Fisher et al. (1985) found that both groups understood and defined homesickness in...
consistent ways. The most common aspects of the definitions included: missing home environment, missing parents/family, and wanting to go home. She continued to note that “homesickness appears to be a complex cognitive-motivational-emotional state focused on missing home” (Fisher, 1989, p. 31).

Other studies do not define homesickness as a word, but rather describe what kinds of characteristics or feelings may be associated with homesickness. Watt and Badger (2009) said, “homesick people are prone to crying and can be apathetic and listless; severe homesickness can provoke thoughts of suicide. Often there are somatic responses such as stomachache, loss of appetite, sleep disturbances, and headaches” (p. 516). Watt and Badger’s description of homesickness only goes so far as to examine the potential negative outcomes of severe homesickness. Brewin, Furnham, and Howes (1989) argue,

“Although homesickness cannot be defined in absolute terms, there is sufficient consensus among students about its major features for it to be defined operationally. Four features- missing home, missing family, wanting to go home, and longing to see friends at home -- have previously been shown to be by far the most commonly mentioned in student definitions of homesickness” (p. 468).

While the above studies focused on clinical definitions of homesickness, other studies aim to understand homesickness in more contextualized ways in terms of setting and age. In order to address the lack of consistent definitions at the time, Baier and Welch (1992) performed a concept analysis of homesickness within the context of hospitalization experiences of children and adults. They noted the importance of examining homesickness as a stand-alone phenomenon, and when they reviewed
literature regarding homesickness and hospitalization, they found no literature that mentioned homesickness, for children or adults. Baier and Welch (1992) noted the differences between homesickness symptoms in children and young adults. Baier and Welch (1992) outlined criteria for the concept of homesickness. The goal was to differentiate homesickness from other disorders and diagnoses. Below are the six criteria identified by Baier and Welch (1992, p. 56):

1. Homesickness happens universally to all age groups, under conditions of being away from home.
2. Homesickness frequently is not acknowledged, nor are the feelings processed intrapersonally.
3. In adults and older children, homesickness is sometimes experienced with embarrassment or denial.
4. Homesickness is a pervasive feeling of sadness and thoughts of the place left.
5. Children who are homesick are generally encouraged to suppress their feelings.
6. Somatic complaints may accompany the longing for home or family.

These criteria better define homesickness than much of the current literature, including the characterization of homesickness as a shameful or bad experience. Baier and Welch (1992) support my idea that homesickness is common, and something that needs to be acknowledged widely as a normal part of moving from one place to another. These definitions, however, classify homesickness as an inherently negative occurrence without consideration of the potentially positive or neutral aspects of a homesickness experience. My research informed a new definition of homesickness as a transitional, identity
development process, centered on developing skills while away from the previous home environment.

Current Theoretical Models

Moving beyond the idea of homesickness as a construct to be defined, other scholars have developed ideas about homesickness as part of broader theoretical models. Shirley Fisher has conducted significant research on homesickness and psychological responses. Fisher was the first researcher to put forth a theoretical model of homesickness (Fisher, 1989). Her work is often cited as the leading theoretical and practical understanding of homesickness throughout the current literature. In her book, Homesickness, Cognition, and Health, Fisher (1989) outlines multiple theoretical frameworks that had been used to study homesickness in the past. These included a biological model of homesickness, cognitive accounts of homesickness, and job strain and homesickness. Each of these different models focused on a single aspect of homesickness. Fisher (1989) noted that each model fell short of accurately describing homesickness, as evidenced by her substantial research. She put forward a multi-causal theory of homesickness. Her model of homesickness attempted to account for the different aspects of transition and homesickness that she had found over the course of her research. Rather than assuming that leaving a familiar environment was the cause of homesickness, Fisher (1989) asserts that it is both the leaving and the interaction with the new environment that cause a homesickness reaction.

Fisher’s (1989) work is the taken-for-granted understanding of homesickness assumed in the literature: it is often cited as the model for homesickness studies. For example, the development of homesickness inventories (Archer et al., 1998; Eurelings-
Bontekoe, Vershuur, Koudstaal, Van der Sar, & Duijsens, 1995; Verschuur, Eurelings-Bontekoe, & Spinhoven, 2001) used Fisher’s conceptualization of homesickness and theoretical models as starting points to develop their own materials. Fisher’s work has literally defined homesickness throughout the current research. Because of this, if a new theoretical model overturs Fisher’s assumption, it stands to alter the research landscape. My study focuses on developing a model of homesickness using the empirical data provided by participants to construct a model, rather than piecing together previously defined models to fit the problem of homesickness. In this way, it represents a substantial shift in the scholarly homesickness conversation.

Measuring and Assessing Homesickness

Despite the popularity of Fisher, there are variations in the definitions and constructs of homesickness. These make it difficult to determine the best ways to theoretically frame or measure homesickness. As research on homesickness began to develop, the need to identify signs, symptoms, and predictors of homesickness became important. Multiple researchers sought to develop instruments to measure different aspects of homesickness. Some researchers, for example, used assessment instruments developed to measure psychological disorders or illnesses. Because in my research I use a survey about homesickness, I will describe the processes related to the development of three different homesickness measures before explaining how those influenced my own tool. Common across all three instruments is using psychological assessments to measure homesickness in the context of homesickness being a mental health affliction.

Dundee Relocation Inventory. Fisher (1989) developed an inventory based on her and colleagues’ previous research. The Dundee Relocation Inventory (DRI) was
created to examine homesickness as a result of relocation. In the literature available to me, the Dundee Relocation Inventory was the first assessment of its kind. The DRI has been used in numerous studies to measure homesickness on the four factors: adaptation, home, satisfaction, and social (Fisher, 1989). Authors of other homesickness inventories and questionnaires used elements of the DRI to develop their instruments. I implemented aspects of Fisher’s (1989) approach to homesickness assessment. The college experience list I developed to indicate the potential for homesickness used the four factors to organize and conceptualize the list of experiences.

**Other Homesickness Assessments.** I found significant literature describing the development of three other homesickness assessments. Each assessment measured different aspects of homesickness including vulnerability to homesickness (Verschuur et al., 2001), how to cope with homesickness (Vingerhoets, et al., 1997), and a grief-centered assessment of homesickness (Archer et al., 1998). The creation of these assessments followed similar protocols.

Beginning with Eurelings-Bontekoe et al. in 1994, a group of mental health reporting instruments were gathered together as no clinical instrument had been developed to measure homesickness specifically. Over the course of ten years, the assessment was given to different populations of homesick and non-homesick people to test the reliability of the instrument. The Homesickness Vulnerability Questionnaire was the result of the work.

Archer et al. (1998) also developed a scale to measure homesickness. They used the work of Fisher (1989) to guide the development of the questions used on the assessment. Archer et al. (1998) highlighted an important development -- that the most
reliable measure of homesickness was a single item that asked participants to report if they were homesick or not, and to indicate the frequency along a four-point scale. Van Tilburg et al. (1997) knew of assessments to measure and predict homesickness, but did not find an assessment to measure how adults coped with homesickness. Identifying that an assessment to describe coping measures was needed, van Tilburg et al. (1997) developed the Adult Homesickness Coping Questionnaire.

SkyFactor, a student retention and benchmarking research company has developed assessments intended to provide higher education institutions with information regarding the individual and aggregate student experience (skyfactor.com/student-retention-why-it-works/ accessed on June 27th, 2018). The retention assessment, MAP-Works, utilizes a predictive model to alert staff if a student is at high risk for leaving an institution (“The Foundation of MAP-Works,” 2014). The predictive model incorporates elements related to student retention including academic efficacy, desire to attend the institution, and homesickness, in addition to institutional variables and student academic information. The MAP-Works assessment provides a snapshot in time of the student’s risk of leaving the institution (“The Foundation of MAP-Works,” 2014). The homesickness section of the MAP-Works assessment asks questions related to student behavior and feelings related to the transition to the institution. MAP-Works can be utilized to compare homesickness concerns with a set of variables related to other parts of the student experience. MAP-Works is a retention tool with the purpose of identifying students who are at risk of leaving an institution. While homesickness is a variable considered in the model, the focus of the MAP-Works survey is not to understand homesickness, but to use it as a predictive tool for higher education professionals.
In each of these assessments, a gap exists between the definitions and assessment of homesickness. Each of these assessments was developed based on previous instruments that had been used to measure other kinds of phenomenon, whether it was depression or anxiety. This approach allowed the measures to be used in quantitative studies to compare and contrast homesickness with other psychological pathologies or demographics. I was not able to locate a homesickness assessment developed using the lived experience of homesick individuals. In order to better understand homesickness, an evaluation of homesickness assessments using qualitative methodologies is necessary. The models and assessments these authors developed began the conversation about how to assess homesickness. I contend that we need to move research regarding homesickness forward. The lack of qualitative data and critical methodologies to examine homesickness has left a gap that can be filled by research studies like this one.

**College Student Homesickness**

According to the research on homesickness, anyone can be homesick. Matt (2011) described homesickness in the U.S from the time of the first colonizers through to modern times. Her examination of primary historical documents details how men, women, children, soldiers, wives, business people, and others all described feelings that we would associate with homesickness (Matt, 2011). Despite its purported universality, across the literature on homesickness, different populations like international students or migrants are often singled out as being more prone to homesickness. In this study, I focus specifically on homesickness in college students.

As I conducted my research and literature review, I found few studies that were conducted in the U.S. The majority of homesickness research is conducted in Europe and
Australia. I outline aspects of homesickness that are critical in understanding how homesickness has been characterized in regard to college students.

**Homesickness and Mental Health.** Significant literature exists to examine relationships between homesickness and mental health conditions like depression and/or anxiety. One of the few homesickness studies in the U.S. was conducted at University of Loyola Chicago by (Urani et al., 2003). They examined the relationship between social anxiety and homesickness. Social anxiety was found to have a positive relationship with homesickness (Urani et al., 2003). Fisher and Hood (1987) examined psychological disturbance, absent-mindedness, and vulnerability to homesickness. Fisher and Hood (1987) found that homesick and non-homesick students differed in personality features prior to leaving home.

Stroebe et al (2002) problematized the relationship between depression and homesickness, noting that they were unable to determine the direction and influence between the two. While it has often been surmised that depression is a precursor to homesickness, Stroebe et al. (2002) challenged that depression may influence the
development of homesickness. Flett, Endler, and Besser (2009) focused on how an individual’s separation anxiety levels and perceived controllability would predict levels of homesickness in Canadian university students. Flett et al. (2009) determined that those with higher levels of separation anxiety were more likely to be homesick. Tognoli (2003) examined homesickness using a mixed-methods approach of survey analysis and phenomenological review of interview questions. It was found that participants experienced homesickness as a process (Tognoli, 2003), noting that homesickness would come and go, and that the homesick students needed to enact their coping mechanisms, like talking with friends or calling home. Tognoli (2003) drew a relationship between the cyclical nature of homesickness and depression, and called for research to focus on the association of homesickness and depression. While Tognoli (2003) describes homesickness as cyclical, Tognoli also asserts that the cycle is in relation to depression. The idea that homesickness is cyclical in nature is key to my understanding of homesickness, yet, Tognoli’s understanding asserts that homesickness and depression are linked in that cycle.

**Homesickness and Academics.** Sun, Hagedorn, and Zhang (2016) examined factors related to homesickness and academic success. Using the previously-described college student transition survey, MAP-Works, Sun et al. (2016) performed multiple regression analysis and found that two independent variables, Homesickness Distress and Homesickness Separation, predicted 35.2% of variance in the GPA of the students in the study. Additionally, Sun et al. (2016) found that female students, first-generation students, and out-of-state students were more likely to experience Homesickness Separation. As Sun et al. (2016) noted, while the survey data was rich in results and
information, Sun et al. were not able to control or predict the incoming emotional variables that may be present as students transition to a university. Grounded theory methods allow for the collection and integration of personal variables that may not be included in a survey.

**Homesickness Over Time.** Fisher and Hood (1985, 1987) noted that homesickness could develop over time, and that feelings of homesickness could develop after the first year of college. Brewin et al. (1989) found in their study that homesickness dissipated over time for the first-year students in their study. Bell and Bromnick (1998) found similar results to Brewing et al. (1989) that feelings of homesickness were more intense at the beginning of the school year and lessened as the semester went on. Urani et al. (2003) reported that the overall incidence of homesickness declined over time for their participants. Lu (2007) found that while psychological aspects improved, the levels of homesickness did not decrease over time as supposed in other studies.

**Cultural Differences.** Stroebe, van Vliet, Hewstone, and Willis (2002) developed a study to examine homesickness in the Netherlands and the UK. Results of the study found that 50% of the NL students and 80% of the UK students reported being homesick. Comparisons of the results of the studies noted significant differences between the duration and intensity of homesickness between the UK and NL students, with the intensity being greater in the UK study (Stroebe et al., 2002). The identification that homesickness experiences were commonly present in the students in the different populations studied, but that their symptoms or intensities were different, challenges the notion that a homesickness study in one country can speak to the results or outcomes of homesickness in another.
**Homesickness and Belonging.** Watt and Badger (2009) investigated the relationship between feelings of belonging and being homesick. Needing to belong was identified as the strongest predictor of homesickness in the surveyed students. Watt and Badger noted, “that the need to belong has a causal effect on homesickness” (Watt & Badger, 2009, p. 524). Watt and Badger (2009) noted, too, that “experiencing distress on leaving places where we already have a strong sense of belongingness is normal and the sense of loss does not dissipate easily. It is simply a product of our construction as social beings” (p. 538). Sun et al. (2016) also found that belonging and homesickness were related to one another. In both variables, Homesickness Distress and Homesickness Separation, the more a participant felt they belonged at the institution, the less likely they were to be homesick.

**College Students in Transition**

The transition to college is one that has been the focus of scholarship and practice for decades (Tinto, 1993). Almost every aspect of the transition, from moving away from home, to adjusting to a new schedule, and managing time have been the subject of studies to attempt to determine the best practices to assist students throughout their transition. My professional experience has taught me that there is a relationship between the college transition and homesickness. However, current research lacks any direct mention of homesickness. Students in transition are often focused on in the realm of student success and retention. Helping students adjust to the university setting and transition to be successful members of the institution community serves both the students and the institution. When framed this way, significant literature exists regarding the college transition experience of students in the U.S. While student retention is important, the
process of transitioning to the university environment is also key to the success of the student. I will provide a brief overview of some of the literature regarding students as they transition to college in the U.S.

**Adults in Transition.** Transition is a complicated process that is different for each person. Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg (2012) state, “A central theme in our current social context is change, reflection on the dynamic impact of forces across demographic, social, cultural, technological, political, and historical domains” (p. 3). Change is something that can be either anticipated, unanticipated, or marked by the failure of an event to occur. Each of these situations brings a set of expectations and shifts to the person experiencing the transition. Examples of these three types of transitions include attending the number one choice of an institution, not being able to attend the institution of one’s choice, or not being admitted to the institution of one’s choosing. Each of these events has circumstances that will impact the ways that individuals react and interact during the transition. And transition does not occur immediately. In fact, Anderson et al. (2012) noted that in order to best understand the ways that individuals manage transition and the transition process, they need to be examined over the course of time.

While there are three main types of transitions that are described by the authors, there are additional factors that are cited in determining how an individual will react in a time of transition. The basic part of the process is moving in, moving through, and moving out of transition. Applicable to the transition experience of new direct from high school students attending college for the first time, they will encounter these three different phases, and will move through these different phases based on their personal
assets or liabilities (Anderson et al., 2012). Assets and liabilities are the variables that can either assist or prevent someone from successfully navigating the transition process. Each person has an individual set of assets and liabilities that interacts with the individual’s response to the change. For some, family may be considered an asset, while others may see family as a liability to their ability to transition fully. Anderson et al. (2012) categorize the variables as the four S’s, Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies.

Transition does not happen in a vacuum, nor does it happen aside from all other life events (Anderson et al., 2012). This perspective allows for individuals to continuously navigate the transition, minding that variables can constantly change. The framework allows for consideration of the assets and liabilities that each person brings to a transition, noting that even if some students may have the same list of supports, they may each view the individuals on that list differently. In examining the experience of college students, it is imperative to be mindful of the diversity of the experience of the students, their cultural values and history, their racial identities, social, religious, and other pertinent intersectional identities. This theory does not explicitly examine the differences between different cultures, but acknowledges that differences will exist, and that those in helping professions cannot dismiss the personal experiences of the adults who are experiencing the transition.

