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University Belonging and Well-Being Across Contexts

Dakota Burton
University of Mississippi. Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College

UNIVERSITY BELONGING AND WELL-BEING ACROSS CONTEXTS

by
Dakota Rosado Burton

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Approved by

_____
Advisor: Professor Gary C. Glick

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Reader: Professor Carrie Veronica Smith

_____
Reader: Professor Rebekah Smith

ABSTRACT

DAKOTA ROSADO BURTON: University Belonging and Well-Being Across Contexts
(Under the direction of Dr. Gary Glick)

Belongingness has been presented in previous research as a fundamental need in which humans are motivated to seek out meaningful social interactions and contexts. In the current study, we sought to build on existing research examining belongingness in the university, by focusing on specific contexts in which first-year students are likely to meet belongingness needs. Participants in the current study comprised a sample of 299 University of Mississippi undergraduate, first-year students (23% male, 77% female). The study included seven questionnaires to measure the extent in which belongingness is related to well-being during the transition to college. The results of this study reveal significant links between belongingness and well-being (e.g., loneliness, depression) during the first semester in college. Moreover, the present results also highlight aspects of participants' home lives (e.g., homesickness, missing old friends, helicopter parents) that may impede meeting belongingness needs.

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The transition that students make from high school to college is a very pivotal adjustment period where students are presented with new academic, social, and personal challenges. For many students, this is the first time leaving home and the comfort of their familiar relationships with family and friends. It is during this major transition that students seek out contexts at the university level to find a place to belong and thus ease the adjustment to university life (Asher & Weeks, 2014). In addition to adjusting to the workload of college classes and navigating their own goals and career aspirations, students also are seeking out new friends, campus organizations to get involved in, and a sense of community in the contexts of the university and college town. The present research will examine how belongingness in these contexts is associated with social and emotional well-being (e.g., depressive symptoms, loneliness) during the first year of university life.

Research suggests that there is a link between students' life satisfaction, adjustment to college, and depression (e.g., Smojyer- Ažić, Živčić-Bećirević, & Jakovčić, 2010; Hames, Hagan, & Joiner, 2013), with self-reported rates of depression increasing over the first semester of college (Sargent, Crocker, & Luhtanen, 2006). First year undergraduate students may also be less emotionally mature than more advanced students, which may lead them to struggle to meet the changing demands and academic

rigor of college (Sharma, 2012). Such difficulty adjusting also may stem from social factors, such as missing connections to one's relationships and community back home, which may add to the difficulty of finding a sense of belongingness and community in a new, unfamiliar context. Moreover, past research has identified several specific factors that may inhibit the transition to college life, such as homesickness, missing a long-distance romantic relationship partner, helicopter parenting and a phenomenon known as "friendsickness", or missing one's friends from back home. Therefore, the present research also will examine if belongingness in the various contexts of university life is inhibited by such aforementioned "tethers" to one's former relationships and community.

Theoretical background

It has long been proposed that the need to belong is a fundamental human motive. Essentially, all humans are motivated to seek positive social interactions and connections with other humans (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The need to belong or "belongingness" is defined as the experience in which individuals feel themselves become an integral part of a new system or environment (Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, & Collier, 1992). In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, he proposed that belongingness needs exist just beyond physiological and safety needs, with belongingness being necessary before one can address esteem and self-actualization needs (Maslow, 1968). Therefore, it is essential that students transitioning into college life find a sense of belonging in order for them to further establish a sense of identity and autonomy.

College presents incoming first-year students with many opportunities (e.g., student organizations, dormitories, classes) for them to achieve a sense of belongingness.

It is especially important during this transition that first-year students find belongingness in such contexts in order to ease adjustment. One study found that students who felt a stronger sense of university belongingness also reported lower levels of internalizing symptoms such as anxiety and depression (Pittman & Richmond, 2008).

A related, though theoretically distinct, concept is loneliness. Feelings of belongingness are thought to be linked to a certain setting or context (e.g. social group, school, organization), whereas feelings of loneliness can be attributed to the level of life satisfaction as a whole (Asher & Weeks, 2014). Loneliness is thus recognized as a broad consequence of lacking a connection with others (Hagerty & Patusky, 1995). Belongingness, on the other hand, is related to a perception of support that is thought to result from feelings of being socially integrated into a new social situation (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Students who feel assured in their social relationships during college report less social loneliness than their uncertain counterparts (Bernardon, Babb, Hakim-Larson, & Gragg, 2011). Additionally, feelings of loneliness may impede freshmen student's positive academic adjustment due to a loss of interest and a negative attitude that might result from these feelings (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012).

A key aim of the present research is discovering where students find their sense of belongingness in college. During the transition to college, adolescents enter emerging adulthood, which is a period of development where individuals are no longer adolescents but are also not yet fully adults. Additionally, during this period of emerging adulthood, individuals tend to have some uncertainty about which direction in life they will go, with many experiencing changes in identity (Arnett, 2000). Experiencing such uncertainty can

be both liberating and intimidating to college students as they navigate unfamiliar territory during the transition from high school to college.

