

## The counterproductive effects of helicopter universities

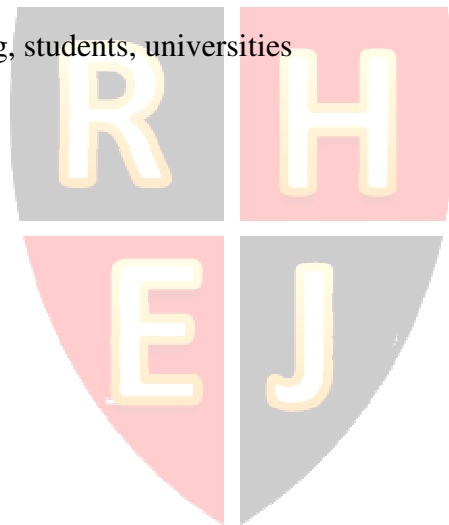
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### ABSTRACT

Perhaps universities have gone too far in their attempts to provide the best learning experience for our students? We have heard of helicopter parents who hover over their sons and daughters, removing all obstacles their student might face and solve problems for them. Have colleges and universities adopted this same kind of behavior in their attempt to be “student oriented,” provide better customer service, and reduce student attrition rates? This paper examines the pervasiveness of “helicoptering” and the detrimental effects when parents and universities seek to control students instead of allowing them to learn responsibility.

Keywords: helicopter parenting, students, universities



“Universities cannot be viewed as a sanctuary for comfort but rather as a crucible for confronting ideas and thereby learning to make informed judgments in complex environments. Having one’s assumptions challenged and experiencing the discomfort that sometimes accompanies this process are intrinsic parts of an excellent education. Only then will students develop the skills necessary to build their own futures and contribute to society.”

—University of Chicago President Robert J. Zimmer (2016)

## INTRODUCTION

Decades ago under the *in loco parentis* principle university authorities had similar rights as parents to manage student behavior on campus. Following World II, and what some would call the Free Speech movement at colleges and universities, students demanded to be treated as adults with fewer restrictions on their school behavior. Today, it seems that higher education is once again assuming a parental role as students are requesting faculty and administrators to protect them from ideas, words, and actions they find objectionable, offensive, and inconsistent with their (usually liberal/progressive) beliefs (Langbert, Quain, & Klein, 2016).

This protection seems eerily reminiscent of the security provided to Jimmy by his mother in the 2001 movie, *Bubble Boy*. Jimmy was supposedly born with an immunodeficiency disorder which made him defenseless to infectious diseases that would kill him and was therefore raised in a manufactured world of plastic tubes and bubbles provided by his well-intentioned, but misguided mother. Over time, Jimmy falls in love with one of his caretakers and builds a portable protective dome and travels cross country to prevent her from marrying another. At the wedding, he removes his protective equipment declaring that he would rather die than stay in his bubble, and discovers that he did not need the bubble after all—it was just part of a sinister but well-meaning plan his overly-attentive mother developed to protect him from life’s unavoidable dangers outside the bubble. Jimmy’s mother could be said to be emblematic of today’s helicopter parents whose overly effortful parenting approach is deliberately chosen “... in a loving but misguided attempt to enhance their child’s current and future personal and academic success” (Locke, Campbell, & Kavanagh, 2012, p. 250).

While we present the concept of parental helicoptering behavior, this paper focuses on helicopter institutions of higher education. We believe that many colleges and universities seem to be continuing the excessive protection many of their emerging adult students (the time from the end of adolescence to the young-adult responsibilities of a stable job, marriage, and parenthood; Arnett, 2004) experienced in their grade schools and high schools. We first present the topic of helicoptering parents and define helicopter parenting and then relate this concept to universities. We then discuss what faculty and student affairs and counseling professionals can do to address student concerns followed by a conclusion and summary.

## HELICOPTER PARENTING

Baby-boomers (those persons generally born between 1946 and 1964) are considered to be the best-educated and most affluent generation of parents. Those affluent, educated, baby-boomer parents raised today’s college students. Gallo and Gallo (2001) report that these baby boomers have made child-rearing an important element of their adulthood and wanted to give their children the best, and their resources have enabled them to closely monitor and manage

many areas of their children's lives, earning them the moniker "helicopter parents" because they, like helicopters, hover right above their children (Coomes & DeBard, 2004).