**Stress and the College Transition.** The transition to college is noted to be a stressful time for students and parents alike (Clinciu, 2013; Dyson & Renk, 2006; Frazier & Schauben, 1994; McCarron & Kinkelas, 2006; Mounts, Valentiner, Anderson, & Boswell, 2006; Vianden & Ruder, 2012). Students with marginalized ethnic/racial identities, with disabilities, with low socio-economic status, and with first-generation
status encounter additional challenges when transitioning to college (Buchman, 2009; Estrada, Dupous, & Wolman, 2006; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Huynh & Fuligni, 2012; Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, & Leonard, 2007; Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014; Tsai & Fuligni, 2012).

Like Fisher (1989) noted, the transition to a college or university is stressful, but can be made more challenging when depression or anxiety are involved. Rice et al. (1990) examined depressive symptoms, stress, and coping in first-year students as they transitioned to a university. They found that students employed various coping techniques, but, overall, the students avoided managing the more difficult emotions. Pittman & Richmond, (2008) investigated the relationship between friendship quality and psychological adjustment in first year students as they arrived at a university. Developing a sense of belonging at the institution correlated with ease of transition to the university (Pittman & Richmond, 2008).

**Transition Interventions.** Transition interventions are programs to assist students in developing skills to be successful in college. Interventions can include college success courses, living-learning programs, and gathering groups for students with similar social identities. Inkelas et al. (2007) studied the role that a living-learning community played in the overall college transition of first-generation college students. While informal personal and social relationships were not found to significantly impact the transition of the first-generation students, structured peer-to-peer resources were found to be successful in helping the students adjust (Inkelas et al., 2007). First-generation students were found to have a more difficult social transition than academic transition.
Inkelas et al. (2007) attributed this to the academic focus of the first-generation students in their study.

Hurtado et al. (1996) examined the college transition experience of Latino students across the first and second years of college. The development of peer mentoring relationships between upper class students and residence life student staff contributed positively to the transition of the Latino students in the study. Hurtado et al. (1996) called for the development of programs to connect Latino students to peers and programs to create these structured relationships. The academic transition for the students was best supported by structured upper-class student and trained staff interactions. Creating opportunities for Latino students to engage in academic skill building conversations with trained students and professionals will support students in their transition (Hurtado et al., 1996).
CHAPTER 3. AN ARTS-BASED APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING HOMESICKNESS

My interest in challenging conventional understandings of homesickness required methods particularly oriented to making meaning of lived experience. In this chapter I will describe the methods I explored and ultimately selected to develop this study. First, I will outline the process I used to select the appropriate method to answer my research questions. I will compare two qualitative methods, and then comment on how I came to confirm grounded theory as the best method. In this discussion, I will also explain the advantage to my study of new and innovative data collection methods. In particular, I will share how I used arts-based inquiry to develop a new data collection method that challenged the objectivist position of traditional grounded theory. I will conclude this chapter by summarizing how the approach I developed allowed me to examine homesickness in college students in a way that previous studies on the topic of homesick college students have not, and how this contributes new knowledge in service of higher education professionals and college students. My institutional review board approval memo is included in Appendix F.

Research Positionality

It is important for me to explain the context of the research, including my institutional knowledge, professional roles, and research considerations. I have worked as a student affairs professional for over ten years. Having worked at Midwest State for over five years and in multiple roles, I developed institutional knowledge through my direct student outreach, and professional committee and collaborative work. Working as a residence hall director and apartment manager provided me with direct student support for students experiencing homesickness and other transitional issues related to their
arrival at Midwest State. As I worked, I also developed knowledge of resources on
campus and ways that students could seek assistance. My institutional position at the time
of this research was that of an academic coach. I provided intentional academic coaching
to a cohort of first-generation and Pell-eligible students. My assigned student cohort had
completed their first year at Midwest State and were considered second year students. I
focused on developing a research methodology to highlight the experiences of these
rising second-year students. Knowing that the students I directly worked with had
completed their first year, I felt I would be able to balance my dual roles as institutional
agent and researcher.

My professional training as a student affairs professional provided me with
opportunities to develop research and assessment projects in real life practice and
contexts. I used quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the performance of my
student staff and the students in my residential areas. Creative projects, like word clouds,
poetry, or collaborative art projects are tools I used in order to understand how my
student staff worked with one another and to explore their attitudes and ideas. Whether or
not I participated in the creation of the art project or simply assigned the task for the
students, I found enormous value in what the students created. Each student staff member
contributed a part of their experience and together they formed an impressive
construction of their mutual experience. The students I worked with described their
participation in activities related to arts-based methods as engaging and meaningful. Each
person could look at their individual contribution as a part of a whole, which was an
intended consequence of the activities. As I approached this research, I wanted to develop
data collection methods that would push the limits of previous studies, and allow for
participant engagement in the research project in ways other than providing verbal feedback. My goal was to allow the participants to investigate their own lived understanding of the homesickness phenomenon as I developed a theoretical understanding.

I had a goal to develop a research study that would incorporate my academic interests and professional competencies. As a student affairs professional I ascribe to professional ethical values that necessitated a research approach that allowed me to develop a relationship with participants beyond “researcher” and “subject.” I have worked with students who are experiencing trauma, and wanted to develop a study that would allow interactions to both further my research agenda as well as to support students as they navigate the complicated system of higher education. Qualitative methods allow me, as a researcher and staff member, to engage in powerful research while supporting students throughout their college going experience. My professional roles have allowed me to work with students who are experiencing homesickness. My research approach was developed in such a way to allow me to respond to the needs of my participants if they expressed concern or needed assistance throughout the research process.

Original grounded theory methodologies require that the researcher step outside of the participant experience and review the phenomenon from an external perspective (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). However, by conducting research at the institution where I was employed, I needed to develop ways to balance my roles as an institutional agent and as a researcher. I identified that I needed to determine ways that I would be accountable to institutional policies, and provide a safe, confidential interview process for the
participants. I carefully developed my informed consent documents to explain my limitations and to provide key information to participants. Moreover, I determined that if a participant mentioned a concern or asked a question regarding institutional policy or practice, I would respond in a way to support that student.

**From Phenomenology to Grounded Theory**

As I thought about what steps I wanted to take to better understand homesickness in college students, I reflected on the methods that were available to me to examine a phenomenon like homesickness. I had found from my reading that the previous research and literature regarding homesickness had a gap in understanding regarding the lived experience of those who are homesick. In order to examine the lived experience of the individuals who are enrolling in college and self-identify as homesick, I needed to select a method that would allow me to gather data and interrogate the particularity of the lived experience. I began the development of my study by focusing on phenomenology, but ultimately realized my research questions would be better answered using a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory, as I came to understand, would allow me to describe the homesickness experience in a way important to the understanding I was seeking.

**Phenomenology.** Phenomenology is a method focused on revealing the lived experience, the personal interpretations of people who are going through a common phenomenon (Creswell, 2014; Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). The data collection effort concentrates on gathering the perspectives of the individuals who experience the phenomenon in question. Analysis of the data includes thematic coding along with researcher interpretations of the meaning of the phenomenon. The intended result of a
phenomenological study is thick, rich descriptions of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014; Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007).

As I was initially developing my research questions, my first realization was that the literature was missing the essence or the detailed description of the experience of people who were homesick. Attention to the variability of lived experience of those who are homesick was missing throughout the literature. With this gap in mind, I began to explore theoretical frameworks and data collection methods to implement that would bring this missing element into the scholarly conversation. As I continued preparing the literature review and designing my approach, I had a second realization; the problem in understanding homesickness was not merely an absence of attention to the lived experience, but also a re-interrogation of its very nature. Most research has situated homesickness as a psychological disorder (Fisher, 1989; Schmitz, 1997; Terry, 2013). Current theoretical models used to shape homesickness research continue to use theories developed to understand different psychological phenomenon (Thurber & Sigman, 1998). As Thurber and Sigman (1998) have argued, “Each of the modern theories and ideas about homesickness etiology has its own emphasis, but most are inherently transactional, integrating characteristics of the person, the environment, and the circumstances surrounding the separation (p. 903).

I was unable to locate theories used to study the phenomenon of homesickness that were rooted in constructive methods or developed using iterative methods examining homesickness outside of a preconceived theoretical model. As my understanding of the phenomenon of homesickness continued to develop and transform, I realized that work focused on constructs, like grief (Fisher, 1989), job strain (Fisher, Frazer, & Murray,
1984), or peer social support (Brewin, Furnham, & Howes, 1989), focused on explaining, predicting, or curing the phenomenon without interrogating its very definition or contextual interactions. This helped me see that while definitions of homesickness may be accepted, a common theory of homesickness, drawn from a phenomenological accounting of participants’ expressed experiences, does not seem to exist.

Developing a theoretical understanding of homesickness using the lived experience of participants was lacking from the literature. While I was able to locate two studies that employed phenomenological methods (Thurber, 1999; Tognoli, 2003), each used questionnaires and established theories to frame their analysis. At this point, the purpose of my study changed from being focused on a definition or essence, and turned toward developing a different understanding of homesickness. Many theories may currently be used to examine homesickness from a number of psychological and sociological perspectives; I wanted to construct an understanding of homesickness from the perspective of those who are homesick without comparing homesickness to a mental health disorder or seeking to predict who may be homesick. After learning about the grounded theory method, I determined that I would perform a grounded theory study of homesickness.

**Constructivist Grounded Theory.** Inherent in grounded theory methods is the collection of data in the field with the intention to discover the truth of a phenomenon, without using the lens of a previous defined theory, or attempting to verify an existing theory (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory encourages mid-level theoretical development regarding basic social processes (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The
mid-level theories are developed using empirical evidence gathered in the real-life setting where the phenomenon takes place. Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that mid-level theories were important to social sciences because they could help illustrate basic social processes, and contribute to the understanding of the human experience (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Oktay, 2017).

Charmaz (2014) noted that the theories were developed to answer questions, and to explicate process. Because I wanted to develop a theoretical understanding of homesickness as a social process occurring within the particular contexts of its experiencing, I determined that I would implement a grounded theory method to answer my research questions. The development of a mid-level theory regarding homesickness provides a framework for additional studies to be developed, and for the research on homesickness to advance. A constructivist approach to grounded theory also allowed me to situate myself with my participants in the research process.

Charmaz (2014) describes a constructivist approach to grounded theory as one that allows the researcher and participants to construct the meanings and outcomes of the research together. The researcher is not situated outside of the research process as an unaffected observer, but rather uniquely positioned to make meaning of the data in conjunction with the participants as the participants are exploring their experience with the selected phenomenon (Charmaz, 2014). The researcher is not expected to be “objective” but subjectively linked to the analysis and reporting of results. As Charmaz (2014) asserts, “[c]onstructivist grounded theorists assumed that both data and analyses are social constructions that reflected the conditions of their production” (p. 240).
Charmaz’ constructivist orientation to grounded theory expands upon that of Glaser and Strauss (1967). (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) asserted that researchers were supposed to be almost silent observers, taking the data from the field, and carefully examining the information collected to develop the grounded theories. The original methods called for researchers to remain as objective and outside of the phenomenon as they could (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). However, as ways of knowing and philosophies were developed, the need to acknowledge how grounded theory methods would respond to the postmodern and constructionist movements arose (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Charmaz (2014) responded by outlining how grounded theory methods could be implemented across epistemological and ontological views.

Charmaz (2014) challenges the notion that researchers must separate themselves from the data and participants. She stresses that there is space within the grounded theory method for researchers to be both rigorous in the method and topic, as long as significant reflection is present throughout the research process. Rather than taking the perspective that an involved participant in the phenomenon is not fit for performing grounded theory research, Charmaz (2014) and others (Bryant, 2002, 2007; Thorne, Jensen, Kearney, Noblit, & Sandelowski, 2004) argue that a reflexive and informed researcher is capable of developing a grounded theory using the methods determined by Glaser and Strauss (1967). The idea of construction, and creation of knowledge and understanding, exposes the potential to explore new ways of gathering data and theorizing about a social process. The construction of the theory is not solely based on the researcher’s perspectives. The researcher is responsible for constructing the theory out of the shared meanings of the phenomenon created through the data collection and analysis process. The researcher and
participant are equally engaged in creating the understanding of the phenomenon, but it is up to the researcher to organize and compose the theory.

**Uncommon Data Collection Methods.** Arts-based expression and research is an emerging data collection process in higher education (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2008; Haywood Rolling, Jr., 2018; Leavy, 2018). Art as a way to make meaning, explore emotions, and develop understanding is often used as a therapeutic method (Hogan & Lomas, 2001). Different from a therapeutic application of arts-based methods, a collective art project will be used as a tool to gather data from participants. I was drawn to taking an arts-based approach because of the way it would allow me to connect the participants, the readers, and myself as the researcher to the phenomenon of homesickness I was interested in exploring further.

The act of creating a work of art, of selecting colors, media, designs, shapes, and patterns, can relax, engage, and challenge a participant (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008; Holm, Sahlstrom, & Zilliacus, 2018). Arts-based inquiry methods allow participants and researchers to create visual or auditory representations of the lived experience of the participants. Developing an artistic depiction of feelings, experiences, and ideas allows for different ways of knowing and being to emerge as a result of the research experience. After being introduced to arts-based methods during my doctoral coursework, I determined that I wanted to push the boundaries of data collection and analysis by using an arts-based approach in my study. Constructivist grounded theory methods, like those supported by Charmaz (2014), allow for the researcher to explore non-traditional methods of data collection to construct the understanding of the phenomenon in question.
In my review of the research literature, however, I could not find an example of the use of an arts-based inquiry method in either a phenomenological or grounded theory study. I was able to locate studies that have examined the role of art therapies using a grounded theory method or in using art-based inquiry to develop a creative representation of the findings of studies (Fish, 2018) but no study that used art-based inquiry to gather data, analyze data, and report findings. Fish (2018) is a therapist who uses art as a way to explore the complicated nature of her patients’ experiences. Art was a way for her to express her feelings and learning as it related to her role as a researcher and therapist. She writes, “The images are the vehicle of investigation, as well as its synthesis” (Fish, 2018, p. 339). While arts-based methods can be a stand-alone approach to explore a project, I wanted to, as Fish expressed, “listen beyond words” (Fish, 2018, p. 338). Fish (2018) stated that the art created as a result of the therapy considers the tone, environment, and the energy of the client. The important idea at the heart of Fish’s thinking is that words, while meaningful, may not be enough to encapsulate the full experience of a phenomenon in question.

For me, the connection between making meaning and making art is an inherent one. Arts-based research is a perfect fit with grounded theory because of this connection between artful objects and the production of meaning. Grounded theory methods are based on symbolic interactionism, the notion that humans make meaning through interacting with objects (Blumer, 1969). As Blumer (1969) noted, objects are anything a person may interact with, including self, other humans, and art. Asking participants to create an object, a piece of art that can represent their experience is both a way for the participants to make meaning of their experience, and for the researcher to learn about the
lived experience of the participant. Since I wanted to explore the phenomenon of
homesickness from the perspective of the people who are experiencing homesickness,
arts-based methods allowed me to draw out these perspectives as fully as possible.

Interviews provide opportunities to learn about the experience of the participants, but are
limited to ways of knowing that can be verbalized. Characteristic of arts-based inquiry is
a value placed on visual and tactile ways of knowing. As noted throughout the literature
of art therapy, taking time to create can help individuals develop understandings of their
lives in ways that talk therapy cannot (Collie, Bottorff, & Long, 2006; Edwards, 2004;
Hogan & Lomas, 2001).

Performing research regarding a sensitive topic, or working with participants who
may be in crisis requires that the researcher be able to support the wellbeing of the
individuals who are providing a glimpse into their lived experience. I wanted to find a
method that would allow the participants to make meaning throughout the research
process, while also providing me with quality data from which to make meaning.

