The Rise in Use of Emotional Support Animals by College Students: The Impact of Parenting Styles

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As the generational context of higher education shifts, a rise in Emotional Support Animal (ESA) use and mental health concerns are present for students on college campuses. While previous studies have aimed to address the relevancy and controversy of ESAs in higher education as well as their effectiveness in supporting individuals, less research has explored underlying factors that contribute to the use of an ESA. The purpose of this study was to explore the parenting behaviors of parents/caregivers of students with ESAs in comparison to parents/caregivers of students without ESAs. An embedded mixed methods design was used. Participants completed the Parenting Behaviors Questionnaire (PBQ) assessment scale and an embedded qualitative question. Findings revealed significant differences in the PBQ subscales of responsiveness, explaining, and discipline indicating that the parenting behaviors among parents/caregivers of students with ESAs differ in these areas. Students with ESAs also disclosed higher incidents of unexpected life events and caregiver instability than their non-ESA counterparts. The data provides essential assessment and intervention information for college counseling centers.

Keywords: emotional support animals, higher education, parenting, college counseling centers, mental health

GEORGIA
College Personnel Association
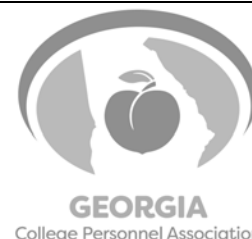
With the generational demography of college students evolving, new phenomena are surfacing in higher education. With an increase in mental health concerns on college campuses, the use of emotional support animals is on the rise. Institutions of higher education face the challenge of developing policies and practices that both support and protect students. As these situations evolve, it becomes necessary for higher education to have a consistent response on multiple fronts, with regard to policies, practices, and direct support services for student success. In order for counseling centers in higher education to be prepared to address the overall health and well-being of students under their care, it is critical to have a broader understanding of such phenomena. While previous studies have debated the relevancy and controversy of emotional support animals and focused on the value of using an emotional support animal, little focus has aimed at identifying underlying factors contributing to the need for their use. In an effort to better understand this gap, the purpose of the study was to explore the parenting behaviors of the parents/caregivers of students using an emotional support animal compared to the parenting behaviors of the parents/ caregivers of students without an emotional support animal while attending college.

Emotional Support Animals and Higher Education

Mental health concerns are growing in the United States (Locke et al.,2016), especially in adults ages 18-25 years old (SAMHSA, 2018). College counseling center directors have reported an increase in the use of mental health services and that students are coming to college with higher severity of mental health concerns (Gallagher, 2014). A new phenomenon that provides support for students who have mental health concerns is the use of emotional support animals (Adams, Sharkin, & Bottinelli, 2017). However, the subject of emotional support animals on campuses of higher education has been one of controversy in recent years (Kogan, Schaefer, Erdman, & Schoenfeld-Tacher, 2016). The requests to bring service animals (defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act) and assistance animals (defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development) continue to increase on campuses of higher education (Adams, Sharkin, & Bottinelli, 2017; Kogan et al., 2016), while there is a significant lack of consistent policy towards these requests across institutions nationwide.

Emotional Support Animals versus Service Animals

One of the more difficult challenges associated with recognizing the difference between emotional support animals (ESA)

and service animals is the lack of a single definition of the two. One of the main differences is that an ESA is not trained to perform a specific task to aid the individual. According to the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) (2015), under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, "Service animals are defined as dogs that are individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people living with disabilities" (p. 1). Examples of this can include physical disabilities, such as a dog that aids a person who is blind, and psychiatric disabilities, such as a seizure alert dog (Kogan et al., 2016). The DOJ also states that this definition does not restrict the broader definition of the term "assistance animal" by the Fair Housing Act or the term "service animal" by the Air Carrier Access Act (U.S. Department of Justice, 2015). In the Fair Housing Act, an emotional support animal is considered an assistance animal (Fair Housing Act, 1968).

In the higher education setting, the two laws that are most applicable to the regulations regarding service animals and emotional support animals are the ADA and the Fair Housing Act. However, both of the federal laws have different definitions and names for service, assistance, and emotional support animals, which have an adverse impact on the confusion regarding policy formation in higher education (Kogan et al., 2016).