These parents are referred to by a myriad of labels including: Velcro (difficulty in tearing themselves away), bulldozer or lawnmower (removing obstacles in the path), tiger (overbearing academically), concierge (handling everything for them), intrusive parenting (overly involved with their offspring), overzealous parenting (fiercely protective), parenting out of control (Nelson, 2010), and over-parenting (application of developmentally inappropriate parenting tactics that exceed the needs of their child). In this paper, we use the label helicopter parent as a descriptor that encompasses these various expressions, and that refers to excessive levels of involvement, advice, problem-solving, control, protection, and abundant and unnecessary tangible assistance in the service of their offspring's well-being.

For younger children, many of these behaviors may be appropriate, but increasingly research indicates that when applied to emerging adult children such actions may be questionable. Helicopter parenting has been linked with psychological discomfort in young adults such as increased depression and perceived stress as well as lower levels of life satisfaction and self-acceptance (LeMoynes & Buchanan, 2011; Schiffrrin et al., 2014). Montgomery (2010) found a relationship between helicopter parenting and neuroticism, lower openness to new experience, and dependency (van Ingen et al., 2015) reported that helicopter parenting was correlated with alienation from peers and a lack of trust among colleagues. Helicopter parenting has also been found to be positively associated with problematic personality traits such as entitlement and narcissism (Locke et al., 2012; Munich & Munich, 2009) and negatively correlated with positive traits such as self-efficacy (Givertz & Segrin, 2012). Helicopter parenting may also prevent young adults from learning how to solve their problems and take responsibility for their lives (Lythcott-Haims, 2015). Moreover, Kouros, Pruitt, Ekas, Kiriaki, and Sunderland (2017) noted that helicopter parenting has been linked to a "poor academic achievement, lower self-esteem and life satisfaction, poor peer relationships, and greater interpersonal dependency, and female students are more vulnerable to these negative effects than are males". Overprotective parenting may also be linked with psychological maladjustment (McLeod, Wood, & Weisz, 2007) such as anxiety (Hudson & Rapee, 2001) and low self-worth (Laible & Carlo, 2004), and is believed to be a major cause of a rapidly growing problem known as the *failure-to-launch syndrome* which Marano (2016) defines as the collective name for the difficulties many young people today seem to have in assuming the self-sufficiency and responsibilities of adulthood.

These findings should not be surprising. Child development research has reliably found children to be more successful when they had parental involvement and support (Hiltz, 2015)—but such helpful behavior can go too far leading to many problematic outcomes. Indeed, the idea that positive phenomenon at excessive levels often become damaging is an old principle embraced by Aristotle ("The Golden Mean"), Confucius ("The Doctrine of the Mean"), and the Buddha ("Middle Way"). Moreover, the Yerkes-Dodson Law (Yerkes & Dodson, 1908) empirically demonstrated an inverted-U relationship between performance and arousal and more recently Grant and Schwartz (2011) documented evidence from many different domains showing that at high levels, virtuous effects begin to turn harmful. For instance, research suggests that moderate levels of positive emotions enhance creativity, but high levels do not (Davis, 2008), and that although happier people had greater longevity on average, extremely cheerful people engage in risky behaviors (Martin et al., 2002) and live shorter lives (Friedman et al., 1993).

Grant and Schwartz (2011) conclude their paper by suggesting that there are no virtues for which costs do not emerge at high levels.

The purpose of adolescence is forming an identity, and the aim of parenting is to slowly encourage independence, then delayed identity formation and dependence on one's parents may leave college students unprepared for real-life experiences. Specifically, children of helicopter parents will often not learn to deal with the consequences of their poor decision-making if their parents come to the rescue to handle their problems. When parents regularly save their children from harmful consequences, children do not learn to overcome failure (Kantrowitz & Tyre, 2006). Over-parenting is crippling children as they move into adulthood, shaping a generation of complainers unable to cope effectively with problems of everyday life once considered minor, creating increasing feelings of entitlement (Givertz & Segrin, 2012), and unreasonable expectations about what other people should do for them (Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, 2014). The parental helicoptering that children experienced in the primary and secondary grades seems to have shifted to higher education.