Supporting the participants emotionally as they shared their experiences was also at the
forefront of my development of methods. While arts-based inquiry is not art therapy,
there are connections to the benefits of using an arts-based inquiry method in this study. I
wanted my participants to come away from the study feeling that they had gained a better
understanding of their college homesickness experience. In developing the data collection
methods, I determined that the creation of an art object through guided reflection would
accomplish the goal of providing me with data and the participants with a meaning
making experience.
Methods Explained

Implementation of constructivist and traditional grounded theory methods is similar in data collection procedures, participant selection, and the coding processes. I followed the theoretical sampling method to identify potential participants for the study, as well as to continually examine and develop the interview protocol to meet the needs of the study and to enrich the data being collected. Theoretical sampling provides structure for the researcher to review the data, analyze, and determine what additional data is needed in order to develop a set of saturated theoretical categories (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). My research process included interviews, the individual art project, and a final focus group in which the collective art project could be completed by the participants. A timeline of my research process and activities is provided in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Timeline of research activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Activity</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant Recruitment Began</td>
<td>11/11/17</td>
<td>Distributed posters to residence halls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Interview</td>
<td>11/27/17</td>
<td>Completed the first interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email to NDHS students</td>
<td>11/27/17</td>
<td>Email sent to 5,870 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coded 1st Interview</td>
<td>11/28/18</td>
<td>Line-by-line coding of first interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewed Survey Responses</td>
<td>11/30/17</td>
<td>Cleaned spreadsheet; determined who to invite for interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sent Interview Requests</td>
<td>11/30/17</td>
<td>Sent interview requests to 11 potential participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewed Survey Responses</td>
<td>01/02/18</td>
<td>Revisited survey responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sent Interview Requests</td>
<td>01/02/18</td>
<td>Sent interview requests to 30 potential participants, with duplicates from 1st and 2nd invitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sent Interview Requests</td>
<td>01/14/18</td>
<td>Sent interview requests to 30 potential participants, with some duplicates from the first invitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed Final Interview</td>
<td>01/18/18</td>
<td>Completed the final interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sent Focus Group Scheduling</td>
<td>04/14/18</td>
<td>Sent email requesting focus group scheduling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group Held</td>
<td>04/23/18</td>
<td>Five participants attended the final focus group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Site Selection. When determining where I would conduct my research, I examined my options and determined that I would conduct my research at Midwest State University. As I mentioned, my professional role at the institution gave me context and experience that provided me unique tools to perform the research. Additionally, I had access to institutional knowledge, such as where first year students were living, and how I could best recruit the new direct-from-high-school students (NDHS). Selecting the institution where I worked, however, also posed potential problems. My role as a campus security authority meant that I would need to be clear about my federal responsibility to report crime. I outlined how I would intervene or not intervene to assist my participants. I determined that I would not speak about my personal or professional observations, or of other professionals in a negative way during my interactions with participants. Additionally, I would recommend and provide resources for campus programs or outreach that would assist the students. As I mentioned in my positionality statement, I felt it important to support students when they disclosed a challenge during my interactions.

Theoretical Sampling Procedures. The target population of students for this study was new direct from high school students (NDHS) who enrolled at Midwest State University in the fall of 2017. The institutional setting in which I work uses “new direct from high school” as the term to define students who are attending college for the first time, and are directly coming from their compulsory education. An advantage of a focus on NDHS students is that it allowed me to pursue my interest in homesickness with a diverse population. As noted in previous literature, homesickness is most likely to impact students in the first parts of their transition (Archer et al., 1998; Brewin et al., 1989;
English, Davis, Wei, & Gross, 2017; Fisher, 1989). I determined that I would recruit NDHS, as I worked primarily with second year students and would be able to limit the potential for students I worked with directly to be recruited as a part of my research study. Most research regarding homesickness has taken place in a specific European country, or with a specific focus on international students attending an institution in the U.S. (Brewin et al., 1989; Clinciu, 2013; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007; Scopelliti & Tiberio, 2010; Stroebe et al., 2002). The population of NDHS students allowed me to focus on a population only constrained by their U.S. citizenship and first college enrollment status. I requested a list of NDHS students from the campus registrar, and recruited from the pool of NDHS students identified by the campus registrar.

My implementation of theoretical sampling proceeded in the following way. I first developed a recruitment survey based on the literature regarding homesickness predictors, symptoms, and outcomes. I used Stroebe et al. (2008) and Archer et al. (1998) as guiding studies to develop my participant screening survey. I then began to recruit participants through multiple means, including an email sent directly to the recruitment pool. The mass emailing process at the institution delivered the email to the 5,870 students. In addition to the email, I hung posters in residence halls where NDHS students lived, and used social media posts and sent emails to all NDHS students enrolled in the fall of 2017. I only distributed posters to the residence halls as the highest numbers of NDHS students lived in the traditional residence halls due to age restrictions on the residential apartments.

Interested participants took the emailed screening survey. A copy of the survey instrument is in Appendix A. The first questions asked participants to identify if they
were an international student, a transfer student, or were under the age of 18. I did not ask the registrar to eliminate those under the age of 18, therefore my screening survey needed to include a questions to determine the age of the potential participant. If a potential participant responded affirmatively to any of these questions, an automated response thanked them for their time and explained that they were not eligible for the study. After responding to the inclusion questions, potential participants were given a list of common college going experiences, both related and unrelated to homesickness. The experiences related to homesickness were identified by reviewing the previous literature regarding homesickness feelings, actions, or ways of being that can indicate homesickness or be caused by homesickness. The list of experiences/feelings included the following: missing my significant other, missing friends from home, academic struggles, feeling homesick, learning new things, missing home, leaving home for the first time, making new friends, joining a new organization, wanting to go home, helping others, regret coming to college, emotional struggles, and other. Survey respondents were instructed to select all that applied to their experience.

Overall, there were 103 responses, with four responses declining to give informed consent, 13 refusing to participate in the study, and 85 who consented to complete the survey. Of those who completed the survey, five were not 18 years old. The other 80 respondents met the inclusion requirements of being NDHS and a US citizen. After removing partial responses and those who selected not to participate, there were 67 potential participants identified. In order to make sense of the participant responses, a spreadsheet was developed to track responses to the homesickness and college experience question. Each respondent’s answers were noted in the spreadsheet to allow me to review
the overall responses, and to identify ways to continue my theoretical sampling. Potential participants were contacted to schedule an interview as a result of their response time and the responses to the screening survey. Table 2 details the overall response counts for each survey item.

Table 2. Screening survey response counts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Item</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Missing my significant other</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing friends from home</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic struggles</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling homesick</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning new things</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing home</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaving home for the 1st time</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making new friends</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joining a new organization</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanting to go home</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping others</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regret coming to college</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional struggles</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *respondent reported financial stress

While Glaser and Strauss (1969) stress the need for a grounded theory researcher to be as free as possible of preconceived notions regarding the social process and experience of the participants, I affirm that my background knowledge helped me to develop my theoretical sampling process. Archer et al. (1998) developed a homesickness questionnaire, and I used their findings to assist me in determining which items on the survey I should consider grouping together to identify potential participants who are exhibiting homesickness. In the Archer et al. (1998) study, the greatest predictor of
someone being homesick was the respondent selecting yes when asked if they were
homesick. As I reviewed the responses of the potential participants, I looked for patterns
across the different survey items, taking notes about the commonalities among all of the
respondents. I developed a table that included all complete responses from the
participants. I eliminated any potential participant who did not indicate that they were
homesick. Based on previous research, I began by recruiting participants who had listed
feeling homesick, missing home, and wanting to go home. I included regret coming to
college as an item to consider when contacting potential participants.

The first participant contacted me before the screening survey had been sent to
the NDHS students enrolled. I asked her to complete the screening survey, and I reviewed
her responses. I selected to interview her due to her interest and her responses to the
screening survey. Her responses included regret coming to college, missing home,
wanting to go home, and missing significant other. I chose to interview her because her
responses shared some characteristics of homesick individuals, and she showed interest. I
wanted to start the process of data collection, and used my first interview as a pilot to
help me determine what to look for in the screening survey responses, and how to move
forward with my interview and questions.

After conducting the first interview and cleaning the data from the screening
survey, I determined that I would focus on the students who responded that they were
homesick and who listed any of the other negative items on the screening survey. Those
students who only listed positive experiences and no mention of homesickness were not
contacted to participate in an interview. I initially sent the scheduling information to ten
potential participants hoping to have three or more individuals respond to the invitation to
participate. I received responses and scheduled interviews of three participants. I conducted those three additional interviews and determined that I could expand my potential participant pool by including additional responses to the screening survey. Overall, I used the screening survey to identify the most homesick individuals who responded, and continued to expand my outreach to participants until I was able to reach seven participants. Table 3 has a list of participants and key social identities.

**Table 3. Participant identity table**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Generation Status</th>
<th>In /Out-of-State</th>
<th>Social Identities</th>
<th>Major</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irene</td>
<td>First-Generation</td>
<td>In-State</td>
<td>Woman, Low-Income</td>
<td>Design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiz</td>
<td>Continuing Gen</td>
<td>In-State</td>
<td>Woman, Asian</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>Continuing Gen</td>
<td>Out-of-State</td>
<td>Woman, Bi-Racial</td>
<td>Kinesiology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ginger</td>
<td>First-Generation</td>
<td>Out-of-State</td>
<td>Woman, Bisexual</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timothy</td>
<td>Continuing Gen</td>
<td>Out-of-State</td>
<td>Male, Military</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taz</td>
<td>First-Generation</td>
<td>In-State</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Animal Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bunny</td>
<td>First-Generation</td>
<td>In-State</td>
<td>Woman, Immigrant</td>
<td>Pre-Health</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participant Descriptions.** Each of the participants brought their unique perspectives regarding homesickness and their college transition process. I will provide a short background of the participants to give a fuller description of their individual transition to Midwest State University.

**Irene.** When looking for colleges and universities, Irene only considered public, in-state institutions. Coming from a family where she was going to be responsible for paying for all of her college expenses, Irene focused on getting scholarships and attending an institution that she could afford. During high school, Irene discovered a love for design and determined that she would attend an institution that had a strong graphic design program. She was admitted to Midwest State University and she received a
number of scholarships to assist her financially. Irene identified as a first-generation college student, and mentioned that being a first-generation student meant that she had more pressure to succeed and she felt as though she was alone. Before arriving to campus, Irene held multiple jobs in order to save for her first year of college.

**Tiz.** As one of eight siblings, Tiz was expected to attend college just like her siblings. She applied to a number of schools, including elite private institutions. After being waitlisted at her number one choice, Tiz decided to attend Midwest State University due to her scholarship offers, and proximity to her family home. While Midwest State was not her first choice, Tiz knew that the engineering programs were highly rated. She was still concerned that her academic career was not going to be as challenging as at her number one choice. As a continuing-generation student, Tiz had been saving for college under guidance from her family. Tiz’s best friend is her mom, and Tiz mentioned how much she missed her mom. Tiz identifies as Asian-American, and was raised as a Christian. She moved into an off-campus apartment with her older brother. A major concern for Tiz was navigating a chronic health condition that could cause her to miss out on parts of her college experience.

**Jordan.** Choosing which college to attend was more difficult for Jordan than she anticipated. After getting accepted to a high number of research one universities, making her decision came down to where she was offered the highest amount of financial aid. Jordan only knew of Midwest State because of the Division I basketball team’s performance in the NCAA tournament from the previous year. She was offered a full-tuition scholarship, and as an out of state student that financial aid offer made Midwest State University Jordan’s number one choice. Coming from an urban area and a bi-racial
family, Jordan was concerned about the transition she would have attending an institution in a rural mid-western setting. During high school Jordan was heavily involved in school athletics, and was no longer playing on an organized team. No one from her high school in recent times attended Midwest State University.

_Ginger_. Ginger did not really want to attend college. However, Ginger’s mother wanted Ginger to go to college after graduating from high school. With her mother’s support, Ginger began looking at schools and determined that she would apply to Midwest State University due to the animal science program. After visiting two different campuses, Ginger picked Midwest State because she felt like it was home when she visited. As an out of state student Ginger had to take out a significant number of loans in order to pay for her tuition. She was happy to leave her hometown to attempt to leave behind childhood trauma and to start anew. Ginger focused on the possibilities of being more independent and developing a reputation outside of her family history. Ginger identifies as bi-sexual and prefers making friends in an online setting.

_Timothy_. Originally intending to enroll in an ROTC program, Timothy chose to enlist in the Marine Corps. Timothy attended boot camp for the six months prior to arriving on campus at Midwest State. The college decision process for Timothy was difficult. He did not really have a number one choice of institution, and made his college choice based on the accessibility of ROTC programs and additional financial aid. Midwest State rose to the top of Timothy’s list in regard to the financial aid offer and the accessibility to his major. Timothy’s parents both attended college; his mother achieved a PhD, and teaches full time at a research one institution. Timothy asked his mom a number of questions about coming to college, and how to manage. After Timothy
completed boot camp he arrived on campus over a week after classes started. Timothy’s identity as a member of the military is the most salient for him as boot camp was a meaningful experience. Timothy mentioned that he was struggling with the difference in structure and freedom between boot camp and college life.

**Taz.** Working with animals was always a passion for Taz. She looked for colleges and universities that had strong animal science programs in and out of state. After visiting multiple schools, Taz chose Midwest State University because she felt comfortable on the campus during her visit. Midwest State was also in-state and would be less expensive for her to attend. Taz was worried about leaving her horses and her family behind in her hometown. Taz’s older brother also attends Midwest State, but that was more of a deterrent than a positive reason to attend the institution.

**Bunny.** Bunny’s family immigrated from Africa to the United States when Bunny was in elementary school. As a first-generation American, Bunny looked at going to college as something that she needed to do in order to be successful. As a first-generation student and close with her family, Bunny looked for an institution near where her family lived. Midwest State was the first place she applied, and the only institution that Bunny considered. Due to family obligations, Bunny was unable to attend orientation or any of the move-in activities to acclimate to campus. She arrived the day that classes began. Bunny disclosed that she had struggled with depression, and that she had sought treatment to cure her of depression prior to arriving on campus.

**Interview Procedures.** After recruiting further participants, I arranged an interview time with each. The interview lasted 60-90 minutes, and consisted of 15 semi-structured questions and an art activity to contribute a piece to a larger collective art
project. I developed a list of questions as a guideline for me to ensure that I was able to ask all of the questions that I initially had. Each interview was unique to the participant as I explored personal histories and experiences. All interviews were recorded and transcribed using the transcription service Rev.com. In order to ensure that the participant’s experiences were adequately described and represented, I provided copies of the transcripts to each participant. With transcriptions member-checked, I followed Glaser and Strauss’ constant comparative method of data analysis and collection. My implementation of the constant comparative method included performing the interview, reading the transcriptions, and coding the interview transcripts. I coded each interview before proceeding to the next interview. The coding and reflective memos assisted me in asking specific questions during the later interviews to explore the initial findings from the first interviews. I was able to explore topics related to homesickness due to the review and coding of the interviews as I went on. The final aspect of the data collection process was a focus group where the participants assembled their collective art project, answered follow-up questions, and provided feedback on my findings.

As I mentioned during my discussion of participant recruitment, I continued to review and reach out. I managed to recruit one self-identified male participant, as well as someone who identified as bi-sexual. These two individuals were also from out of state, while the majority of the rest of the participants were from in-state. Prior to my final three interviews, I reviewed my interview protocol. I continued to ask the original 15 questions, but added notes to ask about previous findings. For example, I discussed the overall rates of homesickness among the other first year students to gather reactions and discuss the prevalence of homesickness with the participants. I also discussed responses
from other participants, and attempted to normalize some of the responses in the hopes of gathering new and challenging data. I also added some questions throughout the interview to inquire about decision making processes and responses to homesickness. These questions depended upon participant responses throughout the interview, and were only asked if the topic was not covered during the participant’s responses to questions.