Emotional Support Animal Policies in Higher Education

A large concern for institutions is setting the precedent of allowing ESAs on campus. If they give approval of an ESA to one student, they will not be able to refuse approval to another student (Field, 2006). This could be problematic on several fronts, one of which is a concern of students trying to bring their pets to campus under the guise of an ESA, when that is not the case (Von Bergen, 2015). As ESAs are untrained, there are no regulations to vet whether or not the animal is of legitimate psychiatric use to the individual, and many ESAs are certified without an accurate examination from a mental health professional (Salminen & Gregory, 2018). Another concern could be other legal issues, especially the liability of having animals on campus (Adams, Sharkin, & Bottinelli, 2017). The differing definitions, laws, and lack of consistent regulation make for uncertainty when it comes to policy-making in higher education regarding ESAs (Von Bergen, 2015).

Generational Context

As the demography of students entering higher education evolves, exploring the generational context of this cohort as well as their parents/caregivers is necessary. For higher education institutions serving undergraduate students, first-time college students ranging from 18 to 22 years of age

are the youngest generational cohort being referred to by numerous suggested names including the Homeland Generation, Post-Millennial, Generation We, IGen, or Generation Z. According to Beck and Wright (2019), the use of the title IGen for this cohort encompasses the historical significance of being real digital natives, having had wide access to technology for the duration of their lives, and suggests the isolation present from growing up in a society where technological connection is easier than a connection with people.

For the IGen cohort, technology has played an influential role in their lives. Members of this cohort participate in frequent use of social media which has skewed boundaries about information that is public versus private, thus reshaping social norms (Beck & Wright, 2019). Because absorption with technology is present, social and relationship skills may be weaker (Chicca & Shellenbarger, 2018). Another increasing concern is the rate of mental health concerns with this generation as they have been found to be much lonelier than any other adult cohort (Beck & Wright, 2019). Friendships usually transpire through a technological platform, making it a challenge for the IGen cohort to engage and make connections face to face. The IGen cohort is being parented by GenX parents, which have endorsed a hovering style of parenting allowing their children some level of freedom

but staying connected with them through technology. As a result, parents struggle to let go (Jenkins, 2017), thus, drawing the conclusion that parenting may be influenced by an individual's generational cohort.

Parenting Styles

Research on parenting styles has been explored for decades. Baumrind (1971; 1991) asserts that the best parenting outcomes evolve when parents are not too punitive or too detached. Guidance and monitoring are needed among all children, which can be flexible according to their developmental needs. Numerous researchers have recorded positive outcomes on children raised by caregivers who are warm and affectionate but who also set clear, consistent, and reasonable expectations for their children, opposite of being punitive or aloof (Jaffee & Jacobs, 2013). Researchers have indicated an authoritative parenting style, which encompasses high levels of love, support, and discipline, lead to higher academic adjustment as compared to other parenting styles such as permissive or authoritarian (Spera, 2005; Love & Thomas, 2014). Additionally, individuals whose parents and/or caregivers employed an authoritative parenting style also had higher levels of self-esteem (Love & Thomas, 2014). Studies comparing authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting styles have identified

that using the authoritative approach has resulted in positive outcomes of emotional well-being, academic adjustment, social adjustment, and positive social behaviors (Silva et al., 2007). Wissink, Dekovic, and Meijer (2006) note the quality of the relationship between caregiver and adolescent appears to be more paramount than tangible parenting behaviors.

A rise in the use of emotional support animals on college campuses is occurring among the current IGen student population. This upward trend has caused unique challenges for universities and student counseling centers, but research remains limited. Although a depth of studies has been conducted linking parenting styles to academic outcomes and emotional well-being, research exploring the parenting behaviors of students with emotional support animals has not been explored.

Purpose of the study

The overall purpose of this study was to explore the parenting behaviors of the parents/caregivers of students using an emotional support animal in comparison to students without an emotional support animal while attending college.