Navigating the transition to emerging adulthood and university life can be especially difficult without the social support of friends and other close relationships to rely on. Social adjustment is one of the four different types of adjustment identified by Baker and Siryk (1984) and refers to the extent in which students have integrated themselves into the university, including making new relationships and becoming involved in campus activities. It is one of the primary goals of the present study to reveal which specific contexts of university life are most strongly associated with positive social and emotional adjustment.

Where do students find belongingness in college?

Friendships & Peers

Social support in the new college environment is a protective factor that assists students in making the transition to university life. Students who believe that they have adequate resources for social support are better adjusted during the transition to college (Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, & Cribbie, 2007). Research shows that establishing new friendships while at college can help ease this challenging transition, especially among students who are residing on campus, away from home, during their first year of college. Further, such friendships may be a critical source of needed support during the problematic and stressful moments that college often presents (Giddan, 1988).

Much of the familiar and comfortable aspects of high school may not carry over into a large university setting. Previous research has suggested that popular adolescents might lose their sense of status when they enter new social contexts that have different

criteria for social prominence (Ruschoff, Dijkstra, Veenstra, & Lindenberg, 2015). Research has also shown that sociometric popularity, or how well students are liked by their peers, is predictive of positive adjustment across school transitions (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998). If students do not feel accepted or welcome by peers in their university environment, they may have difficulty adjusting, which could result in feelings of depression and loneliness.

The results from a study in Canada show a significant positive relationship between the quality of new friendships and adjustment to the university. Respondents of this study indicated that new friends helped them in many contexts including school, work, meeting new people, and managing stress (Buote et al., 2007). Additionally, students who report having friends at their university also report lower levels of loneliness and a greater sense of belonging (Asher & Weeks, 2012). Asher and Weeks (2012) also propose that friendships with fellow students can promote students' feelings that they matter, that they can count on others, and that their values align with peers at the university, all of which may promote belongingness in contexts of university life.

Based on previous research on friendships and adjustment in general, it is predicted that higher levels of belongingness in one's college friendships and other social contexts in which these friendships exist will be associated with better adjustment and well-being (e.g., less loneliness, fewer depressive symptoms).

Campus Culture

McGrath and Braunstein (1997) highlight several factors as potential influences on a student's perceptions of their college environment, including other students, course

offerings and living on campus. Greater involvement in college in all of these areas enables students to connect with peers and feel comfortable with the campus setting. Previous research has found a positive relationship between involvement in both academic and social activities and students' belonging in college (Strayhorn, 2012; Asher & Weeks, 2012). Academic engagement has also been shown as one of the strongest predictors of feelings of belongingness in college (Asher & Weeks, 2012). In another study, it was also found that the environment of a college town or city might influence attitudes towards a university setting (Martin, Swartz-Kulstad, & Madson, 1999).

It should be stressed that there are many contexts in which first-year college students can establish new relationships with peers and achieve a sense of belongingness. These contexts may include student organizations, courses, and residential dorm, as well as the overall school and campus environment. Ideally, students will have healthy and optimistic expectations for their college experience. The way that individuals perceive their university environment during the transition into college is associated with successful adjustment to college (Katz & Somers, 2015). One study found that students who feel like they are receiving sufficient support from the campus environment tend to do better in terms of adjustment, specifically in levels of academic self-confidence and positive attitudes towards the university (Martin et al., 1999).

A meta-analytic review of over two decades of research found a strong correlation between adjustment and institutional attachment, or the extent that students identify with and become emotionally attached to their university community (Credé & Niehorster, 2012). However, little is known about in which contexts belongingness is most strongly related to social and emotional well-being (e.g., depression, loneliness). Therefore, in the

present study, we will attempt to replicate the association between overall belongingness and adjustment, while examining in which areas of university life belongingness is most strongly associated with adjustment.

What factors might impede belongingness across the transition to college?

Homesickness & Friendsickness.

It is important to recognize some factors outside of the university environment that may inhibit students' ability to adjust to university life, as well develop a healthy and strong sense of belongingness. As previously stated, first-year students in college are experiencing a challenging transition and for many this is the first extended time period being away from the familiarity of home. A sample of first-year university students defined homesickness as a collective term for various cognitive and emotional experiences related to missing home and wanting to visit it (Fisher, Murray, & Frazer, 1985). Although homesickness is a common and normal experience for first-year college students, at extreme levels, it may have negative implications on adjustment and well-being. Such negative effects include poorer social interactions with other students and inhibited adjustment to college (English, Davis, Wei, & Gross, 2017). Additionally, homesickness has been found to arise partly in the need to belong and individuals who feel accepted in surrounding communities feel less homesick (Watt & Badger, 2009).