**Coding Process.** After line-by-line coding was complete and each code was placed onto an individual notecard, I began coding by case. I shuffled the note cards together, and began to develop categories using the note cards. Categories were identified by reviewing the code and examining what was indicated by the action listed, the feeling reported, or the place in time the code happened. The order in which the codes and participants experienced different aspects of the phenomenon was important to compare cases across participants. For example, knowing when the participants first experienced homesickness was important for me to identify across the individual accounts. Over half of the codes were placed into categories in this manner. At this point, I reviewed the categories that I had created by sorting the cards. I read each code in the category and evaluated the connections between the data points. As I reviewed each category, I took detailed notes in memos to outline my decision making regarding the inclusion or exclusion of a code in a category. After reviewing the categories separately, I examined the categories themselves. I employed axial coding strategies to compare categories with one another, and to determine uniqueness and fit of the data in each of the categories.

The axial coding process revealed that I had overlapping categories. One example of overlapping categories includes communication techniques. Initially, I had developed individual categories of “telephone calls” and “using technology to communicate.” After
reviewing the data included in those two categories, I determined that they were not separate categories, and I condensed them together into a new category, “communicating out.” Detailed notes were taken regarding my decisions about what to include or exclude from a particular category. Integrating categories with one another was done as I reviewed the data in each category, referring to my memos. I used the words my participants used to describe their overall homesickness and college going experience to help me begin identifying themes that eventually became some of my categories. Home, challenge, time, and growth were all words that my participants used to describe their transition to college and ascribed to their homesickness experience.

Once I finished auditing the existing categories, I reorganized the notecards into numerical order, based on the page number of the transcript in order to compare cases. While the pace of each interview varied, the topics covered throughout the interviews aligned across the page numbers of the transcripts. Each notecard was reviewed and placed into categories. I did not place these codes directly into the existing categories; I continued to organize the data points into organic categories. At the conclusion of these sorting sessions, I reviewed the categories that emerged from the data I had sorted. I would place the notecards into existing categories if the fit was correct, and create new categories if there was a need.

As I finished my first complete review of all the categories, I continued to audit the categories for saturation. Category saturation is achieved when the data is reviewed and there is no new data to add to the category, and the category is rich with description and meaning (Charmaz, 2014). Each category contained data collected in each interview with the participants. I described the categories using tables and figures to provide
additional context and denote relationships between categories. Integrating categories continued throughout my coding process. The axial coding process helped me to see the connections between the different categories that I had developed. Charmaz (2014) and Glaser and Strauss (1967) recommended placing codes in chronological order, or to re-examine the codes comparing similar situations between the individuals’ accounts of the phenomenon. The re-organization of my categories into chronological order helped me to visualize the ways that my participants had experienced homesickness.

Grounded theory methods do not outline the number of participants needed in order to complete the research, develop the theory, and report the results. As I developed my memos and findings, I identified and related my initial findings, and continued to code and compare the results of my first four interviews. Categories began to emerge to me as I re-read and organized the individual codes. Clear themes and experiences were emerging across the four individual accounts of homesickness that I had already collected. I had not anticipated finding such commonality and consistency across the accounts of the participants. While there was cohesion, I worried that I was missing varied perspectives from the first four interviews, as they were all women. After more discussion about what I had discovered, I determined I needed to interview additional participants. From this process, I interviewed an additional three participants.

Additionally, I reviewed the individual artifacts created by each participant. The individually decorated hands expressed words chosen by the participants that I could use in formulating thematic categories. Each participant had provided their own words, without knowing what the other participants had selected as each of their five words. As I reviewed and coded the words I gathered, I chose words to encapsulate the categories that
I was developing throughout the coding process. After coding the individual art contributions, I continued to sort and re-sort my codes and categories.

**Collective Art Project Development and Analysis.** As a part of the interview portion of the data collection process, each participant contributed to a collective art project. As mentioned before, I wanted to challenge the participants to reflect on their homesickness experience and to develop an artistic representation of their college transition and homesickness. Participants were provided with a tag board cutout of a hand and a multitude of coloring and crafting supplies. The directions for the project included identifying five words that described their transition and homesickness experience, and writing one on each of the digits of the hand. All of the decisions regarding colors, patterns, and placement of the words were up to the participants to determine. I took pictures of each hand, and noted the words that were used to describe the transition and homesickness experiences of the participants. I used the words as guidance when developing the categories and coding the interviews. Pictures of the individual contributions are included below.

After each participant developed their individual contribution to the collective art project, I asked each of them to describe how and why they created their hand. The descriptions the participants provided were recorded and analyzed as a part of the coding process. Each participant used a different approach to develop their piece of art. I looked for patterns in their language, and similarities between their process creating and their overall transition experience. The parallels between the creative process and transition experience were noted and covered during the focus group.
The assembly of the collective art project was the final activity of the focus group gathering. I invited the participants to discuss the approach to creating the final piece of art. Each participant was required to contribute at least one new item or design to the canvas. The final assembly of the art project included attaching the hands to the newly created background developed by the participants. As the canvas was painted and dried, I completed the final assembly. I sought permission from the participants to be responsible for the final construction of the project. The final assembly of the project was the concluding activity in the development of the study.

**Theoretical Saturation.** Glaser and Strauss (1967) described theoretical saturation as reaching a point in the research process at which there are no new data points being discovered. My first four interviews provided me with unique yet consistent accounts of homesickness and the college transition process. Individual codes I identified throughout the coding process were able to be applied together across the accounts of the participants. My first time organizing my data provided me with initial categories. I continued using those categories, and found that I was able to apply each of my individual codes to one of those categories. As each category developed through the axial coding process, I found saturation had occurred. I knew that category saturation had developed as I placed my codes into categories. Each code found a place in my organization and identified areas. When conceptualizing the overall theoretical frame that would encompass my findings, I used my data analysis strategy and examined the ways that the categories emerged. In this way I determined that my data had developed into a cohesive model.
CHAPTER 4. IS HOMESICKNESS A PROBLEM?

Jordan’s transition included hope, fear, learning, and homesickness. As I listened to my participants, those feelings were present in their stories. The participants explained their college transition from beginning to end, unable to separate homesickness from the rest of their college going experience. Homesickness is an intricate part of the college transition experience. Homesickness began before they arrived, continued as they made their transitions to campus, and then continued to wax and wane as the semester went on. I discovered that homesickness and going to college were more entangled than I anticipated as a researcher. Homesickness for college students was more than a single phenomenon, it was a process of realizing that they could leave home and still be successful individuals.

My results include a reconceptualization of homesickness – the assertion that it is a developmental process. Changing the framework through which homesickness is viewed is critical to understanding the ways students cope and develop skills to overcome homesickness. After describing the new framework to conceptualize homesickness, I will detail individual aspects of homesickness and how they interact and connect to form The Developmental Process of Homesickness for the participants. Individual categories will be explained and linked together to detail the overarching college student homesickness experience.

The categories that emerged from the data and collective art project were both unexpected, and affirmed my professional observations and scholarship. The categories painted a comprehensive perspective of the college transition process. I had spent years learning about college student development through classroom theoretical learning and
on-the-job practical engagement with students directly. The concerns described by the students, their hopes and disappointments, represented the stories of past students I had worked with. However, my lens as a researcher was more critical of the themes and relationships I saw between the events presented by my participants than I had been as a staff member.

After being a professional for so many years, I thought I could no longer be surprised by the stories of students, to be honest, I thought I had a strong bearing on what I might find regarding homesickness. In spite of my own ideas, I was challenged to reconceptualize what homesickness meant and how students are coming to college. My research questions assumed that homesickness was a phenomenon, set aside from other parts of the college transition process. The largest concern I had from my literature review and experience is that homesickness was often characterized as a stand alone phenomenon, as something that happened after leaving home and arriving at the location away from home (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The participants in this study explained that homesickness is an interlinked part of their transition, and in this way challenged previous research that characterized homesickness as an illness. Homesickness was the lens through which they viewed their entire college transition experience.
A New (Old) Definition of Homesickness

Aspects of previous definitions and exemplars of homesickness were used as descriptors by the participants. Missing home, missing people, wanting to go back were all aspects of their homesickness experience. Their definitions focused on what it felt like to them, not a clinical definition or one that attempted to characterize the value of homesickness. For example, Irene focused on the feelings associated with her previous physical home. While she said she did not miss the place itself, Irene missed, “the comfort of being home. Because, you know, when you’re sick, you don’t want to be out anywhere, you want to be home.” Tiz echoed the need to feel comfort, saying “I wouldn’t feel homesick for anything that was at the [new] location. It’s very much the people.” Tiz focused on the nature of her existing relationships having changed through her move to college. Bunny repeated the same sentiment -- that her home was with her family, and homesickness was lacking comfort. Lacking comfort was described by participants as not having access to food, places, or feelings that provided relief/ease to them. Ginger and Taz confirmed that homesickness was missing the feelings of safety and comfort when in the physical presence of someone, most
specifically family. Tim, the only male identifying participant, asserted that homesickness is a complicated relationship that includes missing both the people and the place. For Tim, homesickness was about craving familiarity, “It’s just craving something that you’ve already known…Just that craving to be with family and the craving to [be] talking to family.” Feeling foreign in the new place is how Jordan conceptualized homesickness. Homesickness as feeling out of place was a shared feature of the homesickness experience as articulated by my participants.

Notably absent from these homesickness definitions is the focus on the potential negative impacts on the participants. They all assumed that the transition was going to be difficult, and that they would need to adjust. Having homesickness was not a negative experience for the participants, or one to be prevented. It was an anticipated aspect of the college going experience. According to the participants, college students should expect to miss aspects of their previous homes and relationships. Students should expect to redefine and reimagine what those relationships will look like now that they have moved away, even if away is only 30 miles. This is a significant departure from the research. Previous definitions always included predicted negative outcomes. Thurber and Walton (2007) defined homesickness as “distress and functional impairment caused by an actual or anticipated separation from home and attachment objects such as parents.” My participants did not view homesickness as an impairing phenomenon; it was not distressing. Homesickness, they taught me, is stressful, but not distressing.

My participants were offended when asked if they were sick with homesickness. I could see that they were offended by the notion by their body language and verbal responses. Contrary to how literature has characterized it, homesickness is not an illness
for them. Homesickness was a lived experience that challenged them to develop new skills and ways of being. While homesickness may have made the transition more difficult at the beginning, the challenge of feeling homesick also spurred growth in ways that the participants did not anticipate. Their definition of homesickness focuses on relationships and development, not on deficiency or illness. Their definition of homesickness supports their struggle as being a normal part of the college going experience; it is not a disorder for the weak or unwell. This demonstrated for me the need to conceptualize college student homesickness as a process, similar to the transition process described by Anderson et al. (2012), but inclusive of developmental processes that are unique to the college student experience.

Homesickness did not disappear from the lives of these students as the semester went on. My participants made it clear to me that there is no cure for homesickness, rather, you have to work through the process of homesickness. Jordan stated, “it’s hard almost to be homesick because there’s [no] solution.” Ginger explicitly said, “I think you’re not, like, cured of it, but you come to terms with it.” When asked about overcoming homesickness, Bunny explained, “time heals things in general. Yeah, sometimes you need to just be patient and just let everything go through its process. And that’s what I’ve been doing. And it’s worked.” You can heal and reinjure; you can spend time away and return. As the participants described homesickness to me, I created a Developmental Process of Homesickness.

**Homesickness as a Process**

Conceptualizing homesickness as a process is different than any other homesickness definition and existing research. While studies have included the
examination of homesickness feelings over time, the development aspects or reasoning behind the lessening of severity has not been studied. My participants illustrated that homesickness is the process of going to college for them. As the college going process can be explained, so can homesickness. Each participant expressed their homesickness experience using their individual lens of the world, but they were all unified around the idea that homesickness was a process through which they progressed. They developed skills, confidence, and identities as a result of experiencing homesickness.

As I examined the data, I saw a pattern related to the passing of time. The idea about how time passed and continued to pass for the participants influenced how I framed my results. All participants mentioned time throughout their interviews. I first began to see homesickness and time related during my sorting and categorizing process. Reflecting on the role of time and what time passing for the participants meant caused me to organize and conceptualize homesickness along a continuum. I struggled to use a straight line. Tiz explained to me that her homesickness would get better after a while but would reoccur after going home. Taz noted the same kind of experience. Returning to her parent’s home and coming back to campus got easier each time. When asked why it got easier, Taz shared that she felt more comfortable at Midwest State and that made leaving her childhood home easier each time.

Conceptualizing homesickness as a developmental process mirrors much of Anderson et al.’s (2012) adult transition, but includes developmental aspects that are not explicitly described as a part of transition developed by Anderson et al. The Homesickness Development Process I propose includes choosing higher education, preparing for change, acclimating, redefining self in relation to others, and belonging.
Figure 6. visualizes Duven’s Developmental Process of College Student Homesickness. This visualization helps us see that homesickness is a developmental cycle. It begins at the point when the individual is choosing to leave the “home.” Once a decision to attend college has been made, preparing for the change, and for the eventual change, occurs. The actual move happens, and continues the cycle as the participants are acclimating to their new physical and social environment. After making the move, individuals begin the process of redefining their identities in the context of their new human and physical environment. After the process of redefining self has begun, and individuals begin to feel comfortable in the new location, commitment to the new place and the decision to leave closes the homesickness loop.

Figure 5. Duven's developmental process of college student homesickness

Individuals can move through the homesickness process multiple times. All my participants mentioned re-experiencing homesickness when returning to campus after a break period. I believe that the homesickness cycle will mirror the school year, in the comings and goings of students for long breaks or weekend trips. Although the homesickness process has a clear beginning -- making the choice to leave their defined
home and attend school -- the developmental process is not linear. It allows for growth to continually happen, even if the same feelings arise. For example, Tim explained that he had been homesick multiple times. Each time he was able to overcome the feelings and commit to the new place. When he would leave his home again, the feelings of homesickness would occur again, but he felt more prepared to manage the feelings and to enact his coping strategies. Each time through the cycle, individuals will develop skills associated with transition.

I did not find any existing literature that described homesickness in terms of a developmental process. As noted, Tognoli (2003) conceptualized homesickness as a cycle combined with depression. My data explained homesickness as a cycle, a developmental process by itself. I was familiar with other developmental theoretical frameworks, like Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) seven vectors of identity development, and these were helpful in my conceptualization of the homesickness process. As in other developmental frameworks, I used the idea that a process could be completed multiple times, and that individuals could continue to grow and develop each time they finished a cycle. I saw how much the participants grew and developed over the course of time since my first interaction with them. Interestingly, they framed their growth and development as a result of their feelings of homesickness. The fact that they felt they developed skills as a result of their homesickness experience made me revise my initial findings. At the time of the focus group, none of the students felt severely homesick, although some still missed their family and friends. In an ironic twist, at the time of my focus group right before the end of the semester, the students were anticipating feeling homesick for Midwest State University. They had developed an identity associated with a new place, people, and
environment. They will begin a homesickness process as they leave the university as their newly defined home place to return to their previous home.

A contribution of my homesickness development process framework is that each aspect of the developmental process revolves around the context of the students and their previous life. The attention paid in my research to the individualization of the homesickness experience makes it unique, as well as how I arrived at my understanding through a portraiture and arts-based approach. In what follows, I will describe how each step in the Developmental Process of College Homesickness was identified and illustrated through the data about the participants’ lives, beginning with college choice and decision making, and concluding with institutional and personal commitment. At each stage, I will describe the subthemes associated with the participants’ experience of homesickness. Below I describe each part of the proposed developmental process.

**Choosing Higher Education.** Making the decision to go to college was easy for all of the participants. After their high school experience, they all knew that they would be attending college. Choosing what school to attend was the next step. The institutional process varied for the participants. Each participant found themselves making what seemed to be the biggest decision that they had made until that point in their lives. Shaped by family involvement and cost of attendance, the decision-making process was a complicated balance of meeting multiple needs. While some were attending their first choice and others not, there were consistent concerns regarding the decision to attend a specific institution. The choice to attend college was easy for most, choosing the specific institution was the most difficult part of the process. Institutional selection provided the most conflict across the participants’ experience.
The Developmental Process of Homesickness starts at decision making because this is the moment when the participants decided that they were going to leave the homes where they currently lived. The internal development of making a choice to spend at least four years away from their families was the start of the homesickness process. Previous literature regarding homesickness placed the feelings of homesickness starting once the individual had left their homes (Eurelings-Bontekoe, Vingerhoets, & Fontijn, 1994; Fisher, 1989; Thurber & Walton, 2007; Van Tilburg, 1997). The participants began to feel aspects of homesickness once they had made their final institutional choice. The decision to leave was the trigger to begin their college going process, their developmental homesickness process. Choosing to leave home and attend an institution was the beginning of the participant reflection on leaving home and their anticipation of homesickness. Each part of the college decision process -- family involvement, cost of attendance, and participant decision making -- were all linked to the participant descriptions of homesickness. Feeling alone in the decision-making process and feeling trapped by the financial aspects of college contributed to the challenges they faced when leaving home. I will describe major features of choosing higher education in relation to the participants and their lived experiences.