RQ1: What is the difference in parenting behaviors of the parents/caregivers of the participants with ESAs and the participants without ESAs on a university campus?

RQ2: How is the relationship between the participant and their parents/caregivers described?

RQ3: How does the relationship described by the participants about their parents/caregivers further explain the differences of parenting behaviors among the parents/caregivers of the participants?

Methods

Procedure

The design for this study was an embedded mixed methods design, in which the qualitative data played a secondary role to the quantitative data collected (Creswell, 2014). Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently from students enrolled in a medium-sized regional southern university, who either had an emotional support animal (ESA) or who did not have an emotional support animal (ESA). The researchers not only aimed to explore the parenting behaviors of the participants' parents/caregivers through the collection of quantitative data, but the researchers wanted to know more deeply how the participants described the relationship they had with that parent/caregiver through qualitative inquiry. Thus, the embedded mixed methods design was selected, as

participants' description of the relationship they had with their caregiver could not be obtained through the use of quantitative measures alone. Approval was obtained from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). At this university, only the students who live on campus in residence halls are required to register the use of an emotional support animal. Due to the lack of tracking at the university overall of students who have emotional support animals on campus, a convenience sample was used. Two primary recruitment strategies were used: 1) students were informed about the voluntary study through the weekly email announcements disseminated to all students at the university through their campus email and 2) the university housing office sent an email about the voluntary study to students who had an emotional support animal living on campus in their residence hall.

Qualtrics, an online survey tool, was used for obtaining informed consent electronically. Once a participant completed the informed consent form electronically electing to voluntarily participate, they were redirected to a separate Qualtrics link to complete the electronic survey. The students' university identification number was obtained on the informed consent form only for all participants of the study to be included in a drawing for a one-hundred-

dollar Visa gift card. Completed survey data was not linked to the informed consent forms to protect participants' confidentiality and anonymity. The link to participate in the study was open for one 16-week academic semester.

Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 54 total students in a medium-sized regional southern university. Half of participants reported having an ESA, while the other 27 participants reported having no ESA. Although more students without ESAs participated in the study; there were only 27 students with ESAs who participated in the study. Thus, the first 27 participants without an ESA to submit the survey were included in the study in order to have equal representation of both groups. Although the university does not track students' use of ESAs overall, at the time of the study, the university had 61 students using an ESA who were living in a residence hall on campus, therefore, the study represented 44% of this total number. Table 1 shows the demographic information gathered from participants. The questions regarding gender and cultural background were open ended responses, as to allow participants to self-identify.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

	Students with Registered ESA (%)	Students Without ESA (%)
Age		
18-24	96	4
25-29	4	11
30-34	0	4
35-39	0	4
40&up	0	7
Cultural Background		
White/Caucasian	70	41
Hispanic	4	26
African American	4	4
Mixed Race	0	11
Other	22	19
Gender		
Female	89	67
Male	4	30
Transgender	7	4
Class Standing		
Freshman	19	4
Sophomore	15	22
Junior	30	30
Senior	33	44
Graduate	4	0

Note. N=54 (n = 27 for each participant group)

Measures

The Parenting Behaviors Questionnaire (PBQ), developed by Wissink, Dekovic, and Meijer (2006), is a 30-item questionnaire measuring six subscales on a Likert scale of one (never) to five (very often). The questionnaire measures the frequency of existing child rearing behaviors rather than parenting beliefs, attitudes, or behavioral intentions. Three dimensions of parenting behaviors are assessed: support, authoritative control, and restrictive control. Each dimension was also subdivided into two subscales each. The first dimension of support includes the subscales of warmth (i.e. How often do your parents let you know that they love you?) and responsiveness (i.e. How often do your parents really try to help, comfort you, or cheer you up when you are having a (small) problem?). The second dimension of authoritative control includes the subscales of explaining (i.e. How often do your parents try to give you a good answer when you ask something you don't understand?) and autonomy (i.e. How often do your parents say you can do something on your own?). The final dimension of restrictive control includes the subscales of strictness (i.e. How often do your parents have strict rules you have to obey?) and discipline (i.e. How often do your parents punish you severely?) (Wissink et al., 2006). Permission was granted in the American Psychological Association (APA) PsychNet database to use the PBQ questionnaire for research and/or teaching purposes.