### **Helicopter Parenting and Universities**

Despite the overwhelmingly undesirable outcomes of helicopter parenting for emerging adults (for a counterview see *The National Survey of Student Engagement*, 2007) many colleges and universities are continuing the behaviors of the helicopter parents of today's (millennial) students in part because America has become a helicopter society and that it is not just parents who have created this situation. According to Gray (2015), society has not helped prepare students for the real world where they could fail, and because of that, students have not developed "grit" and resilience. Moreover, college students often exhibit trauma in the face of intellectual challenge and expect university officials to guard and comfort them from ideas and words they perceive to conflict with their beliefs, opinions, and views—just as their helicopter parents had done. This has led to some college officials referring to students as "'crispies' or 'teacups'—so burned out that they can't engage meaningfully in college life, or so fragile that they break at the first sign of challenge" (Iarovici, 2014, p. 4). Because of students' emotional frailty faculty have become increasingly reluctant to give students low grades for poor performance or to challenge them very much because of the subsequent emotional crises and excessive handholding they would have to address in their offices (Gray, 2015). Junior faculty members are much more likely to feel the pressure of getting good evaluations to obtain promotions and tenure.

We began to notice the arrival of helicopter parents on college campuses in the early 2000s. Helicopter parents seem to maintain continuous contact with their college-aged adult children as well as with the school administration. Cell phones, it seems, have become virtual umbilical cords. With their adult children, such parents average 10.4 forms of communication (e.g., e-mail, cell phone, text message) per week and students are calling parents to make decisions about dropping a class, making a purchase, dealing with school setbacks (van Ingen et al., 2015). Ultimately, helicopter parents may be hindering their adult children from learning accountability, responsibility, and self-sufficiency (Ungar, 2009). They are likely adversely affecting their adult children's self-reliance and self-efficacy by sending them the message that they cannot handle their own lives (van Ingen et al., 2015). These parents send their children to college with the expectation that faculty and administrators will assume their parenting model and campus counselors are increasingly expected to provide support for the typical stresses of

everyday university life including poor grades, soured relationships, and being responsible for themselves for perhaps the first time in their life.

Although the intention of helicopter parents is to help insure that their adult college student succeeds, some college counseling center practitioners contend that helicopter parents have a negative impact that leaves their progeny with weakened autonomy, lowered resilience, and an increased emotional frailty (Hofer, 2008). Indiana University psychologist Chris Meno (2013) noted: “When children aren’t given the space to struggle through things on their own, they don’t learn to problem-solve very well. They don’t learn to be confident in their own abilities, and it can affect their self-esteem. The other problem with never having to struggle is that an individual never experiences failure and can develop an overwhelming fear of failure and disappointing others. Both the low self-confidence and the fear of failure can lead to depression or anxiety.”

It is understandable then that students experiencing helicopter parenting expect to find universities that should also want to protect them and keep them safe because the college environment can be a challenging place, full of distractions and stressful events. Students leave the support and comfort of their families and friends behind, and the familiarity of home, and must live and learn with hundreds and perhaps thousands of strangers. Students are faced with the challenge of adaptability and adjustment to manage the stressors of this significant life transition (Miremadi, 2015), and they expect universities to assist them and ease these difficulties—just as their parents did. Many students today want to be protected from speakers whose views do not coincide with their own to be disinvited, they mandate that people who espouse that all lives matter be silenced, they shout down critics of affirmative action and abortion, they demonstrate when (usually) conservative presenters are invited to campus, and they pressure administrators that organizations like the National Rifle Association, and groups supporting the U.S. military and Christians be banned from colleges.

Some students feel the need to be sheltered from facing intellectual challenges and any conflicting ideas, thoughts, and words despite research showing the value of dissent, not for the truth that it may or may not hold or for its ability to persuade, but rather for the thinking that it generates. Minority influence theory (Nemeth, 2011) has repeatedly demonstrated that controversial views and accompanying dissent encourage the more complex thought that is more inquisitive and creative. On the other hand, majority views stimulate convergent thinking where people tend to focus on the mainstream perspective issue and thus limit the range of possibilities leading to intolerance and an unwillingness to consider different options that are not necessarily apparent at first—something most universities, at least historically, have endorsed.