*Cost of Attendance.* Scholarships and cost of attendance played the largest part in the decision-making process for the participants, to the point that the cheapest option was the only choice the participants felt they could make. Jordan, Irene, and Tiz all received scholarships that made Midwest State University the only realistic option in their college choice. Tim and Taz had looked at other schools, but enjoyed the campus when they visited, although, Midwest State was not the number one choice for them. Money was a
major feature of the decision-making process and continued to influence the developmental process. Access to monetary resources and the ability to pay for college guided what opportunities the participants thought they were going to have as students.

**Participant Decision Making.** For Jordan, asking family members for input was not helpful. They all focused on the monetary aspects of college going, while Jordan was looking for individuals to talk about the benefits and drawbacks of the institutions where Jordan was accepted. For Jordan’s family, the full tuition scholarship removed all other potential choices. Any other decision than attending Midwest State would have meant that she must defend her choice and the amount of money it would cost Jordan and her family. Tiz found herself in a similar position to Jordan. With a full-tuition scholarship to Midwest State, Tiz’s dream to attend an Ivy League school disappeared. Knowing the amount of debt she would incur would be enormous, Tiz chose to attend Midwest State University to alleviate any financial burden from her and her family she could.

Irene, a first-generation college student, made her college decision in spite of her family relationships. Unsupported in her decision to attend college, Irene researched, applied for, and received scholarships that allowed her to attend an in-state institution. While Irene could have attended college anywhere, her available resources limited her accessing other potential institutions. Bunny’s experience echoed Irene’s. Coming from a family of immigrants, Bunny played an integral role in caring for the family when she lived at home. Choosing to attend college away from the family was a choice to leave behind family responsibilities, and was not supported by her parents. Bunny wasn’t supported in her decision to attend Midwest State, even though it is less than an hour drive to get to campus. Her choice of leaving the family dwelling meant that Bunny was
no longer contributing to the family in the ways that she’d been doing before. Bunny described that she chose Midwest State because it was what the successful students at her school did, it seemed like a cool place to be. Her lack of familial support prevented her from being able to explore college options, settling for something that was a fit for other people.

Irene, Taz, and Tim made their decisions to attend Midwest State after visiting the campus. Each came with a family member to attend a scheduled visit. There was a homey, welcoming feeling present for all three as they toured campus and visited with the staff and students during the visit. For Taz, Midwest State was the only in-state institution she was considering, and was her number one choice. Finding an affordable institution that had her major and provided the type of environment she was looking for relieved Taz. Her decision was easier than she had anticipated. Tim initially wanted to attend a military academy. After completing research regarding the lives of military academy pupils, he chose a different way to join the military. Tim enlisted as a U.S. Marine. He made his college choice after visiting campus. Midwest State had been low on his list, but met Tim’s minimum conditions of having his major and an ROTC program. Having the military to pay for his college allowed him to make a choice based on program access and institutional fit in ways that were not possible for other participants.

Ginger had been unsure about attending college. Spurred on by her mother, Ginger began to explore the possibility of attending college. She had always wanted to be a veterinarian, so institutional selection became important in what school she would attend. Ginger selected Midwest State because of her major and the potential to attend vet
school. Ginger’s mom did not anticipate Ginger’s desire to attend an out of state school and the possibility that Ginger would move far away. Still, Ginger’s mom supported visiting Midwest State and other institutions, hoping that Ginger would choose a different school. After visiting the campus, Midwest State was the only option that Ginger considered. Financing her attendance meant that Ginger was signing up for significant debt, as she lacked scholarships and family monetary support. While she had support from her mom, the choice was ultimately Ginger’s to make, as Ginger would be financially responsible for all aspects of her college-going experience.

Parental and family involvement in the college-going decision making process is assumed by higher education professionals. The participants felt alone in their decision making, even though their families were also a part of the decision-making process. Having family members with previous college-going experience played a role in how the decision-making process was implemented, but even continuing generation students were challenged to make the decision on their own.

**Preparing for Change.** After choosing Midwest State, anticipation set in; anticipation of all of the good, but mostly the bad, that could come as a result of attending college at Midwest State. The anticipation prompted preparation to begin for the eventual move to Midwest State. Preparation included packing up the physical items needed to fill the rooms or apartments they would be moving to, and learning about the campus. Looking up information regarding the campus and going to college were key activities completed by the participants as they prepared to move to college. Knowing the physical layout of the campus, knowing the busing systems, and all of the intricacies of the campus environment were the most important aspects of the preparation.
Preparation also included mentally preparing for the coming changes. Each participant described their worst fears in detail to me throughout the interview process. The fears ranged from failing all courses to needing to leave for medical reasons. The anticipation of negative outcomes drove Irene to make back-up plans before even arriving on campus. From her family experiences, Tiz knew that there were going to be stressors and challenges, but she denied them. These different ways of managing the preparation for college impacted the homesickness experience of the students. Tiz, in her denial that anything was going to be challenging, began to feel homesick at this point in her transition. Her homesickness began as she prepared to leave her family and move to a new place. Previous college going experience in the family was evident in the types of preparation for the students. The role of cultural capital in the preparation stage of the homesickness process surprised me. Accessing information and knowing what was important were key aspects to the preparation of the students as they planned their move to college.

*Cultural Capital.* The concept of cultural capital was explained by Pierre Bourdieu in 1985. He explained the nature of capital, the resources an individual possesses to allow social mobility. Bourdieu (1986) outlined three types of capital: economic, social, and cultural. I focus on cultural capital because the variance of college going experiences stratified my students during the preparation for college. Each family possessed knowledge and information to assist the students in preparing for college, but the differences in how that knowledge was enacted, and the gaps in knowledge the family had, influenced the feelings and activities of the participants.
Irene, Ginger, Taz, and Bunny are all first-generation students. Each shared how much information they felt they lacked as they were preparing for college. Bunny said that she did not even know why or how she was going to college, but that it was happening. Her parents had no experience with higher education, in her home country or the U.S. As an immigrant, the cultural capital passed to Bunny was focused on cultural norms and family history, not on the college going experience in U.S. higher education. Irene’s mother provided no assistance, leaving Irene to explore and plan without context about what was to come. While her brother attended Midwest State, Irene’s relationship with her family was not positive. That prevented any accumulated capital being shared from sibling to sibling. Taz’s family had some college going experience, as Taz’s brother attends Midwest State too. Her mother learned about the college going experience, and sought to assist Taz in ways she did not assist Taz’s brother. Taz was encouraged to take notes at orientation sessions. Conversely, Ginger’s mom did not know what to attend for orientation, so she and Ginger went to what they thought was going to be important, and skipped some of the recommended sessions.

Tim, Tiz, and Jordan are all continuing generation students, with parents who attended and graduated from a four-year degree granting institution. Tim’s mom works as a college professor at a large public university in his home state. Jordan’s parents both graduated from college, and Tiz’s father has an advanced degree in his field. These students talked about how they were better able to anticipate the challenges, and felt more comfortable with the knowledge about going to college. Tim, Tiz, and Jordan discussed how they prepared in different ways than their peers. Tim was away at boot camp and was unable to attend any orientation sessions. Yet, he felt comfortable in his preparation.
due to his mother’s experience as a professor. Tim explained that he’d been given “insider knowledge” about how to be a successful student from his mother. Even with the lack of attending traditional college preparation events, Tim felt more confident than other participants due to the college-going cultural capital he gained from his mother.

Developing the cultural capital to navigate the systems of higher education was imperative to the participants’ specific understanding of Midwest State, and what it meant to go to college more generally. Their confidence and feelings of belonging were connected to their knowledge of the campus and college going. Taz explained that she felt unintelligent because she did not know the new town or campus. Irene detailed how she overheard conversations about Midwest State, and was not able to contribute due to her lack of information. Irene used those experiences to listen, but not to interact or join. As Bunny mentioned, going to college was something everyone else did, but she did not have a clear path or know what going to college entailed. Even those with significant cultural capital like Tim and Tiz, found that using previous knowledge did not prevent them from experiencing homesickness.

**Accessing Information.** Each participant anticipated what they were going to need to know in order to be successful in their transition to the university. Every participant used the website to explore and attempt to find answers to their anticipated problems. The biggest fear was getting lost on campus; every participant mentioned throughout their interviews that they regretted not learning more about the physical layout of the campus. Accessing information about class schedules and making a class schedule during orientation eased some of the concerns as they prepared, but where classes were located and how to manage time to get there were still unanswered questions.
that left the participants wanting more information. They would get frustrated when they could not find answers to their questions. Even when following through with all of the preparation and information gathering, they were met with barriers. Ginger knew she had to pay for her college through a combination of loans, grants, and scholarships. When speaking with the financial aid folks, she was given a number and that is what Ginger used to prepare her financials for attending Midwest State in the fall. However, the information provided was incomplete and Ginger had to make new plans in order to attend in the fall.

One participant, Ginger, enrolled in a learning community. The peer mentor for the community reached out via text message and email over the summer. Ginger mentioned that this was the single most effective tool she had to get her questions answered. The ability to text message a specific question and have an individual answer provided Ginger with the confidence to start asking more questions. Ginger asked questions about all aspects of the college going experience, and her peer mentor sought to answer those questions as best she could. Ginger also felt that she had a personal connection to campus and a conduit through which to get answers to questions that she had. Her peer mentor filled a large gap in the cultural capital that Ginger had regarding going to college. Ginger was able to find answers and make connections between information that better prepared her for the transition.

Bunny was unable to attend any orientation sessions. Her responsibilities to support her family by caring for her younger siblings prevented her from being able to gather information in the same ways as other students who were attending Midwest State. Bunny’s mother was also absent from the home during the orientation time, so Bunny
was also prevented from going due to family resistance and absence. When Bunny’s mom returned, they went to campus to try to put together their own orientation. Bunny had created a list from what she thought she needed to do in order to prepare for Midwest State. She got her ID and spoke with an adviser, but that was the extent to her exposure to campus on that day. While she walked around, she was not introduced to other resources or opportunities that she would have been able to access had she been able to go to an organized day of orientation.

**Coping Skills.** Preparation included physical preparations and mental preparations. Each participant mentioned how challenging it was to make the decision to attend college, and starting the preparations made the fact they were leaving more real. Anticipating the worst and hoping for the best was the coping strategy used by all participants. They all thought about potential situations in college, like failing a class or not having friends. Each imagined the worst possible outcomes as they visualized what their college experience was going to be like. Coping skill development began in the preparation phase. All participants possessed coping skills that they had learned, and they utilized what they knew to work for them in their home contexts. These coping skills used positive and negative ways to manage feelings and mental health. Avoiding thinking about negative situations, distraction, and confrontation were all used to approach the anticipated problems the participants identified.

Tiz had to prepare for an additional set of circumstances. She navigates the world with a chronic health condition that can cause her to have to be isolated for days as she recovers from an episode. Tiz began planning and preparing for what an episode may look like when she was away from home. She’d just been able to get a hold of a set of
medications and therapies that helped her manage her illness. These preparations were key for her to determine where she would be living, what kinds of accommodations she may need, and what kinds of mental conditioning she felt she had to do in order to make the move to campus as healthy as possible. Bunny had navigated depression prior to college. She had overcome the symptoms for the most part before leaving for school. Rather than seeking information about where to get help before she moved to campus, she believed that she was going to be ok and would not need any kind of mental health counseling or support. Bunny found herself reliving her battle with depression in a new and unfamiliar environment. She described her homesickness as being intermingled with her depression, unable to separate the two until she began to seek treatment for her mental health concerns. Bunny felt that her homesickness was worsened by her relapsed depression.

*Acts of Preparation.* The preparation stage invited the participants to see themselves as Midwest State students. They began to gather information they believed critical to their success as a college student. Ginger’s access to a trained student provided her with support ginger did not know she needed. Taz, so excited for the move, packed up her car a month in advance of her trip to the campus to move into her residence hall. Jordan considered herself “low maintenance,” meaning that she did not need to get a lot of new stuff or prepare matching linens for her bed. Tim did not actually get to prepare anything, as his transition from his military preparation required a quick turn around that required his family to do most of the packing for him. Tiz was moving in with her brother, so her preparations were in concert with her family members to get her what was missing from the apartment where the two of them were staying. Bunny did not pack
anything until the night before moving to campus. She wasn’t able to remove herself from the responsibilities she had with her family to get prepared for her college experience.

These stories of preparation are woven into the homesickness stories of the students. After making their decision to attend Midwest State, the preparation phase began for the students. The participants described reflecting on their choice to attend Midwest State as they prepared their minds and belongings to come to campus. Entwined with the preparation are the assets the students brought to the transition process, and what liabilities they had. Anderson et al. (2012) described the idea that each person, regardless of previous personal experience, had assets to bring to a transition and similarly, there would be liabilities. I perceived that the first-generation students had more liabilities than assets in the preparation phase, but noted that they had innate motivation to make the transition possible. No matter the assets or liabilities, their lack of preparation or over preparedness, the students all made the move to come to campus.

Acclimation. Move-in day arrived for the participants. Each participant made their way to campus, with folks to help, either family or friends. Some arrived on the formal move-in day, while others arrived ten days early or on the first day of classes or after. The process of moving items into the new living space was the smallest part of the moving process. Now was the time to acclimate themselves to the new physical and human environment to which they had just moved. The acclimation process included navigating the physical environment, responding to culture shock, and figuring out how to exist in the new space. How to make friends, integrate into a new place, and to move on from previous relationships or experiences were all tasks required of the students.
Preparations taken by the participants made some parts of the acclimation process easier, but others weren’t prepared for the complicated nature of what it meant to come to campus. Events meant to help students acclimate to campus were discussed by the participants, as were other barriers and facilitators of acclimation.

*Physical Environment.* Midwest State’s campus is big and spread out, according to all participants. Getting around on the campus and learning the new town were paramount issues for all participants. The competency to get around campus and attend courses without asking for help was the first signifier that they were successful students. Ginger used Google maps directions to help her navigate the campus to get to her classrooms on time. All participants used the campus information app on their phones to access bus schedules, dependent on the information provided because they all felt unprepared to get to where they needed to be on the campus. Every participant shared that they had gotten lost on campus, and that made them feel as though they were not supposed to be present on the campus. Being lost and unfamiliar with the physical space made them long for the familiarity of their previous homes and towns. Taz self-reported that she had a terrible sense of direction and learning new spaces. She hated that she wasn’t able to drive in town because she got lost so easily. She felt embarrassed that she could not get around her new town like she had her old town. Taz wanted to feel competent, and knowing how to get from point A to point B by herself was an illustration of her competency. Not being able to do so made Taz feel incompetent in other aspects of her college life.

Moving to a new residence presented a challenge. The lack of privacy for all participants was something new to deal with. Irene despised sharing space with others. At
home, she had her own room with a much larger bed and access to a private bathroom. Moving into a residence hall and sharing a bathroom with 45 other people was an acclimation challenge. She had to determine when and how to use the space without infringing on others, but also meeting her needs. Getting used to the ways that others around her listened to music, talked in the hallway, or engaged in studying were some of the biggest challenges Irene had when she arrived on campus. Ginger hated her living situation. She chose to live in the dorms because that is what she thought all students did. The sparseness of the décor and the lack of control over the look and feel of her room made her resent having moved to the residence halls. Ginger felt suspicious of the student staff members, as many wouldn’t engage with her after their first interaction or invitation. She grew to view her residence hall space as a room where she used the internet to log-in and engage with her friends across the high-speed connection. It was not a living space, but a resource she had to connect with folks outside of her immediate physical location. Living off-campus with her brother seemed like the best solution for Tiz to manage her chronic health condition in a place where she wouldn’t be burdening someone outside of her family with her medical concerns. Not being able to drive, Tiz had the added layer of difficulty in getting around town and campus using the public transportation system. Never having ridden a bus before, Tiz had to overcome fears of traversing a public transportation system.