An additional seven demographic questions were added to the questionnaire by the researchers: age, culture, gender, academic classification, family structure, caregiver age bracket, and birth order. Demographic questions designed with a forced response included age, academic classification, family structure, age of caregivers, and birth order. Researchers provided an open text entry option for cultural background and gender. One open ended question was also incorporated, (How would you describe the relationship with your parent(s) /caregiver(s)?), where students typed their open-ended response in a text box.

Data Analysis

The demographic questionnaire consisted of seven questions developed by the researchers. Data from the demographic questionnaire enabled the researchers to compare specific demographic variables with other study variables. The Parenting Behaviors Questionnaire (PBQ) was developed by Wissink et al (2006) and is a 30-item questionnaire measuring six subscales with an accompanying answering Likert scale of 1 to 5. Data analysis was conducted using a paired-sample two tailed t-test on each subscale of the questionnaire

using an Excel spreadsheet (p value $\leq$ 0.05). To minimize the possibility of errors, two of the three researchers analyzed the data independently, and then met to discuss the analysis to ensure consistency and accuracy.

Qualitative data was also collected by using one open-ended question developed by the researchers to identify emerging themes that were different among the two groups (students with ESAs and students without ESAs) to better address the research questions. Participants typed their response in a text box to answer this qualitative question. This process involved: assigning units of data, sorting the units of data into categories, dividing categories into subcategories if needed, assigning codes for each category type, and defining the attributes of both the categories and subcategories (Creswell, 2014; Stringer & Dwyer, 2005). The researchers analyzed the qualitative data collectively to come to a consensus on the emerging themes.

Results

Parenting Behaviors Questionnaire (PBQ)

For the Parenting Behaviors Questionnaire (PBQ), a paired-sample two tailed t-test was conducted to identify differences in parenting behaviors of the parents/caregivers of participants with ESAs versus the behaviors of the parents/caregivers of participants without ESAs on a university campus. The PBQ consisted of 30 items, measuring six subscales, providing participants an answering scale of 1 (never) to 5 (very often). Each subscale consisted of five questions. As displayed in Table 2, the results suggest significant differences on three of the six subscales. Of the three subscales that were statistically significant, participants with an ESA responded with the selection of sometimes (3); whereas the participants without an ESA responded mostly with sometimes (3) to rarely (2). The subscales of significant difference included responsiveness (p=0.004), explaining (p=0.000), and discipline (p=0.037).

Table 2
Parenting Behaviors Questionnaire (PBQ) Results

PBQ Scale Item	Registered ESA		No ESA		*t*	*p*
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*		
Subscale Warmth	3.64	1.13	3.37	1.18	1.927	0.055
1) *Show love*	3.96	0.90	3.78	0.93	0.742	0.460
2) *Give a compliment*	3.56	1.05	3.11	0.80	1.748	0.086

3) Call you a nickname or pet name	3.59	1.22	3.41	1.55	0.488	0.627
4) Give a kiss or say something nice before bed	3.38	1.33	3.22	1.40	0.433	0.666
5) Hug you or give you a kiss	3.70	1.10	3.34	1.04	1.270	0.209
Subscale Responsiveness	3.47	1.16	3.05	1.20	2.878	*0.004
6) Tries to understand when you talk about something	3.37	1.24	3.19	1.13	0.544	0.588
7) Really try to help, comfort you	3.44	1.12	3.00	1.21	1.400	0.167
8) Notice, if you're feeling sad or down	3.37	1.18	2.81	1.08	1.806	0.076
9) Ask you if something is bothering you	3.44	1.12	2.74	1.29	2.140	*0.037
10) Give you the feeling you can call on them	3.70	1.17	3.52	1.22	0.568	0.571
Subscale Explaining	3.69	1.03	3.16	1.17	3.905	*0.000
1) Try to give you a good answer when you ask	3.77	0.99	3.52	1.12	0.860	0.393
2) Explain why something is forbidden to you	3.34	1.23	2.67	1.00	2.209	*0.031
3) Explain why you are being punished, if they punish you	3.88	0.95	3.26	1.29	2.003	*0.050
4) Make sure that you understand why certain rules are important	3.84	0.88	3.41	1.15	1.553	0.126
5) Explain something to you when you fail to grasp	3.62	1.06	2.96	1.13	2.169	*0.034
	3.84	1.12	3.64	1.04	1.482	0.140