In addition to missing home, students may also experience feelings of loss and change regarding their adolescent friendships. This has been referred to in past research as "friendsickness," or the feelings of concern and relational challenge that new college students face when they move away from their established, precollege network of friends

(Paul & Brier, 2001). The results of this original study on friendsickness found negative adjustment outcomes to college when students are preoccupied with high school friendships, including difficulty in new social situations, lower self-esteem, and loneliness. Friendsickness is likely to be especially pronounced during the first semester of college as students experience changes in their old friendships such as living in separate locations and not having as frequent communication. In fact, approximately half of high school best friendships become close or casual friendships by the end of the first year of college (Oswald & Clark, 2003).

During the often overwhelming transition into college and its new social environment, it can be helpful and reassuring to continue to have communication and ties back home to family and friends. Maintaining best friendships in the transition to college may even serve as a buffer from social loneliness during the first few weeks of college (Oswald & Clark, 2003). A previous study found that keeping these close relationships with high school friends is beneficial during the initial transition to college. However, at some point, there may be more benefits to having close relationships with new college friends, with first-year students who lack on-campus friends being more likely to struggle in their adjustment to college (Swenson, Nordstrom, & Hiester, 2008). Thus, to ensure healthy adjustment to college, it is important for first-year undergraduates to find a healthy balance between maintaining old friendships and developing new ones.

Long Distance Relationships

Another challenge some individuals may face during their transition to college is attempting to continue a romantic relationship when one's partner is in a different

location. Similar to the issue of friendsickness, no longer living in close proximity may be taxing on a romantic relationship as the geographical distance might impede communication and closeness. That being said, many couples do choose to remain together during the transition to college despite this struggle; approximately 25-50% of college students' relationships are long distance (VanHorn et al., 1997). Research on being far away from one's romantic partner has also showed negative effects on well-being, such as elevated symptoms of depression (Guldner, 1996). Such symptoms may be, in part, explained by the finding that individuals in long-distance relationships also report missing their partners significantly more extensively than those in physically proximal relationships (Le et al., 2008). We propose in the present study that missing a long distance partner may impede one's ability to fully develop a sense of belonging and attachment to a university environment.

Helicopter Parents

For many students, college is the first time where they feel truly independent, responsible for making important decisions, and in charge of balancing their schedules and daily lives. However, there is growing concern that some parents do not allow their children to feel this independence during the adjustment to college. These parents are commonly referred to as "helicopter parents", or parents who are developmentally overinvolved in their children's lives. Helicopter parents are in constant communication with their children, excessively involved in their child's personal matters, make decisions for their children, and solve their children's problems (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012; Tyler, 2007).

Although helicopter parents often do not intend to harm their children's development, such over-involved tendencies may be linked to maladjustment during the transition to college. Children who rely on their parents to make decisions and assist them in everyday things may experience elevated feelings of anxiety in unfamiliar settings and lack confidence to cope with their own life problems (Odenweller, Booth-Butterfield, & Weber, 2014). Moreover, college students who reported feeling over-controlled by their parents also reported higher levels of depression and anxiety, as well as lower levels of life satisfaction, self-efficacy, and well-being (Darlow, Norvilitis, & Schuetze, 2017; LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011; Schriffin et al., 2013). Some schools have even taken specific measures during orientation sessions to advise such parents to be less controlling during their children's transition to college (Schweitzer, 2005). This is especially concerning as we seek to discover where first-year college students find belongingness, as helicopter parenting may, although inadvertently, impede children' development of new and healthy social relationships in university life.

Purpose of the present study

The present study seeks to provide further insight into how belonging in various contexts of university life is associated with social and emotional adjustment among first-year undergraduates.

Specifically, the following hypotheses are put forth:

1.) Students who report stronger feelings of belongingness are hypothesized to feel less lonely and depressed.

2.) Students who report stronger feelings of attachment to relationships back home (e.g., homesickness, friendsickness, helicopter parenting) are hypothesized to feel a lower sense of belongingness.

In addition, belongingness will be conceptualized and tested in specific contexts (e.g., with students, in class) to better decipher in which contexts belongingness is most strongly linked to well-being.

Method

Participants

The participants were 299 first year students at a large public university in the Southeastern United States. Of the 299 participants, 230 were female (77%) and 69 were male (23%). The sample was 83% White, 10% Black or African American, 3% Asian, 3% Multiracial, and <1% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. There were 107 participants who stated that they were involved in a romantic relationship (35.8%), and of these 107 participants, 58 considered it a long distance relationship (54.2%). A large number of participants identified as being a member of a Greek organization ($N = 162$, 54.2%).

Procedure

Following institutional review board approval, participants were recruited from general psychology classes and received extra credit for participation. After providing consent, participants completed a series of questionnaires on the survey platform Qualtrics in their own time, which was intended to take between 10 and 15 minutes.