Culture Shock. Every participant had developed an idea of what they thought the campus was going to be like. During their preparations they had imagined what the people were going to be like, how folks would dress, what class discussions would include, and how they would make friends. The participants made these assumptions
based on the information from the website, the pictures of students on campus doing what
college students were supposed to do, looking like what college students are supposed to
look like. When they arrived on campus, none of them were prepared for the reality of the
people and place. While the campus looked the same, the assumptions made about the
students and the campus culture were off base. The dissonance between what they had
expected, and the actual human environment caused regret and discomfort for the
students.

Irene came from a small town in state. She thought that she knew what being from
the state meant, and what she was going to be able to expect as she came to the campus.
She had visited as a middle school and high school student, so she had been in the space
before. Irene was surprised at the diversity and difference in attitudes from what she had
anticipated. She became concerned that she was being viewed as “small town” in the
bigger city where Midwest State was located. She did not want to be perceived as inept or
backwards because she came from a smaller town in state. Irene felt she had to prove
herself worthy of the new culture at the institution. On the other hand, Jordan lived in a
large, diverse city in a neighboring state. Her high school was extremely diverse. There
Jordan spent more time with people of color than white people. Arriving on campus was
a shock to Jordan because she had never been in a space that lacked diversity, “I’ve never
seen people wearing boot cut jeans unironically.” Her assumption was that a college town
would be more diverse than the area surrounding it. Jordan’s culture shock continued as
she navigated a predominately white campus as a bi-racial woman. Her identity, never a
topic of conversation at her previous schools, became the main topic of any introduction
or initial meeting of other students.
Initial Involvement. Midwest State has events planned at the start of each school year intended to help the new and returning students acclimate to the campus. Welcome week events are planned for the times just after the first-year students are meant to arrive on campus. Other programs and offices plan events for specific groups of students, based on personal identities or intended majors. These programs introduced aspects of campus to the participants that had been previously unknown. These programs also caused harm for some of the participants due to the scale and lack of personal connection they felt as participants of the events. I will highlight two events that had opposite effects on the acclimation of the participants. One helped Jordan find a community on campus and the other alienated Ginger and made her feel she did not belong at Midwest State.

Jordan attended an event designed for women of color at Midwest State to gather in a location off campus, develop awareness about their identities, and develop a community with other women of color at the institution. She described feeling out of place as a bi-racial person, her name not sounding as though she were not white. Jordan had to defend her right to be at the retreat in the beginning, but after her initial confrontation, she found a place where she was free to talk about what she feared, what her short time on campus had been like, and to develop relationships with other women who shared similar identities and life experiences. Jordan’s academic scholarship also provided her a space to explore her identities with individuals who are similar to her. The academic scholarship focused on providing support for underrepresented students at Midwest State. A class and retreat for all scholarship recipients were required. Jordan developed a mentoring relationship with the instructor of her class. These two planned events provided Jordan with structure and support in her acclimation to campus. She
mentioned the ways that she felt more comfortable and less alone as a person of color on the predominantly white campus.

For Ginger, the activities planned at the beginning of the year were not helpful. Overwhelmed by the process of moving, Ginger’s acclimation was going slowly. She was fearful of putting herself into a position to be judged by others who were going to the events. A student staff member from her residence hall invited her to attend the welcome week kick-off. Ginger hadn’t signed up in advance. She frantically looked for information about what she had to do in order to participate but was unable to find the information on the website. She joined the staff member and other residents from her building and attended the kick-off. Ginger described feeling like cattle going to slaughter as she went through the line to check-in. It was all so fast that she wasn’t able to ask anyone questions or get more information. When she tried to stop and ask, people just pushed her along through the line. Once through the check-in line, she was assigned a group. The group gathered with her leader, they exchanged phone numbers, and while Ginger was putting the leader’s number in her phone, the group got up and vanished, leaving Ginger behind. Left in a new place, surrounded by people she did not know, Ginger got in line for food and sat on a curb and cried. She felt hopeless and alone, and like she did not belong at the place. Her desire to leave began to grow. A graduate student saw Ginger crying and got Ginger up and moving again. The graduate student showed Ginger around the event and drove Ginger home. When Ginger explained the story, she was so grateful for the one person to do something to help her. Ginger wasn’t hiding; she was out in the open, sitting on a curb, crying into a hot dog. Hundreds of people walked past her, none stopped until the graduate student showed empathy and helped Ginger
make it through the rest of the event. Ginger waited for text messages about where to meet, but they never came. Ginger felt more alone than she did the day before.

**Making Friends and Building Relationships.** Feeling alone and on the outside is painful. Listening to the participants share what it was like to feel as though they were alone in the sea of people on campus was difficult and enlightening. Even the participants who had friends from high school or family members on campus shared that they felt alone and out of place amongst the thousands of students on campus. They felt afraid to put themselves out in the new world they had just entered. Being alone, they told me, was being by yourself in a space without other people. Feeling alone was a whole different story. Feeling alone meant, that even when there were other people around, you still felt you were by yourself, isolated from others. Balancing privacy and isolation was difficult. Finding times to choose to be by themselves was hard when there was significant pressure for them to be out and engaging with other students.

Irene felt out of place and isolated based on her identity as a low-income and first-generation student. Those in her residential area talked about all of the new stuff they got, how they did not have to work, and where they were going out to eat. Irene saw herself apart from those students. She isolated herself based on her previous experiences with people who had more money than she did. Jordan took time to figure out what she needed from friends. She attended programs, but mainly kept to herself. The retreats for her scholarship and the women of color on campus were the first places that she began to remove herself from isolation. Ginger retreated from in person interactions, save her classes and peer mentor group. Those were required interactions for grades and Ginger had a responsibility to maintain those relationships. Rather than seek in person
relationships, Ginger developed friendships online using social media sites to search for and acquire friends. Ginger described feeling safe behind the computer. She could be herself, and if someone did not like who she was or what she said, Ginger would block them out of her life. There was less stress related to meeting people online. She could learn about them through their profiles and posts, without having to ask introductory questions or answer them herself. Ginger made more new friends on Facebook than she did on campus.

Taz had grand images of what it was going to be like moving into a residence hall. She had imagined that relationships would be built on mutual trust and not developed like the relationships she had in high school. Taz also came to Midwest State knowing a number of students from her hometown. As her interests developed and feelings of homesickness intensified, she grew away from the people she’d known before coming to campus. She had assumed that those relationships would blossom and develop even more than they had in high school. Instead, Taz made the choice to leave those relationships behind when they did not meet her needs and made her feel uncomfortable. Taz did not participate in any welcome week events at the suggestion of her brother. She regretted missing the opportunity to start the friend making process. As the semester went on, Taz was able to bring one of the horses she trained to campus. She met other students who shared similar interests with Taz, and that is when Taz started to feel as though she had actually made the right choice to come to campus.

Tim and Bunny arrived on campus after classes had started. Bunny arrived in the afternoon of the first day, while Tim wasn’t able to get to campus until after the first week of classes was over. Each shared how awkward it was to move into a residence hall
space that had been occupied, relationships already built, and assumptions made about why Tim and Bunny hadn’t arrived on campus when the other students had arrived. One student helped Bunny find her room, and then assisted her in getting to classes and navigating campus once Bunny’s father left. Tim, on the other hand, moved in on Labor Day when all campus offices are closed. He joked with me that he was on campus before he existed as a student in the system. Neither Tim nor Bunny had any staff reach out to them to check-in and make sure that they were ok, even though they moved in and started attending classes late.

The skills related to making friends were not innate for any of the participants. They all felt awkward and unsure of how to conduct themselves and begin integrating into the new community. While the initial programs and events were created to encourage interaction and the development of relationships, the participants were left out. The intent of the programs was overshadowed by the feelings of being overwhelmed and lacking information to navigate those spaces. The participants wanted ways to find people like them, other students with the same interests, hobbies, majors, or social identities. It took months for the participants to find people who are like them on campus. For Ginger, it took more than a semester to find someone to call a friend who physically attended Midwest State. They felt on the outside of a community that looked as though it was already developed. The participants felt they lacked the insider knowledge of how to get around and to be welcomed.

**More Difficult.** The participants were constantly comparing themselves to the other students, and sizing up their own personal worth as Midwest State students based on their perceptions of their performance. The participants thought they were worse at the
transition -- that their process of making friends and developing relationships was slower than their peers. Each hurdle or conflict was perceived to be worse than what their peers were experiencing. However, once they started to develop relationships with others, they learned that their experiences were not so different from their peers. Irene and Jordan disclosed to their roommates that they were homesick toward the end of the first semester. Their roommates responded that they were homesick, too. Irene and Jordan had spent a semester hiding their feelings of homesickness from their roommates for fear of judgement when their roommates were feeling the same. Bunny shared that she was struggling with depression, and her roommate responded with support and encouragement, as a depressed person too. While the perception at the beginning of their experience was that they had it harder than those around them, what the participants found was that everyone was having a hard time managing the move to campus. Feeling overwhelmed with information and possibilities also paralyzed the participants from doing things. They did not know where to start or who to ask about what might work. Ginger’s peer mentor was a key partner for her in getting acclimated to the campus academically. While Ginger made a decision to change majors halfway through the semester, her peer mentor continued to support Ginger’s academic growth, even in the new major. Ginger knows that her peer mentor was paid to help her, but the peer mentor was the first person to make Ginger feel as though she mattered. Each participant could identify a person who had helped them feel as though they belonged on campus. The feeling of belonging was necessary for them to continue their development as individuals and to continue managing their homesickness.
Redefining Self. All seven participants came to Midwest State with previously established identities that were formed in the contexts of their prior homes and educational settings. Moving to a new place meant that they were going to renegotiate, redefine themselves in relation to the new environment. As I reflected on the experiences of students and theories that I had previously encountered regarding identity between my findings and that of Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) Education and Identity. Chickering & Reisser (1993) outlined seven vectors of identity development that could be cycled through as individuals continued to develop over time. Each vector builds on itself, moving the individual toward the establishment of their identity and purpose. I kept cycling back to this framework of identity development as the participants described having to learn to navigate a new campus, how to manage their emotions again, and how they were handling the changing relationships with parents and significant others.

Parts of Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) vectors begin in the acclimation part of The Developmental Process of Homesickness. Developing intellectual, physical, and
interpersonal competency is required before continuing the identity developmental process. I have outlined the competency building experiences that the participants had through the acclimation stage. As soon as the students arrived on campus they began developing the functional competencies related to being a college student. After developing the functional competencies, they began the process of redefining who they are in the context of their new physical environment and identity as a student at Midwest State. Rewriting identity development theories is not the purpose of my study. Identity development was a key aspect of the homesickness experience of the students who participated in my study. Their struggles were all based around the identity of being someone who left home, who moved on. They needed to redefine their identity in regard to their new circumstances.

I am going to focus on three of Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) vectors: Managing Emotions, Moving through Autonomy Toward Interdependence, and Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships. Establishing identity is included in the last part of the Developmental Process of Homesickness. These three areas were present throughout the experiences of the participants. They described their failures and triumphs, and ways that they learned skills and handled situations with new competencies that they had acquired as a result of their college homesickness experience. All of the participants saw coming to college as a new start to define who they were meant to be and who they already were. It was an opportunity to reinvent or solidify parts of their existing identities. Being away from home and feeling homesick, required significant personal reflection on who they were and who they wanted to be.
Managing Emotions. The process of identifying, managing, and overcoming negative emotions challenged all participants. Chickering and Reisser (1993) explained that developing competency is easier than managing emotions. There are specific skills and visibly measurable outcomes to show that development has occurred. Emotions, on the other hand, are invisible and unpredictable aspects of being human (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The participants came to college with bundles of emotions including hope and fear, excitement and anxiety, and pride and shame. The complicated and unpredictable nature of emotions challenged the participants to engage in help seeking behaviors, and to learn new ways to manage their emotions when previous tactics no longer worked.

Tiz had developed strategies to manage her emotions that involved seeking out her mother and explaining all concerns, with the encounter ending with a hug and encouragement from her mom. Coming to college, Tiz lost her major coping mechanism. Her feelings of fear, anger, and regret could not be shared with her mom in the same ways. She was unable to cope with what she was feeling. Tiz had to seek out other ways to identify and confront her feelings that did not require the presence of her mother. Tiz took up journaling, and continued to paint as a stress relieving activity. When she was with her mom, Tiz was able to use her previous coping techniques, but was unable to depend solely on the comfort of her mom to ease her emotional pain. Managing emotions also meant that Tiz did not share her feelings outwardly or express them to others. Tiz felt she had to “wear a mask of strength” due to her identity as a woman in a STEM field. She could not allow her emotions, signs of weakness, be seen by her competitors. Tiz admitted that her emotional management was not all healthy, but it was meeting her
needs at the moment of the interview. Her coping mechanisms changed over time as she began to develop trusting interpersonal relationships.

Taz considered herself to be emotionally well adjusted before coming to college. When she left home she found herself feeling anxious and out of place. She missed her home, the place with people who had made her feel safe and wanted. Her anxiety manifested as nausea and cramping. Taz noticed that when she would start her drive to return to her parent’s house, her pain would go away and when she would come back to campus, her pain would begin as soon as she got near. Taz tried a number of different strategies to manage her nausea. She called home and talked to her mom about her anxiety and homesickness. She would get in her car and pretend to go home, her pain would start to go away, but as soon as she turned around it would come back. She began to confront why she was feeling anxious -- she was concerned about her horses and family. As a result of her reflection and discussions with her mom, Taz was able to bring her horse to campus. Taz, when feeling anxiety, cares for her horse. She has been able to stop her nausea and cramping. Taz avoided getting involved until she was able to feel physically well and able to manage her emotions.

Bunny had previously been diagnosed with depression, as was Ginger. Bunny noticed that she was feeling depressed again, and sought mental health counseling to help her identify and manage the emotions that she was feeling. Bunny needed someone to help her process what was going on in her brain and body. Bunny admitted that she struggled in other aspects of her transition due to how her depression had completely overwhelmed her and prevented her from being able to accomplish tasks and assignments. For Bunny, homesickness and depression were not easily separated from
one another. While Bunny sought help, Ginger needed to balance her access to medical care and parental involvement. Ginger had previously seen a counselor to address her feelings of depression and suicidality. Ginger’s mother was skeptical and discouraged Ginger’s use of a counselor or medication to manage her mental health. Ginger needed to both manage her emotional health and the relationship with her mother. Ginger sought support in her friends online, processing experiences through messages and pictures.

Being homesick is a complicated set of emotions, as the participants described. The emotional management skills described by the participants were also used to manage their responses to homesickness triggers. All participants journaled their experiences. They each focused on finding ways to identify and manage emotions in ways that fit their new locations. Confidence in their ability to know when to seek support developed over the course of their time on campus. Often, learning to manage their emotions was through trial and error. They found new ways that they tried, and when they worked or did not work, they continued exploring how to best manage their emotions.

**Moving Through Autonomy Toward Interdependence.** Going it alone and needing to do college alone were said out loud in every interview. Somehow coming to college meant that they needed to sever ties and relationships in order to be “true” college students. Chickering and Reisser (1993) outline the process of developing interdependence. The process includes emotional independence, instrumental independence, autonomy and then moving toward interdependence. As the semester went on, each participant began to see how their previous relationships could be woven into their new life experiences. Taz described coming to college as “cutting the cord.” She meant that it was time for her to move beyond needing her parents to help her in any way.
Taz was one of the first to admit that she needed to maintain those relationships, but to characterize the relationship in a new way that fit her new-found independence. Finding freedom, making decisions, managing time, and meeting requirements were all aspects of developing interdependence.

Ginger and the relationship she had with her mother was fraught with conflict and dependence, each needing the support of the other to accomplish daily tasks. As Ginger moved to college, she began to process her emotions and life events outside of the context of her relationship with her mother. She started to develop new perspectives outside of existing relationships. Ginger began to see how she could establish herself in spite of what had happened before. As the semester went on, Ginger was able to manage getting around campus, and not going home or seeing her mom in person for longer periods of time. Yet, Ginger identified that she still needed the support of her mom, just not in the same ways that she had before. Ginger was striking out her place in the world as an individual, not as what others saw her to be.