Subscale Autonomy Granting						
6) Say you can do something on your own	3.92	0.89	3.78	1.01	0.553	0.582
7) Tell you to consider yourself what you have to do or say	3.81	1.17	3.44	1.09	1.173	0.245
8) Tell you that you are responsibility for your own actions	4.46	0.71	4.26	0.81	0.965	0.338
9) Allow you to decide something for yourself	3.85	1.08	3.81	0.88	0.115	0.908
10) Parents ask your opinion	3.15	1.32	2.88	0.91	0.857	0.395
Subscale Strictness	3.93	1.04	3.85	0.98	0.635	0.526
1) Say you should listen to people who are older	4.12	0.95	4.22	0.80	-0.442	0.659
2) Are your parents strict	3.88	0.95	3.78	1.09	0.380	0.705
3) Get angry when you contradict them	3.92	0.98	3.81	0.92	0.415	0.679
4) Use strict rules you have to obey	3.58	1.33	3.59	1.15	-0.045	0.963
5) Want you to do what they say, even if you don't agree	4.15	0.92	3.85	0.86	1.228	0.224
Subscale Discipline	3.18	1.11	2.89	1.18	2.102	*0.037
6) Forbidden to do something you like	3.35	1.06	2.89	0.97	1.639	0.107
7) Parents punish you severely	2.50	1.03	2.59	1.25	-0.293	0.769
8) Give you a box on the ears, a pat, or a pinch in the arm	2.88	0.91	2.22	1.15	2.314	*0.024

9) Punishment if you don't do what your parents tell you to do	3.54	1.03	3.30	0.99	0.872	0.387
10) Yell to you if you did something against their will	3.65	1.13	3.44	1.15	0.667	0.507
Overall Scale	*3.62*	*1.12*	*3.33*	*1.17*	*5.163*	*2.734*

$*p \leq 0.05$

Qualitative data themes

An open-ended qualitative question asked participants to describe the relationship with their parent(s)/caregiver(s). Qualitative results revealed two primary emerging themes that differed between the two groups (participants with ESAs and participants without ESAs); the two themes were unexpected life events and caregiver instability.

Theme 1 - Unexpected life events (ESA n=10; non-ESA n=2)

The first primary theme that emerged from the results was unexpected life events. Participants with ESAs encountered more unpredictable and unexpected prior life events that impacted the participants and their relationships in the family with their parents/caregivers, as compared to participants without an ESA. Examples of statements that illustrated the unexpected life events theme follow:

Joanna - I am very close with my mom. I was close at times with my dad but as I grew up, it got more strained. He passed away suddenly a month before I came to college my freshman year.

Brandy - It was very tense growing up, as my father is an alcoholic who had some abusive tendencies. I was also suffering from prolonged sexual abuse at the hands of a bully and took out my repressed feelings on my parents.

Tracy - I am very close with both my parents but I am closer to my mom ever since she had cancer.

Sierra - I was adopted; it was not good.

Heather – With my mom it's rather intense and not as close as others, she impacts me a lot and after my father's death, I closed off from my

mom and step-father. And I never speak to my step-mother after telling of the abuse her and her son put me through growing up.

Theme 2 - Caregiver Instability (ESA n=14; non-ESA n=6)

Caregiver instability was the second primary theme that emerged from the results. Participants with ESAs encountered higher caregiver instability with their parent(s)/caregiver(s), as compared to participants without an ESA. Examples of statements that illustrated the caregiver instability theme follow:

Amy - My dad is quite distant; he only speaks to us when it is convenient for him. My mom is very in tune with my life.