Students ask for safe spaces, trigger warnings, elimination of micro-aggressions, freedom from speech they perceive as unsettling and hateful, and a world cleansed of perspectives offensive to them. And university administrators seem to want to help them just as did Jimmy’s mother did. They are accused of practically covering students in an institutional bubble wrap to prevent them from getting hurt or experiencing stress (Klick & Mitchell, 2016). This is understandable because of many of these millennial students “... haven’t developed skills in how to soothe themselves, because their parents have solved all their problems and removed the obstacles. They don’t seem to have as much grit as previous generations,” says Dan Jones, past president of the Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors (Wilson, 2015, p. 4).

Moreover, this cohort finds it difficult to hear ideas that conflict with those they want to believe and are increasingly being derisively called “snowflakes” because they are perceived as

fragile as a speck of snow. Their behavior is being described by some of the following article titles: “Emotional Coddling Doesn’t Help College Students—It Hurts Them;” “On the Infantilization of the College Campus;” “The Coddling of the American Mind;” and “The Snowflake Generation: Real or Imagined?” These students are easily offended. For example, a student at a prestigious university filed a complaint that his roommate had an American flag on the wall and it was offensive to him. Another student felt traumatized because her roommate had called her a “bitch,” and two students requested counseling after seeing a mouse in their residence off-campus. Reports indicate that today’s graduates are now bringing their parents to job interviews and organizations are hosting “take your parents to work” days for young millennials (Berman, 2013).

These higher education officials think that helping their students is what is best for them, but they may be inadvertently hurting their student’s chances of success. They want to soften every difficulty and cushion every tumble. The problem is that many of these over-protected students are frequently denied any meaningful consequences for their behavior and therefore miss out on the opportunity to learn valuable life lessons from the mistakes they make and the difficulties they encounter (Sirota, 2017). Learning from troubles and failure is an old finding, and eminent philosopher John Stuart Mill believed it to be central to the autonomy of—and even the value of—human beings. Shielding people from life’s errors and missteps, in Mill’s view, deprives them of the opportunity to flourish (Elder & Cosgrove, 2007). Lahey (2015) more recently echoes precisely these sentiments in her book *The Gift of Failure*.

Despite the overall negative impact of helicoptering institutions, some believe that helicoptering parents help students. Lipka (2007) presented findings from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NESSE) in which “38 percent of freshmen and 29 percent of seniors were reported to be more active and satisfied with college.” Likewise, “helicopter institutions” can play an important active role in student education. The survey points to what they call “deep learning,” based on four important learning activities. For freshmen, Learning Communities utilizing activities outside of class and discussion groups were found to be important in developing “critical-thinking skills, self-understanding, and social lives” (Lipka, 2007). Among seniors, key learning activities included “study abroad, research with a faculty member, and a major project, capstone course, or internship” (Lipka, 2007, p. 4). Despite this earlier study, a growing body of research suggests that colleges and universities have gone too far in running student lives.

### **Addressing Helicopter Students in Universities through Perspective Taking**

Gray (2015) has argued that we have become a “helicopter society” and associated with this trend, students and their parents are asking—and sometimes demanding—that college and university personnel be substitute parents (Wilson, 2015). These social forces often entail requests for safe spaces, trigger warnings, and freedom of micro-aggressions and speech that they find distasteful and which they do not agree. Rather than universities providing safety for students from opposing ideas and beliefs, higher education professionals must give students the freedom they need for psychological growth. Colleges must work towards a culture of belonging that does not sacrifice free speech and rational discussions. This can neither be done when students are overprotected, nor by telling students “you’re just too sensitive—get over it.”

What is needed may be an emphasis on developing empathy and the ability to understand and share the feelings of others. This is especially important since research by Konrath, O’Brien,

and Hsing (2011) found that college students' self-reported empathy has declined since 1980, with an especially steep drop in the past ten years, and almost 75 percent of students today rating themselves as less empathic than the average student 30 years ago. Konrath et al. (2011) indicated that part of the explanation for decreased levels of empathy for young people might be because of changes in parenting styles in the 1980's when parents focused on nurturing if not spoiling children—helicoptering parenting.