As a member of the military, autonomy is non-existent according to Tim. He was a small part of a whole, operating specifically to support his fellow Marines. During boot camp, Tim had depended on those around him for all aspects of his day, getting sleep, eating, and getting emotional support. When he arrived on campus, he was no longer entrenched in a dependent community of Marines. He moved into a residence hall with first year students who were not in the military. Leaving the environment of camaraderie and dependence of boot camp left Tim without the support system that he had depended on for the previous six months. He needed to figure out how to be alone again, and how he was going to build relationships with others. Two things happened for Tim. He joined
an organization that had people who seemed cool to Tim, and that supported his interests in kayaking. Each month Tim had to return to his Marine reservist base and participate in the training. These two opportunities allowed Tim to exist separate from the military but remain connected to the men he depended on and who depend on him.

**Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships.** Making friends and developing relationships was mentioned over and over again throughout the collection of the data. At the beginning of their homesickness process, all participants felt alone. They hadn’t been able to find ways to get out and meet people who were like them or to even know where to start finding people who are like them. As they began to explore and define themselves at Midwest State, they began to see the possibility of making friends. At the time of my interviews, no participant said they had developed a true friendship. At the focus group, however, the participants reported that they had identified people with whom they had developed a significant relationship. For the students, there was a difference between knowing someone as a friend and building a relationship with them. Chickering and Reisser (1993) assert that comfortability and acceptance of difference, and development of emotional intimacy are crucial in the development of mature interpersonal relationships.

Each participant outlined what was preventing them from being able to feel at home at Midwest State. They described that they did not have people they could trust, like the people they were friends with from high school or home. They could not find people who were like them to spur them to reach out to start a relationship of any kind. Lacking trustworthy options for relationships was the biggest barrier identified by the participants. Each were guarding the most vulnerable parts of their identities from
judgment of others. As time passed and the participants began to feel more confident in their abilities to navigate campus, manage their emotions, and be successful students, they began to test the waters to make intimate personal relationships. Taz described the process she went through when building a relationship with her roommate. At the beginning of the school year, Taz shared little about what was going on with her emotionally or academically. Taz pretended that everything was ok. When Taz’s roommate disclosed that she was feeling unhappy, Taz responded by disclosing small aspects of her homesickness experience. Taz began to share more information about who she was with her roommate. Taz’s roommate reciprocated and they began to develop a stronger relationship. Taz was still hesitant to call her roommate a friend, but when her roommate broke down just before winter break and expressed that Taz was important to her, Taz was able to see that they had developed a strong friendship.

The process for developing these relationships was long and difficult for all involved. Ginger focused on developing online relationships so that she could end them at any point if they were threatening or problematic. She shared with me how she was seeking to find “classroom” friends who may eventually become “social” friends. The distinction was that classroom friends were a necessary part of the academic process, while social friends were chosen and optional for her academic success. Tim had developed mature relationships as a result of his service in the military. He categorized his Marine friends and college friends as filling two different parts of his life, one knowing what he would face as a member of the U.S. Marine Corps, and the others helping him be successful at Midwest State. Jordan began her relationship building as a part of her scholarship class and the retreat for women of color. At the time of our
interview she had found people who had the potential to be worthy of her vulnerabilities. She confirmed that she had made friends at Midwest State by the end of the second semester. Irene’s transition to campus included the integration of her romantic relationship. Being a student while her partner worked full time required her to redefine their interactions, and to develop new limits and find new ways to spend time with one another.

Ending relationships that no longer met their needs was an additional aspect of developing mature interpersonal relationships. Tiz came to Midwest State in a serious romantic relationship. She began her college experience using her partner as a guide for learning about the campus. As Tiz began to explore campus and develop confidence, she noticed that her goals and ideas were no longer in alignment with her boyfriend. She made the decision that she had to end the relationship in order for her to reach her potential as a student. Taz ended existing relationships or changed her perspectives at the start of her experience. She realized that her goals and interests were no longer in line with those she had known prior to coming to Midwest State. She wanted to experience difference, to learn and grow, and she felt that her previous relationships were going to prevent her from being able to fully take advantage of the possibilities. Bunny reconnected with a friend from high school at the start of her experience. They spent significant amounts of time together. As time went on, Bunny began to feel uncomfortable with how they were spending their time. His priorities no longer matched Bunny’s priorities, and Bunny stopped hanging out with that person. She noticed an improvement in her overall perspective on life as she moved on from that relationship.
The development of strong, intimate personal relationships came at the end of the homesickness experience, as the participants were able to see themselves as active participants in the new college environment. For the participants, being an active participant meant being a person who had access to social and academic relationships with others and being able to say that they had identified friends at Midwest State. Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) work on understanding identity development guided my understanding and conceptualization of the ways the participants integrated into the environment of Midwest State. Making meaning of who they were before college, how they changed, and who they were now they had come to college was a turning point in the homesickness experience for the students. They had developed to a point where home was no longer easy to define.

**Belonging.** Finally seeing themselves as belonging as students at Midwest State, and confirming that they could be successful is the final part of the Developmental Process of Homesickness. The participants needed to accept that they were worthy of being present at college. Through experiences, the participants were able to see that they fit in as any other student who attends Midwest State. Being worthy meant that they had proved to themselves that they were meant to be at Midwest State University. Fitting in meant that they could move throughout the campus without feeling out of place, and be able to say that they were a member of the Midwest State community. Commitment to learning and developing in their new place is the culmination of learning about who they are in relation to a new environment, new people, and navigating the world as an individual. As the participants reflected on their growth over the course of the year, they shared with me that they were truly members of the Midwest State community. They had
come to see Midwest State as a sort of home. Jordan expressed that she was feeling homesick at the thought of leaving for the summer break. Ginger nodded enthusiastically, while Tiz said that she was not looking forward to leaving and returning to her family’s home. Tim vented that he was worried about his adjustment back to military life after having adapted to college life. Bunny feared what it was going to be like to return home.

Even though the process to get to this feeling of accomplishment and belonging was full of trial and error, success and failure, each participant seemed grateful that they had the opportunity. Bunny expressed that she was happy she was homesick. Tiz agreed, sharing that being homesick required her to get out and try to become apart of something. Homesickness required the participants to confront their concerns and worries, and to find ways to cope and adjust to the campus life. During our interview, Ginger shared that she had looked at attending another school to be closer to family members. Her ultimate choice to remain at Midwest State was built on the successes she’d had on campus, and the fact that she realized that she would have to start all over at a new school. Ginger had done significant personal work in order to make it through her first semester, and she realized that the worst part of her homesickness was over. She had found that she belonged at Midwest State. Tiz had finally stopped wondering what it would have been like if she had attended an Ivy League school, realizing that her experience at Midwest State was as good for her as any other institution would have been. Jordan had a similar moment where she switched from feeling that all would have been better at any of the other schools higher on her preference list. She realized that she would have had to navigate the homesickness, fear, and loneliness in any place.
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CHAPTER 5. IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Higher education needs to change the conversation regarding homesickness and the college transition. The current narrative surrounding the college-going process is that each institution is a world of possibility, with excitement and success. Missing from this story of going to college are the adjustments and failures, the existence of regret or homesickness. My examination of college student homesickness illustrates the ways that positive and negative aspects of the college-going experience are intertwined for the students. Homesickness is not a phenomenon that is only negative. The participants demonstrated that homesickness as it exists currently is a developmental process. They moved through homesickness as they developed confidence and competency, eventually redefining their identities using the context of their new environment. The students were not homesick because they were weak or vulnerable to negative feelings. They were homesick because they were re-negotiating who they were, and analyzing their college-going decisions.

I realize that my study examined the homesickness experience of just a few students. However, the consistency of experiences throughout their stories encourages me that reconceptualizing homesickness as a developmental process is framing homesickness appropriately. In the current literature homesickness is categorized as an “either or.” Either you are homesick or you are not. The ways in which the participants experienced homesickness were not “either or” situations, homesickness was a “both and.” They were both excited to be in a new place, and anxious that they had left home. They were eager to learn new things, and fearful of what they were missing back at home. This “both and” understanding of homesickness provides space for students to exist in multiple ways of
being -- to acknowledge that they can be upset and still have made a good decision to attend college.

As the participants shared final thoughts regarding my study and their homesickness experience, they shared how hard it was to put themselves out there, to try new things, and how difficult it was to leave home. I had a realization that these students were brave. The courage to leave home and attend college was what got them here. Their homesickness experiences almost caused them to leave, but they courageously continued to struggle and develop a sense of belonging at the institution. Ginger, focused on leaving to find a place with family and familiarity, applied to a different institution, but chose to remain at Midwest State. She reflected on her growth and the difficulty she had overcome, realizing that remaining at Midwest State would allow her to use the skills she had already developed, while transferring would put Ginger back at the start of her college experience again. They were able to make it through the developmental process of homesickness to find themselves. In order to respond to how individuals are experiencing homesickness, institutional agents need to focus on how to

Figure 7. Bunny's individual art contribution
create programs and messages that acknowledge the complicated nature of coming to
college today. As the seven participants illustrated, homesickness is integrated into the
college going experience.

Validity

Grounded theory studies are the product of the researcher’s intensive review and
interpretation of data collected from the participants (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss,
2015; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As the researcher, I have studied qualitative methods, and
enacted the research methods according to requirements associated with constructivist
grounded theory. Additionally, as the instrument for the analysis of the data, my previous
experience as a student affairs professional providing direct support for students provided
me with the skill to answer appropriate questions, and to support the participants
throughout the research process. I used member checking and a focus group to triangulate
my results. The addition of the arts-based inquiry provided an additional source of data,
and provided me with another way to compare my data. Theoretical sampling methods
require a consistent review of the data, and determining if there is consistency across the
data collected (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I kept
collecting data until I was able to identify no new information being collected as a part of
my data collection.

Limitations

Qualitative research provides a participant focused examination of a phenomenon.
While my results may not be generalizable to the entire population of homesick college
students due to the small non-randomly selected sample, the findings are relevant to
inform practice at similar institutions; large public, land grant institutions. By using a
screening survey and developing a theoretical sample, the participants selected represented college student homesickness at the site of the study. Each of these participants were recalling their homesickness experiences and self-reporting their experiences. Self-reported accounts of personal experiences may change based on the day or time that the individual provided the account. I implemented a member check process for the participants to review their interview transcript and provide new ideas or clarifications of their statements. The focus group was also used as a way for participants to provide feedback on the analysis of their accounts and the findings of the study. With these validity and limitation notes in mind, a number of recommendations for practice can be identified to improve the first-year experience of college students experiencing homesickness as part of their developmental process.

**Recommendations for Practice**

In order to best serve our students, higher education professionals need to determine ways to normalize experiencing difficulties, and encourage help seeking behaviors. Below I provide recommendations for large public land grant institutions who want to help students move through the Developmental Process of Homesickness. While I use my developmental framework of homesickness to create these recommendations, all students can benefit from intentionally planned programs to encourage development.

**Accessible Information.** Access to information was key to the success of the students in my study. They all discussed what they accessed on the website and institutional mobile app, and expressed their frustration if they could not find an answer. Students are used to being able to use the internet to find answers to obscure questions; they want to be able to explore all aspects of the college experience easily. Reviewing
outreach plans and website organization to provide easy access to information the students are looking for. I mentioned the development of cultural capital and the role it played in how the participants prepared for college. If they could not find the answers on the website, they assumed the question wasn’t important. As illustrated with Ginger’s financial concerns, her questions were important. Assuming that parents, teachers, or the media are going to provide the necessary information for students to prepare for college is wrong. Institutions need to work on developing ways to access information, and providing information to students as they are making their ways to campus.

During the focus group I asked for clarification between asking for help and accessing information. Each participant mentioned how asking for help implied that they were not ready or able to be in college, while accessing and using information was a sign of a successful student. The fear of not knowing and lacking familiarity was lessened as the participants gathered information. As the participants prepared for their college transition, gathering information was the most common aspect of their preparation. This implies that universities need to create targeted websites and informational brochures that seek to fill in identified gaps identified by institutional assessment. At Midwest State, a review of the student on-boarding process took place, and gaps of information were identified. From this process, the university is developing campaigns and resources to provide students with the materials to start learning the institution. While homesickness cannot be alleviated by simply providing information, the information can help the students anticipate and identify areas where they need may need additional information or assistance. Additionally, providing the information removes the assumption that students
know what they are getting into when they arrive at college, or what they need to do in order to prepare for their arrival on campus.

Another important action step is to developing applications and resources that are accessible on mobile devices, and that students can use to find their own way. While Midwest State has an application, the features are lacking some of the key needs of the students. Having questions and getting answers was one of the most important things for Ginger. If her peer mentor had not given Ginger her personal cell phone number, Ginger would have had to identify an office and then email a person or anonymous departmental account in the hopes of getting a response. Developing tools, like applications that provide chats or question and answer services, allows students to develop self confidence and acclimate to the institution.

**Welcome and Orientation Events.** Once on campus, creating multiple ways to connect through trained student mentors or programming is imperative. My seven participants each described what worked for them, and the one-sized-fits-all approach to large welcome events did not meet the needs of any of them. Higher education professionals are noticing a shift in the ways that students are engaging and learning. All events should be designed with ease of attendance and navigation. Videos, pictures, and specific descriptions are all great tools to help students navigate large events that can be overwhelming and less personal. Attention needs to be given to group development and accountability. Ginger’s experience of being abandoned by her orientation leader should never happen, even through large scale events. While assigning groups and accountability for large numbers of student staff is more work for professional staff, it also provides a safety net for the students who may be left behind or who are self-isolating.
Programs to address students arriving after the formal move-in time need to be implemented as well. Neither Tim nor Bunny received any outreach from the institution, even though they had not participated in any welcome or orientation events. Institutional tracking of these students, and an intentional outreach plan to address the unique needs of students who arrive late can assist those students in acclimating to the new place and not falling too far behind academically. I envision new student programs/first-year programs offices, housing, and student outreach programs to be involved in a collective outreach plan. These students can be identified by when they receive their first ID or when they check in for their residence hall space. Professionals can use data from student card systems to track the first use of an ID card on campus, and reach out if the students have not used their cards during the first week of classes. Institutions have a number of ways to outreach and gather information about students in transition. Being able to harness the information to create coordinated outreach plans will only help students as they arrive on campus.

**Peer to Peer Mentoring.** Jordan’s retreat experiences and Ginger’s peer mentors were the most significant parts of their early adjustment to campus. Jordan and Ginger described feeling valued by the facilitators and mentors, that the concerns they had mattered and could be addressed. Identifying ways that all students can have access to a knowledgeable peer mentor or orientation leader throughout the month preceding arrival on campus and through the first six weeks is crucial. Determining scale and outreach plans to provide incoming students with peer connections can help those incoming students with homesickness start to familiarize and acclimate to campus even before
arriving. The access to peer mentors who can share information from the student perspective can ease tensions for students where staff members cannot.

I realize that all institutions are bound by resources, time, space, people, and money, but finding ways for real connection to happen is imperative to helping students aclimate to campus. However, audits of the connections a student may have as an incoming student can be completed. Developing a strategy to document the connections that students have to the campus, and ensuring that there is a professional staff member and peer, trained to assist, assigned to each student, is important. Intentional assignment of these peers and staff is also beneficial to the student. Ginger was an incoming animal science major, and her peer mentor had completed the first year of the animal science program. The most salient identity for Jordan as she arrived to campus was her bi-racial identity. Finding peers and staff trained to address those concerns made Jordan feel comfortable and seen by the community.

** Mention Homesickness.** None of my students heard about homesickness from any student, staff, or faculty. Mentioning homesickness is not going to make homesickness happen. Mentioning homesickness will introduce the idea to new students that being homesick is something institutions anticipate. Homesickness literature does little to encourage those who are homesick to express or share their homesickness experience with their peers. Normalizing the idea that the college-going experience is imperfect, and homesickness is ok, is important. Even as I shared with the participants that about 50% of their peers indicated that they were homesick, they balked at the idea of disclosing their homesickness to anyone else. However, talking to someone about it, like Taz did, improved their outlook and feelings, and helped them overcome the
negative aspects of homesickness. Students are afraid to look weak, to be perceived as failures. Tiz did not discuss her homesickness experience with anyone because she felt that if she did, she would lose credibility as a woman in a STEM field. Helping these students begin to identify negative emotions and learn how to manage them is not only helpful for homesick students, but all students as they are developing their identities as college students.