Elizabeth - Not great. I am estranged from my mother, and am recently not on speaking terms with my father. My relationship with my mother was more of a sister relationship throughout my life, accompanied by extreme verbal abuse. I have not seen her since I moved out at 17. As for my father, he is a good person, we just do not see eye-to-eye and he has recently cut me off with financial aid due to him not in agreement with my major change to nursing.

Taylor - Hostile, constantly lying and always yelling/angry with each other.

Sara - We have a complicated relationship. My mom is a helicopter mom, and my dad is ready to kick me out and make me live on my own.

Whitney – I have a great relationship with my mom. I barely talk to my father, we practically have a non-existent relationship.

Laurie – My mom and I have a great relationship. My dad and I barely get along and hardly talk to each other outside of meals.

Converged Data Results

The quantitative data results revealed significant differences in parenting behaviors of the parents/caregivers of the participants with ESAs compared to the participants without ESAs. Within the responsiveness subscale, participants with ESAs indicated that their parents/caregiver sometimes asked them if something was bothering them or they wanted to talk compared to participants without ESAs who responded rarely. As the qualitative results revealed, participants with ESAs had more unexpected life events and more caregiver instability within their relationships, which could have been a contributor to explaining their

parent/caregiver(s) need to be responsive to their child, due to the stress and chaos that the instability within the home was already causing. Within the explaining subscale, participants with ESAs responded that their parents/caregivers sometimes explained why something was forbidden to them, often explained the reason they were being punished, and often explained something if they failed to grasp the subject. Due to the instability of relationships within the home and unexpected circumstances, parents/ caregivers of participants with ESAs had more enmeshed relationships without clear boundaries among roles. This type of relationship fostered the need to overly communicate and explain the reasons and rationale for their decisions as parents to avoid further strife, negativity or difficulties, as revealed in the qualitative data. Within the discipline subscale, participants with ESAs responded that their parents/caregivers sometimes gave them a box on the ears, a pat, or a pinch on the arm. Due to the level of stress in the home environments among participants with ESAs, parents/caregivers may have resulted in reacting with quick, punitive physical control behaviors toward their children, as revealed in the qualitative data.

Discussion

As the rise of students with ESAs continues in higher education, it becomes necessary to learn more about the underlying reasons or contributing factors related to this phenomenon. Previous articles have explored the dilemmas of relevancy and controversy that ESAs have presented for institutions (Phillips, 2016). In addition, prior studies have indicated ESAs have afforded psychological, social, and physiological benefits to persons living with emotional or mental difficulties (Butwin, 2019). "This is in part because emotional support animals offer love and acceptance, but it is also because they alter behavior, offer distraction, and promote a sense of responsibility" (Butwin, 2019, p. 204). However, to better understand underlying factors that are contributing to the rise of students enrolling in college with an ESA rather than the present effectiveness of using an ESA, this study focused on the familial context with specific attention on students' assessment of their parent/caregivers parenting behaviors. By comparing the parenting behaviors among students with ESAs to students without an ESA, the data revealed key differences in parenting practices and caregiver relationships. These findings provide deeper insights of target areas for assessment and intervention with students

with ESAs for mental health professionals in counseling centers on college campuses.

A high responsiveness subscale for participants with ESAs could come from the chaos and instability within their home environments. Increased unanticipated life events, higher levels of caregiver inconsistency, and enmeshed relationships create a picture of understanding for participants with ESAs. Lastly, participants with ESAs indicated overall that their parents/caregivers were more likely to use lower levels of violence to initiate control compared to their counterparts' parents/caregivers. These data points create a narrative around participants with ESAs that can allow institutions to create more efficient policies that include direct service support for their students and the changing context of higher education.