To counter these social forces, we suggest an increased emphasis on perspective taking. Perspective taking is often defined as the capacity to infer another's thoughts, feelings, or internal states or knowledge (Borke, 1971; Chandler & Greenspan 1972), and an individual's awareness of informational states in oneself and others (Baron-Cohen, 1995; Premack & Woodruff, 1978). These definitions converge on perspective taking as a cognitive process that entails trying to understand or considering another's viewpoint (Caruso, Epley, & Bazerman, 2006; Parker, Atkins, & Axtell, 2008; Sessa, 1996) by "deliberately adopting their perspective" (Caruso et al., 2006, p. 203). The processes involved are subject to conscious control and can be modified by training and awareness (Parker et al., 2008; Sessa, 1996).

Perspective taking is significant and a key marker of human cognitive (Epley & Caruso, 2009) and moral maturity (Kohlberg, 1976). For example, Piaget (1932/1965) identified the ability to adopt a non-egocentric view as one of the stages that children must pass through as they develop and Kegan (1982) and Labouvie-Vief (2005) view perspective taking as a core dimension of human growth. Young children before age 4 have difficulty recognizing that others may have beliefs that may differ significantly from their own (Flavell, 1986; Perner, 1991; Wimmer & Perner, 1983) but come to appreciate this as an ordinary occurrence in daily life as they get older (Wellman, Cross, & Watson, 2001).

The benefits of successful perspective taking may include increased social understanding and harmony (Deutsch, 1993). Perspective taking promotes cognitive self-other overlap, results in less activation of stereotypes, and improves intergroup attitudes (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000) and therefore leads people to do less stereotyping of "out-groups" and engage in less stereotype-driven fear and hostility resulting in reduced impulsive and aggressive behavior (Richardson, Green, & Lago, 1998). Competent perspective-takers respond less aggressively when provoked (Richardson, Green, & Lago, 1998), and they develop more positive relationships with others with different beliefs (Gehlbach et al., 2015). Also, perspective taking fosters cooperation (Johnson, 1975), promotes moral reasoning and development (Hoffman, 2000), encourages altruistic behavior (Batson, Early, & Salvarani, 1995), reduces prejudice (Rokeach, 1960), and facilitates conflict resolution (Deutsch, 1993). On a practical level, the understanding of others leads to better collaboration, social and awareness in a variety of ways regarding needs assessment, planning, execution, oversight, and communication. Accurate perspective taking may lead to increased levels of trust, respect, and strong interpersonal relationships.

Two important constituencies at the college level that may be able to address the needs of today's students include counseling and student affairs professionals and faculty members. Both groups must strike the right balance between support and challenge and to promote active perspective taking. Several approaches that can be employed (some more appropriate to one group than the other) are described below.

Just as many different teaching methodologies can be valuable (lecturing, assigning group work, blending in-person and online work, etc.), many different approaches to perspective taking can be effective or ineffective. Perspective taking activities, such as role plays (Bigelow,

1994a), interior monologs (Christensen, 2000) written reflections on others' fictional experiences, and reading and replying to narratives of the experiences of others are promising pedagogies (Lindley & Rios, 2004). Faculty might consider creating classrooms where there is volatility and vulnerability (Henry, 1993-1994) where dominant ideologies are challenged (Mayo, 2002) and where classrooms are designed that address difficult or tension-filled learning encounters. Students can learn and thrive in such environments because they feel empowered to take risks by expressing their distinctive insights and dissenting with others' viewpoints (Holly & Steiner, 2005) and where students will face opposing views. Boostrom (1998) notes that it is the responsibility of professors to help students recognize that they "need to hear other voices in order to grow ... to be able to respond to those voices, to criticize them, to challenge them, and to sharpen our perspectives through the friction of dialogue" (p. 407). Faculty members are encouraged to follow Baxter Magolda's (2000) suggestion and stand by students during times of transition by showing support for students, yet urging deeper levels of thinking. Challenging discussions can create opportunities for students to learn how to deal more openly with the hostility, tension, and emotions that transpire when challenging biases, prejudices, and unfamiliar perspectives (Bell, Washington, Weinstein, & Love, 1997). Indeed, assignments should be created that incorporate perspective-taking skills of students and enhance their complex thinking and empathetic abilities (Schoem, Hurtado, Sevig, Chesler, & Sumida, 2001).