Measures

Demographics. We asked participants questions regarding their gender, age, race/ethnicity, what year they are in college, religious affiliation, whether they are a

member of a Greek organization, whether they have a long distance romantic partner, and parents' income and education level.

Loneliness. To indicate the levels of loneliness in their first semester of college, participants completed the Loneliness in Context Questionnaire for College Students (Asher, Weeks, & McDonald, 2012). Due to an input error, we used 9 out of 10 items of The Loneliness in Context Questionnaire to assess participants' levels of loneliness in specific contexts (e.g. Class is a lonely place for me; I am lonely during meal times). The missing item was "I am lonely with other people". Items are rated on a scale from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*) to indicate the degree to which each statement is true of their feelings up to this point in college (see Appendix A). The Loneliness in Context Questionnaire for College Students displayed high reliability among item ratings ($\alpha = .92$).

Belongingness. We adapted the College Belongingness Questionnaire (Weeks, Asher, & McDonald, 2012) measure to ask participants about their current sense of belonging across six domains at the university (*university, other students, a specified club/organization, dorm, town, classes).* The original College Belongingness Questionnaire is a 6-item questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale response format with choices ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) and was designed to indicate students' embeddedness in the college community. Our newly adapted version of the College Belongingness Questionnaire (henceforth, referred to as the "Belongingness in Context Questionnaire") is 36 items: 6 items for 6 different domains (see Appendix B). We altered the wording as appropriate from the original questionnaire to pertain to our 6 different domains and had participants rate items about their university (e.g., "I feel

welcome at [specific university]"), other students (e.g., "I feel connected to other students at [insert university]"), which club/organization they indicated they are most involved in (e.g., "I feel like I belong in [specific club/organization]"), their dormitory (e.g., "I am glad that I live in my particular dorm"), the town the university is located in (e.g., "It's hard for me to fit in in [the college town]"), and their classes (e.g., "These are definitely the right classes for me"). The reliability of the overall adapted scale in our study is high ($\alpha = .96$), as is the reliability for the 6 different domains: university ($\alpha = .92$), other students ($\alpha = .92$), club/organization they are most involved in ($\alpha = .93$), dormitory ($\alpha = .86$), town ($\alpha = .92$), classes ($\alpha = .90$).

Depressive symptoms. Participants' depressive symptoms were measured with the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CESD; Radloff, 1977). The CESD is a frequently used reliable and valid 20-item measure (see Appendix C). Participants were instructed to "please select the number that indicates how often you have felt this way during the past week" from a 4-point scale, (*1= rarely or none of the time [less than one day]; 4=most or all of the* time [5-7 days]). Reliability was .90.

Friendsickness. To assess the levels of feelings of loss and change regarding precollege friendships, participants completed the Friendsickness Questionnaire (Paul & Brier, 2001). Items included statements such as "I am confident that I will be able to maintain my high school friendships" and "I miss my friends from high school very much". The Friendsickness Questionnaire (see Appendix D) is a 10-item measure using a 4-point scale, ranging from 1 (*not at all like me*) to 4 (*very much like me*) and in the case of our study, had a reliability of .78.

Homesickness. To indicate the extent students feel homesick during their first year at university, participants completed the Homesickness Questionnaire (HQ; Archer et al., 1998). The HQ (see Appendix E) is a 33-item measure with a 5-point Likert scale response layout with choices ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). It included items such as "Thinking about home makes me cry" and "I can't concentrate on my work because I'm always thinking about home". The HQ showed high reliability in our study ($\alpha = .93$).

Long Distance Relationships. To assess the experience of missing a romantic partner, participants completed the Missing during Interpersonal Separation Scale (MISS; Le et al., 2008) measure, for which they were asked to "please indicate the extent to which each of these statements describes your experiences in the past day (24-hours)" (see Appendix F). The MISS is a 20-item scale that uses a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) and in our study had high reliability (N=58; $\alpha = .96$). Items in the MISS included "I looked at things that remind me of my partner" and "I imagined myself with my partner".

Helicopter Parenting. To indicate to the extent students' recognize their parents' developmentally inappropriate, over-controlling behaviors, participants completed the Helicopter Parenting Instrument (HPI; Odenweller, Booth-Butterfield, & Weber, 2014). The HPI (see Appendix G) is a 15-item measure that uses a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) and had a high reliability in our study ($\alpha = .82$). Items in the HPI included "My parent tries to make all of my major decisions" and "My parent overreacts when I encounter a negative experience".