**Conclusions and Considerations**

I put forth a new framework to view homesickness as a process, a developmental process through which college students explore their identity and ultimately see themselves as belonging in the new place. I challenged the previous notions that homesickness always prevents success, and that those who are homesick are ill. I explored how homesickness played a role in the overall college transition process for seven participants, finding that homesickness and transition are interlinked and unable to be separated from one another in the eyes of the participants. Continued examination of homesickness in the current culture of the U.S. is important. So much has changed in regard to technology, access to information, and self-disclosure that continued evaluation of student perceptions of homesickness and homesickness experiences is needed. As the students change, so do their definitions and interpretations of phenomenon. Research regarding how homesickness is expressed and operationalized by students in the college context is missing from current literature on homesickness.

Future research regarding homesickness should include qualitative methodologies that explore homesickness. The fact that the participants in this study all journaled, without being prompted by me or one another, is a signal that journaling could be a rich
source of data regarding homesickness. Additionally, studies focused on defining homesickness and exploring the student transition experiences at institutional levels can provide professionals with guidelines and recommendations that had not previously been considered. As I worked through this study, I marveled at how surprised I was when students would report to me that what had been implemented did not work. Institutionally developed studies that use mixed methodologies to explore the intended outcomes will support institutional growth and student success.

As illustrated through their art, the participants expressed variants of experience and the contradictions found in being homesick and happy. Their individual contributions to the study came together to illustrate a picture of homesickness that could only be created through their expressions of art and vulnerability. Their developmental process is what inspired the final creation of the framework I proposed. Homesickness for them was about feeling alone, finding themselves in relation to a new place with new people, and then seeing themselves as a part of a whole. Homesickness is not about leaving a home, it is about discovering ways to make home a part of you.
REFERENCES


Dissertation Screening Survey

Survey Flow

Block: Default Question Block (9 Questions)
Page Break

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Q1 INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT
Title of Study: Homesickness from the beginning: A grounded theory approach
Investigators: Carolyn Duven

This form describes a research project. It has information to help you decide whether or not you wish to participate. Research studies include only people who choose to take part—your participation is completely voluntary. Please discuss any questions you have about the study or about this form with the project staff before deciding to participate.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the college transition process, homesickness, and how staff and faculty could assist students in overcoming homesickness and the challenges related to going to college. Your responses will be used to create practical theories to help staff and faculty support college students. You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a first-year student who recently came to college. You should not participate if you are an international student, a transfer student, or under the age of 18. A transfer student is someone who was enrolled at another institution of higher education and is classified by the admissions office as a transfer student. An international student is a student who has come to the institution from another country and was not enrolled in an educational institution prior to coming to the institution.

Description of Procedures
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to respond to a short survey, participate in an interview where you will answer questions related to your transition to college, and complete a collective art project. The survey should take no more than 5-10 minutes.

The survey will ask you to report your age, if you are a transfer student, or an international student. You will also be asked to select items from a list that describe your
experience as you transitioned to college. If you indicate that you have experienced homesickness or other concerns in your transition to college, you will be asked to participate in the interview and focus group portions of the study.

The interview will consist of questions covering topics like where you are from, why you chose the institution, homesickness, challenges faced in coming to college, and what helped you overcome challenges. After the interview, you will participate in a collective art project. You will be provided with supplies and a piece of paper for you to describe your college transition using symbols, words, or pictures. Your contribution is a way for you to explain your college transition using a creative process. You will not be evaluated on the artistic quality of the contribution.

Examples of contributions will be provided to assist your participation. You may use some or all of the supplies. Your contribution will remain with the researcher. Your participation will last for no more than 2 hours. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes and the map will take no more than 60 minutes to complete. The interview will be recorded so that participant’s answers can be transcribed. The audio files will be destroyed after the study has been completed. Notes will be taken during the interview process to supplement the audio recording and the data analysis process. Notes will be used as a tool to assist the researcher. All notes will be destroyed after the data has been analyzed and the final report written.

You will be given the opportunity to review the transcript of the interview and the initial findings of the research. You will be contacted via email with PDF copies of your information and be able to respond directly to the researcher regarding any feedback. You will only need to meet with the interviewer 1 time for the interview and creation of your contribution to the collective art project.

At the completion of the interview data collection and analysis portion of the study, there will be a focus group of participants. All participants will have the option to participate in the focus group. The purpose of the focus group is to review the findings and provide opportunities for participants to provide feedback about the process of the study.

Risks or Discomforts
While participating in this study you may experience the following risks or discomforts: sharing feelings and thoughts about challenges faced when coming to college and/or embarrassment from answering sensitive interview questions. Benefits If you decide to participate in this study, there will be no direct benefit to you. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by helping staff and faculty support students and to provide feedback regarding the student experience as students go to college.

Costs and Compensation
You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated
for participating in this study.

Participant Rights
Participating in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part in the study or to stop participating at any time, for any reason, without penalty or negative consequences. You can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. The researcher is a campus security authority. That means that the researcher is responsible for reporting certain policy violations. These violations include person on person violence, theft, and sexual misconduct. In the case that a serious policy violation or crime is disclosed, the researcher will terminate the interview and provide resources to the participant. In the case of the disclosure of a sexual assault or harassment, the researcher will provide the participant with information regarding confidential and non-confidential reporting structures on campus.

If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115.

Confidentiality
Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy study records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken: All participants will select a pseudonym (a name other than their own to be used by the researcher). A key of participant names and pseudonyms will be kept separately from the data and transcriptions. No participant names will be used in the final report. All geographic locations, family names, employers, residence halls, and other personal characteristics will be given different names to deidentify the data further. All digital data will be kept on an encrypted computer and CyBox. All paper copies of the creative component and notes from the researcher will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the private office of the researcher in her home.

Questions You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. For further information about the study, contact Carolyn Duven via email at cduven@iastate.edu or Dr. Katherine Bruna via email krbruna@iastate.edu.

Consent and Authorization Provisions

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document, and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.
Please select "YES" if you would like to participate in the study.

- ☐ Yes, I would like to participate (1)
- ☐ No, I will not participate (2)
- ☐Decline to Answer (7)
Q9 I am 18 years old.

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Decline to Answer (3)

Skip To: Q5 If I am 18 years old. = No
Skip To: Q5 If I am 18 years old. = Decline to Answer

Q10 This is my first year as a full-time college student.

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Decline to answer (3)

Skip To: Q5 If This is my first year as a full-time college student. = No
Skip To: Q5 If This is my first year as a full-time college student. = Decline to answer
Q2 I am a transfer student.

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Decline to Answer (3)

Skip To: Q5 If I am a transfer student. = Yes
Skip To: Q5 If I am a transfer student. = Decline to Answer
Q3 I am an international student

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Decline to Answer (3)

Skip To: Q5 If I am an international student = Yes
Skip To: Q5 If I am an international student = Decline to Answer
Q4 I have experienced any of the following (select all that apply):

- [ ] Missing my significant other (1)
- [ ] Missing friends from home (2)
- [ ] Academic struggles (3)
- [ ] Feeling homesick (4)
- [ ] Learning new things (5)
- [ ] Missing home (6)
- [ ] Leaving home for the first time (7)
- [ ] Making new friends (8)
- [ ] Joining a new organization (9)
- [ ] Wanting to go home (10)
- [ ] Helping others (11)
- [ ] Regret coming to college (13)
- [ ] Emotional struggles (14)
- [ ] Other (12) ____________________________________________

Q7 Please share your name.

________________________________________________________________
Q8 Please share your preferred email address.

Display This Question:

- If INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT Title of Study: Homesickness from the beginning: A grounded theory appr... = No, I will not participate
  - Or INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT Title of Study: Homesickness from the beginning: A grounded theory appr... = Decline to Answer
  - Or I am 18 years old. = No
  - Or I am 18 years old. = Decline to Answer
  - Or I am an international student = Yes
  - Or I am an international student = Decline to Answer
  - Or I am a transfer student. = Yes
  - Or I am a transfer student. = Decline to Answer
  - Or This is my first year as a full-time college student. = No
  - Or This is my first year as a full-time college student. = Decline to answer

Q5 Thank you for your response. At this time you are unable to participate in the study.

End of Block: Default Question Block
APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol
Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. My name is Carolyn Duven and I am a student and staff member here. There are 2 parts of our interview today, the first is our interview and the 2nd is to create a piece of art that represents your transition to college. The purpose of this interview is to better understand how students transition to college, the challenges they face, and how they overcome them. There are no right or wrong answers or any that are better than others. I am interested in your experience from your perspective. I would like you to say and share how you feel and what you have lived as you adjusted to campus. The second part of the interview is a short art project and I will give you instructions to complete the activity.

If it is ok with you, I would like to record our session. The purpose of the recording is so that I can get all of the details of your story, but also be able to focus on our conversation. Your comments will remain confidential. I will be transcribing your interview and all of your comments will remain confidential by using a pseudonym and changed names of locations and individuals.

Before we get started, I need to go over this form with you. This is a consent form for you to review regarding your participation in the study. Additionally, as a staff member at ISU, I am a campus security authority. As a CSA I am required to report certain crimes and any sexual assault or harassment concerns. If there is a concern brought up during our interview, I will end the interview and provide resources to you. All other portions of our interview will be confidential. Please let me know if you have any questions. (Give the consent form to the participant, answer questions. After the participant has read and signed the consent form, the audio recorder will be turned on).

Q1. What is your full name?
Q2. Where are you from?
   a. Where did you live before coming to campus?
   b. Where do you consider home?
Q3. What made you interested in attending this institution?
   a. What helped you make your college decision?
Q4. Are you the first person in your family to attend college?
Q5. What is your major or intended major?
   a. What kind of work do you want to do after you graduate?
   b. What are you interested in learning more about?
Q6. What has your experience been like since you arrived on campus?
Q7. Tell me about your first days on campus.
   a. What was it like to move into your new residence?
   b. What was it like navigating campus? Were you able to find all the places you needed to go?
Q8. What were some challenges you faced before you arrived on campus?
   a. What did you do to prepare to arrive on campus?
   b. What information was helpful in your transition to campus

Q9. What has been the easiest part about coming to college? The most difficult?

Q10. What does being homesick mean to you?
   a. Do you feel that you have been homesick?
   b. Have you ever been homesick before? Can you share details about your previous homesickness experience? When did the homesickness occur?
   c. Describe what has helped you manage your homesickness.
   d. Have you talked about your transition with other students?
      a. What have you shared with other students?
      b. What haven’t you shared with your fellow students?

Q11. What do you miss from home?
   a. Do you regret coming to college?
   b. What have you liked about the new community?

Q12. What has helped you adjust to campus and college life?
   a. What kinds of people helped you become more comfortable on campus?
   b. How did those people help you adjust to campus?
   c. What programs helped you become more comfortable on campus?
   d. How did those programs help you adjust to campus?

Q13. Has anything prevented you from being successful on campus?
   a. What has prevented you from being successful? Why?
   b. What do you need now in order to be successful?
   c. What do you recommend for staff/faculty to do to help students in your situation?

Q14. What do you wish you’d known before arriving on campus?
   a. What would you want new students to know before arriving on campus?
   b. What do you wish someone would have told you?
   c. What kinds of things did you learn when you first arrived on campus?

Q15. How have you changed since you arrived on campus?
   a. What has contributed to those changes?
   b. What would have made your adjustment easier?

Q16. What would you want staff and/or faculty to know about students who are starting college?
Q15. What else would you like to share about your experience as a first-year student and your transition to college?

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me and share your experiences about coming to college for the first time. The interview will be transcribed and you will receive a copy
of your interview transcript. Do you have any questions or additional comments?

The second part of the interview is an activity for you to complete. You will be participating in a collective art project with all other participants. Your participate is voluntary. Your contribution will not be evaluated for artistic merit or ability, but rather it is a way for you to share your college transition experience in a different way. There are specific instructions on the paper for you to read and supplies for you to use. You may use all the supplies or few of them. You should create a representation of your transition. Your piece will be joined with the other participants’ contributions as well. Please let me know if you have any questions about the project. Pictures of the contributions will be included in the final report. Please do not include your name or any other specific information that may identify you. All contributions will be destroyed after the final report has been created.
APPENDIX C. ART PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Collective Art Project Individual Contribution Directions
The purpose of this activity is to share your experiences using art as a medium for your expression. Each participant will be completing a part of the project. The hands will be combined into a large collective art project that will be used to illustrate the experiences of the students as they arrive on campus and experience homesickness.
You will be provided a piece of white tag board in the shape of a hand. You will also be provided with markers, crayons, colored pencils, and other craft items to decorate and create your piece of the collaborative project. The choices of color, how much is included, and what you use to decorate the hand are up to you.
Directions:
- There is only one requirement for each hand. Each finger is required to contain a word that describes your homesickness experience, moving to college, missing friends, or starting college.
- The rest of the hand is up to you to decorate. Here are some ideas:
  - The palm can include a diagram, picture, or shapes that illustrate how you feel now that you have arrived at college.
  - The wrist/arm can include a diagram, picture, or shapes that describe your life before coming to college.
  - You can write more words or fill in the areas with colors or patterns.

Each hand will be unique to the person who creates it. None of the hands will be better than others, they will be representative of your individual experience. Your artistic skill is not being evaluated.
You will be given an opportunity to explain what you chose to include on your part of the collaborative art project.
Below is an example of how the hands will be combined to create the overall project.

![Image of combined hands]
## APPENDIX D. INDIVIDUAL ART CONTRIBUTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Taz</th>
<th>Tiz</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Taz Artwork" /></td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Tiz Artwork" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>Bunny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Hand Diagram" /></td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Hand Diagram" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Jordan's Hand Diagram:**
  - LOVELY
  - Communication
  - From struggle comes growth
  - Foreign
  - Distance

- **Bunny's Hand Diagram:**
  - Overcome
  - Powerful
  - Capable
  - Patient
  - Sustain
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Irene</th>
<th>Ginger</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Irene Hand" /></td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Ginger Hand" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E. FINAL ART CONTRIBUTION

View of Hands
Close Up View of Words

Communication

LOVELY

Seeking

Resilient
APPENDIX F. IRB APPROVAL MEMO

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Date: 10/25/2017

To: Carolyn Duven
119 Stanton Ave #503
Ames, I A 50014

From: Office for Responsible Research

Title: Homesickness from the beginning: A grounded theory approach

IRB ID: 17-364

Approval Date: 10/24/2017
Date for Continuing Review: 10/23/2019
Submission Type: New
Review Type: Expedited

CC: Dr. Katherine Brun
1615 Lagomarcino Hall

The project referenced above has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Iowa State University according to the dates shown above. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 56), please be sure to:

- Use only the approved study materials in your research, including the recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp.
- Retain signed informed consent documents for 3 years after the close of the study, when documented consent is required.
- Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes to the study by submitting a Modification Form for Non-Exempt Research or Amendment for Person Changes form, as necessary.
- Immediately inform the IRB of (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences involving risks to subjects or others, and (2) any other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.
- Stop all research activity if IRB approval lapses, unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Research activity can resume once IRB approval is reestablished.
- Complete a new continuing review form at least three to four weeks prior to the date for continuing review as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as this date approaches.

Please be aware that IRB approval means that you have met the requirements of federal regulations and ISU policies governing human subjects research. Approval from other entities may also be needed. For example, access to data from private records (e.g., student, medical, or employment records, etc.) that are protected by FERPA, HIPAA, or other confidentiality policies requires permission from the holders of those records. Similarly, for research conducted in institutions other than ISU (e.g., schools, other colleges or universities, medical facilities, companies, etc.), investigators must obtain permission from the institution(s) as required by their policies. IRB approval in no way implies or guarantees that permission from these other entities will be granted.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office for Responsible Research, 202 Kingland, to officially close the project.

Please don’t hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns at 515-294-4566 or IRB@iastate.edu.