Interestingly, Galinsky & Moskowitz (2000) found that asking participants to describe a day in the life of an out-group member from an out-group member's perspective was more effective for reducing favoritism of the in-group than describing ways in which the in-group and out-group member were similar or describing a time when the participant behaved similarly to an out-group member. Moreover, Mendoza (1997; cited in Gehlbach, 2004) found some evidence that imagining how the other was *feeling* was more effective than asking them to imagine the other person's situation, and Oswald (1996) found that perspective taking focused on *feelings* led to more helping than perspective taking focused on thoughts.

Gehlbach (2017) provides further suggestions that can enhance perspective taking that can be incorporated in any class. One proposition simply requires that teachers ask multiple students to give different responses to complex questions. Teachers could also restructure their questions so that multiple answers could be given; for example, "What are some possible reasons why workers were not motivated in the film you just saw?" rather than posing questions that invite a single correct answer as in "Why were the workers not motivated in the film you just saw?" Faculty can also ask students to play devil's advocate or to restate each other's points before responding to them. When disagreements or interpersonal conflicts arise, it should be considered the norm for students to explain their positions and to listen while others explain their position.

A second proposal offered by Gehlbach (2017) is to subtly have students delay making judgments about others and as an alternative consider the sources for another person's behavior. The idea here is to gather more information before rushing to judgment by asking questions like, "Why do you think she might have done that?" or "What's his rationale for what happened?" When students develop the habit of investigating others' perspectives rather than rushing to judge them, the more skilled they will become at looking for clues that might illuminate others' decisions and behaviors. Consider the negative stereotyping of Duke University's men's lacrosse players as privileged, thuggish, and racist by many in the media, the District Attorney of Durham, North Carolina, the Durham police, politically correct Duke University professors, and Duke University administrators in 2006 when three white members of the team were charged



with raping a young African-American woman at a 2006 house party (Taylor, 2006). On April 11, 2007, the North Carolina Attorney General dropped all charges and declared the three players innocent of the rape allegations and added that they were victims of a “tragic rush to accuse” (Beard, 2007). Unfortunately, this vindication occurred after the players were severely thrashed; for example, *Washington Post* columnist Eugene Robinson denigrated the accused players as “privileged white kids who play lacrosse,” adding, “It’s impossible to avoid thinking of all the black women who were violated by drunken white men in the American South over the centuries” (Robinson, 2006).

A third behavior offered by Gehlbach (2017) is providing opportunities for students to practice perspective taking and receive feedback on their accuracy. It is critically important to put students in situations where it is acceptable to make errors and thereby receive feedback that might otherwise be elusive. For instance, before the start of a classroom debate, an educator can ask students to predict which peers will make which arguments. This makes the social perspective taking process explicit. As the debate unfolds, students can see how accurately or inaccurately they predicted their classmates’ beliefs. In time, this should assist students to think more critically about how they understand others and the information they rely upon in developing their perspective. Instructors might also consider ways to increase interaction with fellow students such as team projects and assignments. Role playing is another approach faculty can use to put students in situations perhaps unfamiliar to them and to experience being in another role and to operate from that perspective. After the role play, feedback can be obtained from students.

Marangoni, Garcia, Ickes and Teng (1995) discovered that it was possible to enhance individuals’ empathic accuracy by providing them with feedback. Such class-based training might be especially useful if it involves interaction with targets, thereby providing opportunities for increased familiarity, liking, feeling part of the same in-group, and so on, and if it includes exercises to bring the tacit differences in perspectives to conscious awareness. They also found that target familiarity enhanced the accuracy of which one understood another’s perspective. An obvious way in the classroom to acquire greater knowledge of the target and their context is through more exposure and interaction with the target in group assignments, thereby increasing the opportunity for the motivated observer to learn about the target’s background, personality, and situation.

However, the opportunity for greater interaction alone is unlikely to be sufficient. Such interactions must co-occur with the motivated goal of trying to take the others’ perspective or active perspective taking. Thus, in small group assignments, it would be beneficial to have students not only focus on the content of the team effort but also on its process. As part of the process evaluation, instructors could implement a simple active perspective taking manipulation in which participants are asked to periodically put themselves in the shoes of other team members and view the content from the others’ viewpoint.

Feedback could be given by asking individuals to predict how others might see the situation and compare that to predictions they made (Moore, 2005). Thus, it is active perspective taking which is most likely to lead to positive outcomes. Perspective taking, as an emergent team process, helps teams to capitalize on their diversity on tasks by fostering the sharing, discussion, and integration of diverse viewpoints and information.