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analyses

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the sample ($N = 299$). Included is the mean, standard deviation and range for each variable of interest. It should be noted that the missing a long distance partner scale was only completed by participants who reported a current long-distance romantic partner ($N = 58$), therefore the sample size of these analyses is smaller. Bivariate correlations also were calculated for each variable of interest (see Table 2). Heightened overall feelings of belongingness were associated with lower levels of depression and loneliness. Moreover, higher scores on all 6 subscales of the College Belongingness in Context Questionnaire also were significantly associated with lower levels of depression and loneliness. Feelings of homesickness were negatively correlated with overall belongingness, as well as all context subscales (i.e., class, town, dorm, club, peers, school). Feelings of friendsickness were negatively correlated with overall belongingness, as well as in town, club, peer, and school contexts (but not class or dorm contexts). Students with long distance romantic partners (N = 58) who reported more feelings of missing their partner generally reported lower levels of belongingness, though these analyses were relatively underpowered. Helicopter parenting was negatively correlated with college belongingness.

Regression Analyses

A series of multiple linear regression models were computed to test multivariate associations between overall belongingness and adjustment. Separate models were computed for each of the five dependent variables of interest (i.e., depression, loneliness, homesickness, friendsickness, helicopter parenting). In each model, gender, race, maternal and paternal socioeconomic status, and whether participants were a member of a campus Greek organization added as control variables. Thus, the resulting regression coefficients reflected the degree to which each dependent variable was associated with overall feelings of belongingness, above and beyond the aforementioned covariates. In models assessing well-being, heightened levels of overall belongingness were significantly associated with lower levels of depression (see Table 3) and loneliness (see Table 4). Overall belongingness also was significantly associated with lower levels of both homesickness (see Table 5) and friendsickness (see Table 6). However, overall belongingness was not significantly associated with helicopter parenting (see Table 7).

To test whether belongingness in specific contexts are differentially associated with each dependent variable, a second series of multiple linear regression models was computed with the addition of each of the six subscales of the Belongingness in Context Questionnaire added in place of the overall belongingness score. This relatively conservative test depicts which individual contexts are most strongly associated with each dependent variable when all contexts are included as simultaneous predictors within the same model. In predicting depressive symptoms (see Table 2) and loneliness (see Table 3), only feelings of belongingness when with peers and in classes were significant. Belongingness in town, dorms, clubs, and at school was not significantly associated with

depressive symptoms or loneliness in these models. In predicting homesickness, belongingness with peers and in town were significant (negative) predictors (see Table 4). In predicting friendsickness, belongingness with peers was the only significant (negative) predictor (see Table 5). Finally, in predicting helicopter parenting, belongingness at Ole Miss had a significant positive association, whereas belongingness in class and with peers (marginally) had significant negative associations (see Table 6).

Discussion

This study examined the implications of finding belongingness during the transition to college and how belongingness affects overall well being. Overall, the hypotheses regarding this research were supported. We found that stronger feelings of belongingness were associated with lower levels of maladaptive feelings, such as depression and loneliness. We also found that students who report greater feelings of attachment to relationships back home (e.g., homesickness, friendsickness, helicopter parenting) generally felt a lower sense of belongingness in college. This may be because feelings like homesickness have been found to result from a need to belong in a new community (Watt & Badger, 2009). As expected, feelings of missing a friend back home or "friendsickness" had a negative effect on feelings of belongingness among peers. Those who are preoccupied with friends back home may spend more time attempting to continue high levels of communication and investment in those older friendships, which might then impede their ability to develop new ones at the university. These results are consistent with the background research and theories provided earlier from previous literature. This consistency suggests that it is important for college students to discover a healthy sense of belonging in order to subside the difficult emotions that may result from the high school to college transition.

These results also point to the importance of relationships with other students in easing the transition to college, both by protecting against feelings of loneliness and

fostering a sense of belonging. Specifically, we found that certain domains measured in the newly-adapted Belongingness in Context Questionnaire were more strongly related to adjustment during the first year of college than other contexts. The peers subscale was significant across almost all variables measured. This reveals the unique effect that belongingness among peers can have on first year student's adjustment to college, perhaps by buffering maladaptive feelings, such as loneliness, depression, and homesickness. This also supports previous research that found that having friends at college is a protective factor against loneliness in college by promoting feelings of belongingness (Asher & Weeks, 2014).

In addition, we also found similar results for belongingness in classes. This supports previous research that found those who were academically engaged (e.g. excited and passionate about classes, high levels of contact with faculty) reported higher levels of belongingness at the college (Asher & Weeks, 2012). This suggests that students who feel accepted, engaged, and as if they belong in their classes feel lower levels of depression and loneliness. One interesting finding in relation to belongingness was that those who reported having helicopter parents actually reported higher levels of belongingness at Ole Miss, which may speak to some positive effects of having overinvolved parents on students' transition and adjustment to college. In this case, students whose parents assist them in everyday things might actually take away some of the stress and worry that the first year brings to students.