What do these findings mean for counseling centers in institutions of higher education? Health and wellness topics are currently a national level conversation in institutions of higher education due to years of increasing service usage and now the COVID-19 pandemic that has brought mental health and domestic violence into the national spotlight. Institutions of higher education have the perfect opportunity to appraise their systems and begin to confront narratives that are hindrances to vulnerable student populations and their accessibility to success. The purpose of this study was to explore the parenting behaviors of the parents/caregivers of students using an emotional support animal while attending college. Institutions of higher education can use this data to shape policies and identify strategies to incorporate ESAs into their service provision for a comprehensive health and wellness experience for students. Higher education institutions should provide policies that connect students during the registration of their ESA on campus with student counseling services. This recommendation would allow the opportunity for those students to begin therapeutic interventions that may/may not have been accessible prior to arriving at their institution.

Limitations

The participants for this study consisted of 54 total students of one medium-sized regional southern university. A convenience sample was used and, although the study represented 44% of the total number of students using an ESA who were living in a residence hall on this particular campus, it was still a small sample size on one university campus, lacking generalizability. The participants who had ESAs were predominantly between the ages of 18-24, white females, with the majority indicating upper level academic classification. Their counterparts, students without ESAs, were

more evenly dispersed in age categories, white females, with the majority indicating upper level academic classification. Data collected from the participants were based on participant self-report, which did not allow for independent verification of the information. Because past research has not been focused on this particular area, to address this gap, future research on this topic will be necessary to validate this study's findings.

Future Research and Implications for Practice

Future research on parenting practices of students with ESAs needs to be continued for confirmation of this study's outcomes. Once additional findings are confirmed, research can move forward on the key areas of unexpected life events and relationship dynamics for students with ESAs and the level of impact it has had on students' coping capacities. The majority of students with ESAs participating in the study were the youngest in their sibling birth order; whereas, the majority of students without ESAs were the oldest in their sibling birth order. Future research efforts could explore the notion of birth order along with parenting practices in regard to students using ESAs. In addition, exploring the impact of culture and its influence, if any, as to whether or not students make the choice to use an ESA

would further this research topic. In evaluating the data of this study and applying it to the multicultural and social justice counseling competencies, future research should include the process of the empowerment model to create the space for participants who are members of groups living with marginalization to have a voice in the narrative that is being created. Specific recommendations to capture that data would include "what is the relationship between the empowerment process of one individual and the empowerment of another individual or group?" (Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010, p. 655).

Furthermore, findings of this study highlight the need for added policies and practices on college campuses. According to Von Bergen (2015), there are several areas for institutions of higher education to consider when forming or changing policies and practices regarding emotional support animals. First, the administrators need to know the differences in definitions between emotional support animals and service animals. As emotional support animals become more popular, so does misinformation about the regulations surrounding emotional support animals versus service animals. Second, Von Bergen (2015) suggests that institutions have only one office or department on campus that oversees animals on campus,

both emotional support animals and service animals, as legal issues have arisen in the past when two offices on campus gave conflicting information to a student (*Kyra Alejandro v. Palm Beach State College*, 2011).   In addition, administrators must maintain consistent responses to address the concerns of students who object to emotional support animals with legitimate concerns.   Finally, with the rise in mental health concerns and the severity level of mental health concerns on college campuses (Gallagher, 2014), it is likely that the upward trend of the use of emotional support animals will continue (Von Bergen, 2015).   It is imperative for institutions of higher education to review regulations and case law regarding emotional support animals to aid them in the development of realistic policies that are helpful for students in need and also ensure the legal culpability of the institution.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the parenting behaviors of the parents/caregivers of students using an emotional support animal compared to the parenting behaviors of the parents/ caregivers of students without an emotional

support animal, while attending college, to gain a deeper understanding of any potential underlying factors that may contribute to the use of an ESA. Through the completion of the Parenting Behaviors Questionnaire (PBQ) along with an embedded open-ended question, key differences were identified, providing a broader narrative of the potential factors from within the familial context that may contribute to the use of ESAs. This data can provide more focused guidance on specific strategies for assessment and treatment interventions of students with ESAs; this insight will aid mental health professionals within counseling centers located on higher education campuses. Due to a lack of research in this area, further research on this topic is necessary to confirm the findings and build upon this research emphasis area in order to provide the most effective intervention for students with ESAs.

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Disclosure statement

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