Feeling homesick in general impedes students' sense of belonging during the transition to college, particularly among peers and in the college town. In our study, homesickness was the only factor associated with feelings of belongingness in the college

town. Those who reported feeling homesick reported lower belongingness. For a school like Ole Miss which is so integrated within the town of Oxford, it is important for students to feel a sense of belonging in the town to establish feelings of comfort that they may be missing from back home. This speaks to the importance of not only the college, but also even the college's location to help students better adjust to university life. Although helicopter parenting had a positive effect on students' feelings of belongingness at Ole Miss, it also had a negative effect on feelings of belongingness in their classes and among peers. Although helicopter parenting may be beneficial in some aspects, when parents become too controlling or involved in their student's lives, the student may then have lower levels of social adjustment (Darlow et al., 2017), which may then make it difficult for the students to feel comfortable adjusting independently in and around new classes and peers.

It is important to note that one particular subcategory of belongingness in our study, peers, consistently emerged as significant above all of the other contexts and domains. This supports theory that dates back to early research on belongingness as a fundamental human motive rooted in connections and relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1968). This key point suggests that perhaps it is the social relationships that ultimately matter most when achieving belongingness across the transition to college. The other domains we have studied (e.g., classes, town, clubs, dorms, school) may then exist as a channel to build those relationships that are going to be such heavy influences on overall adjustment to college.

Conclusions, Limitations, and Future Research

Overall, our analyses proposed that feelings of belongingness during the first semester of college are strongly connected to adjustment and overall well being. This is very important and relevant for professionals in higher education, particularly those who handle the first year experience. Realizing the importance of belongingness during the transition to college can be helpful for higher education professionals to better understand retention rates and first year students' success. We can also conclude that from our study, it was especially important for students to feel belongingness among their peers and in their classes at the university. Generally, the present research highlights the unique importance of belongingness in the college classroom, as well as among other students.

Several limitations existed in this study that should be noted. One primary limitation was that our sample only represents the population of a large, public university in the Southeast region, so the results may not be representative of universities in other regions of the country or at smaller, private universities. Moreover, it was hypothesized that students who maintain romantic relationships long distance during their first semester of college would particularly display difficulty adjusting. Although the data that was gathered seems to support this, not enough participants in our study were in a long-distance romantic relationship to reliably draw a conclusion. Thirdly, the survey was done online in the participants' personal time, so the level of monitoring was not there that would have been in a controlled lab setting. It was also limiting that there was only one time point for our data collection. If there was more time and resources to ask the same set of survey questions at the end of students' first year, more could have been revealed about belongingness and adjustment over the course of the whole year. Lastly,

the present study was the first time in which the Belongingness in Context Questionnaire was used, so it is necessary that the survey be replicated at other universities to confirm its validity and reliability.

In conclusion, this study emphasized the importance of belongingness as a factor for healthy adjustment to college and thus, the overall well-being of students. However, future research is needed to confirm these results and develop knowledge about more specific factors that may help ease the difficult adjustment to college. Specifically, a longitudinal study about the change in feelings of belongingness throughout the college years would be helpful to understand what types of domains continue to help students adjust and thus remain happy and healthy at the university level. Additionally, it would be helpful to investigate the directionality of maladaptive symptoms and belongingness by giving questionnaires prior to the start of college. This way, research could help show whether lack of belongingness causes depression and loneliness or vice versa. Our study offers groundwork for future research on belongingness and well-being during the college years.

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Table 1 *Descriptive Statistics of the Measures*

	Mean	SD	Range	n
Loneliness	2.09	.84	1.00-5.00	299
Belongingness	3.85	.66	1.67-5.00	299
Class	3.72	.78	1.67-5.00	299
College Town	3.92	.84	1.33-5.00	299
Dorm	3.68	.83	1.00-5.00	299
Organizations	4.07	.88	1.50-5.00	299
Peers	3.83	.85	1.00-5.00	299
University	3.88	.84	1.00-5.00	299
Depression	1.79	.51	1.05-3.80	299
Friendsickness	2.11	.57	1.10-3.70	299
Homesickness	2.42	.66	1.24-4.67	299
Long Distance Relationships	6.08	1.05	1.00-7.00	58
Helicopter Parenting	2.59	.64	1.07-4.40	299

Table 2 *Bivariate Correlations Between Variables*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Helicopter parenting	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___
2. Homesickness	.29***	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___
3. Friendsickness	.29***	.57***	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___
4. College belongingness	-.10	-.57***	-.23***	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___
5. Class belongingness	-.15**	-.38***	-.11	.75***	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___
6. Town belongingness	-.03	-.54***	-.22***	.86***	.54***	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___
7. Dorm belongingness	-.07	-.32***	-.07	.69***	.48***	.48***	___	___	___	___	___	___	___
8. Organization belongingness	-.10	-.35***	-.19**	.67***	.37***	.46***	.33***	___	___	___	___	___	___
9. Peer belongingness	-.09	-.57***	-.26***	.90***	.62***	.78***	.49***	.52***	___	___	___	___	___
10. School belongingness	-.02	-.57***	-.22***	.90***	.58***	.82***	.50***	.51***	.88***	___	___	___	___
11. Depression	.25***	.51***	.24***	-.50***	-.42***	-.39***	-.26***	-.32***	-.52***	-.45***	___	___	___
12. Loneliness	.21***	.43***	.28***	-.45***	-.40***	-.38***	-.26***	-.20***	-.49***	-.43***	.61***	___	___
13. Long distance relationship ($N = 58$)	-.09	.18	.14	-.16**	-.15	-.22	-.02	-.17	-.14	-.10	.22	.03	___

$*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001$

Table 3 *Associations Between Feelings of Belongingness Across Domains and Depressive Symptoms*

	Depressive Symptoms		
	β	t value	R^2
Overall	-.50	-9.59***	.25
University	.06	.49	.28
Peers	-.48	-4.31***	
Organizations	-.08	-1.33	
Dorms	.02	.35	
College Town	.06	.61	
Class	-.18	-2.76**	

Notes. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001; ****p < .0001.

Table 4 *Associations Between Feelings of Belongingness Across Domains and Feelings of Loneliness*

	β	t value	R^2
		Feelings of Loneliness	
Overall	-.44	-8.18***	.19
University	-.01	-.06	.24
Peers	-.44	-3.77***	
Organizations	.08	1.35	
Dorms	.00	.05	
College Town	.02	.26	
Class	-.17	-2.50*	

Notes. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001; ****p < .0001.

Table 5 *Associations Between Feelings of Belongingness Across Domains and Homesickness*

	Homesickness		
	β	t value	R^2
Overall	-.61	-12.63***	.36
University	-.15	-1.34	.37
Peers	-.25	-2.38*	
Organizations	-.06	-1.14	
Dorms	-.03	-.50	
College Town	-.22	-2.65**	
Class	-.01	-.12	

Notes. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$; ****$p < .0001$.

Table 6 *Associations Between Feelings of Belongingness Across Domains and Friendsickness*

	Friendsickness		
	β	t value	R^2
Overall	-.24	-4.06***	.05
University	.07	.51	.07
Peers	-.30	-2.35*	
Organizations	-.10	-1.53	
Dorms	.09	1.30	
College Town	-.11	-1.04	
Class	.08	1.02	

Notes. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001; ****p < .0001.

Table 7 *Associations Between Feelings of Belongingness Across Domains and Helicopter Parenting*

	β	t value	R^2
	Helicopter Parenting		
Overall	-.10	-1.69	.01
University	.31	2.20*	.03
Peers	-.23	-1.79	
Organizations	-.07	-1.07	
Dorms	-.03	-.35	
College Town	.03	.28	
Class	-.17	-2.20*	

Notes. *p* < .05; ***p* < .01; ****p* < .001; *****p* < .0001.

Appendix A

The Loneliness in Context Questionnaire for College Students

1. Class is a lonely place for me.
2. I am lonely in the evening.
3. My place of residence is lonely for me.
4. My free time is a lonely time for me.
5. I feel sad and alone on weekends.
6. I am lonely with other people.
7. I feel sad and alone at social events.
8. I am lonely during meal times.
9. I feel sad and alone when I am studying.
10. Bedtime is a lonely time for me.

Appendix B

Belongingness in Context Questionnaire

1. I feel like I belong at Ole Miss.
2. It's hard for me to fit in at Ole Miss.*
3. I feel connected to Ole Miss.
4. I feel welcome at Ole Miss.
5. Ole Miss is definitely the right school for me.
6. I'm glad I came to Ole Miss.
7. I feel like I belong at Ole Miss when I am with other students.
8. It's hard for me to fit in with other students at Ole Miss.*
9. I feel connected to other students at Ole Miss.
10. I feel welcome among other students at Ole Miss.
11. Ole Miss definitely has the right group of students for me.
12. I'm happy when I am with other students at Ole Miss.
13. I feel like I belong in [insert club/organization name].
14. It's hard for me to fit in [insert club/organization name].*
15. I feel connected to [insert club/organization name].
16. I feel welcome in [insert club/organization name].
17. [insert club/organization name] is definitely the right organization for me.
18. I'm glad I joined [insert club/organization name].
19. I feel like I belong in my dorm.
20. It's hard for me to fit in with my dorm.*
21. I feel connected to my dorm.
22. I feel welcome at my dorm.
23. This is definitely the right dorm for me to live in.
24. I'm glad that I live in my particular dorm.
25. I feel like I belong in Oxford.
26. It's hard for me to fit in in Oxford.*
27. I feel connected to Oxford.
28. I feel welcome in Oxford.
29. Oxford is definitely the right college town for me.
30. I'm glad that I live in Oxford.
31. I feel like I belong when I'm in my classes.
32. It's hard for me to fit in when I am in my classes.*
33. I feel connected to my classes.
34. I feel welcome in my classes.
35. These are definitely the right classes for me.
36. I'm glad I am a part of these classes.

*Indicates reverse scored item

Appendix C

CESD

1. I was bothered by things that didn't usually bother me.

2. I did not feel like eating; my appetite was poor.

3. I felt that I could not shake off the blues even with help from my family and friends.

4.I felt I was just as good as other people. *

5. I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing.

6. I felt depressed.

7. I felt that everything I did was an effort.

8. I felt hopeful about the future. *

9. I thought my life had been a failure.

10. I felt fearful.

11. My sleep was restless.

12. I was happy. *

13. I talked less than usual.

14. I felt lonely.

15. People were unfriendly.

16. I enjoyed life. *

17. I had crying spells.

18. I felt sad.

19. I felt that people dislike me.

20. I could not get "going."

*Indicates reverse scored item

Appendix D

Friendsickness Questionnaire

1. I am confident that I will be able to maintain my high school friendships.*
2. I have frequent thoughts about my friends from high school.
3. I often bring up my friends from high school in conversations with my new friends, roommates, and/or classmates at college
4. I miss my friends from high school very much.
5. I am concerned about the future of my friendships from high school.
6. I do not believe that my college friendships will be as satisfying as my high school friendships.
7. I wish that I attended a school or stayed at home to be closer to my friends from high school.
8. I spend as much time as I can communicating with my friends from high school (i.e., telephone, e-mail, text message, etc.).
9. I feel lonely now that I am away from my high school friends.
10. I am disappointed in the new friendships that I have made in college.

Appendix E

Homesickness

1. I can't help thinking about my home
2. I can't concentrate on my work because I'm always thinking about home
3. When I'm thinking about nothing in particular my thoughts always come back to home
4. I hardly ever think about my home *
5. There is so much going on here that I hardly ever think about home *
6. I visit home as often as I can
7. I communicate with my family every week
8. Thinking about home makes me cry
9. I dream about my friends at home
10. I've settled in really well at the university *
11. If I ever went home for the weekend I wouldn't want to come back
12. I try to make my room like that at home
13. I rarely communicate with home *
14. I hate this place
15. I hardly ever visit home during the semester *
16. I am drawn towards people who come from my hometown
17. I get really upset when I think about home
18. I am really happy to be here at the university *
19. It upsets me if I am unable to phone home each week
20. I can't concentrate on my work
21. I feel empty inside
22. I avoid going home because it would be too upsetting
23. I wish I had never come to the university
24. I dream about my home
25. I try to shut off thinking about my home
26. The people here annoy me
27. I can't seem to settle here at the university
28. I often dream about my family back home
29. My parents pushed me into coming to the university
30. I feel as if I've left part of me at home
31. I blame myself for having come to this university
32. I feel restless here
33. If I go home for the weekend I feel excited at the prospect of coming back to the university *

*Indicates reverse scored item

Appendix F

Missing a Long Distance Partner

1. I thought about my partner.
2. I imagined myself with my partner.
3. I wanted to talk to my partner.
4. I wanted to correspond with my partner over the phone or in writing.
5. I found myself thinking.
6. I reminisced.
7. I felt separated from my partner.
8. I looked at things that remind me of my partner.
9. I felt sad.
10. I talked about my partner to other people.
11. I wondered if my partner was thinking about me.
12. I dreamed about my partner.
13. I had nostalgic feelings about being with my partner.
14. I wanted to be with my partner.
15. I wanted to touch my partner.
16. I wondered about what my partner is doing.
17. I longed for my partner.
18. I felt sexual desire.
19. I looked at pictures of my partner.
20. I thought about the future.

Appendix G

Helicopter Parenting Instrument (HPI)

1. My parent tries to make all of my major decisions.

2. My parent discourages me from making decisions that he or she disagrees with.

3. If my parent doesn't do certain things for me (e.g., doing laundry, cleaning room, making

doctor appointments), they will not get done.

4. My parent overreacts when I encounter a negative experience.

5. My parent doesn't intervene in my life unless he or she notices me experiencing physical or emotional trauma. *

6. Sometimes my parent invests more time and energy into my projects than I do.

7. My parent considers himself or herself a bad parent when he or she does not step in and ''save'' me from difficulty.

8. My parent feels like a bad parent when I make poor choices.

9. My parent voices his or her opinion about my personal relationships.

10. My parent considers himself or herself a good parent when he or she solves problems for me.

11. My parent insists that I keep him or her informed of my daily activities.

12. When I have to go somewhere (e.g., doctor appointments, academic meetings, the bank, clothing stores), my parent accompanies me.

13. When I am going through a difficult situation, my parent always tries to fix it.

14. My parent encourages me to take risks and step outside of my comfort zone. *

15. My parent thinks it is his or her job to shield me from adversity.