Meditation is one established means for promoting empathy and perspective taking (Creswell, Way, Eisenberger, & Lieberman, 2007; Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008; Leppma & Young, 2016) and is probably more appropriate for counseling professionals.

Loving-kindness meditation (LKM) is a type of mindfulness meditation and a compassion-based meditation that incorporates cognitive and emotional aspects. LKM escalates warm feelings and caring for oneself as well as for others. The practice begins with directing loving-kindness, or compassion, toward one's self. As friendship, respect, and love or compassion develop with oneself, the practice then expands to include others (Salzberg, 1995).

A final key point is that higher education students and faculty and staff believe that perspective taking is important. Dey and Associates (2010) surveyed over 23,000 students and 8,000 professionals (faculty, student affairs personnel, and academic administrators) and found that college students believe that perspective taking should be part of their higher education experience. Approximately 93 percent of student respondents indicated that they "strongly agree" or "somewhat agree" that an "essential goal" of college should be to prepare students to take others perspectives seriously. Higher education professionals stand ready as well, with 97 percent of faculty members, academic administrators, and student affairs professionals agreeing that perspective taking should be an essential goal of a college education.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Buddha's (560-480 B.C) father shielded him from suffering during his childhood, essentially creating a truly safe space for his son. The father made sure his son's life was as perfect as possible, offering him everything wonderful and nothing negative or upsetting. But one day the Buddha left the castle, and when he viewed the sufferings of growing older, sickness, and death, he was obliged to find the cause of human misery and in the process attained enlightenment. In some regards, this is comparable to the film of the Bubble Boy who was only able to become fully human when he left the refuge of his plastic bubble and experienced life without this protection. Many college students today are looking for answers as well but will not find security in safe places, trigger warnings, or calls for campuses free from ideas they do not share but by civilly interacting with others and trying to better understand others' outlooks. Such empathy need not require that students accept others' beliefs or behavior but may lessen fears and lead to more productive relationships.

While colleges in many ways may seem like homes away from home, protecting students and keeping them safe from sexual and physical assaults, providing food, recreational opportunities, and health services and more, they are not homes; administrators are not parents and university students are not children. University professionals can help students navigate the ups and down of college life not by protecting them but by asking them to tackle ideas and conduct unfamiliar to them, perhaps even objectionable to them. This confrontation can begin by learning perspective taking and can start as an element in college orientation programs for new and beginning students. Consistent with this view, Dallas psychologist Jeannie Whitman, who specializes in stress and trauma-related disorders, said "What makes us sick, I mean pathologically sick, is the avoidance of things, where we try to start trying to manipulate and massage our lives so we don't see anything that might be stressful. We have to live in this world, and we're going to be subject to things that are distressing" (quoted in Dembling, 2016).

Educators should not protect students from thoughts and messages they find upsetting or wrong. Oftentimes, speech protected by the First Amendment, may offend or unsettle conventional thinking and this is good. Universities should not be safe havens from disturbing ideas and speech according to Mark Yudof (2015), former president of the University of California and former chancellor of the University of Texas. It is one thing to condemn and quite

another to censor or punish. Universities and colleges are among the very few places in American culture where one encounters others with different points of view and have the opportunity to engage in vigorous debate. Bruni (2017) indicates that “If anything, colleges owe students turbulence, because its’ from a contest of perspectives and an assault on presumptions that truth emerges—and, with it, true confidence.” It is a place described by David Hodge, former president of Miami University, where intellectual collisions can occur. “Colleges are places where students learn and grow through intellectual collisions in and out of class, with professors and staff, and peers...” (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2013).

Nevertheless, it seems that many universities are becoming helicopter institutions willing to soothe their students’ every struggle and where individuals can retreat from ideas and perspectives that may conflict with their own. As we began, we end with a quote from the University of Chicago: “For members of the University community, as for the University itself, the proper response to ideas they find offensive, unwarranted and dangerous is not interference, obstruction, or suppression. It is, instead, to engage in robust counter-speech that challenges the merits of those ideas and exposes them for what they are. To this end, the University has a solemn responsibility not only to promote a lively and fearless freedom of debate and deliberation but also to protect that freedom when others attempt to restrict it” (Stone, 2012). Perspective taking can assist individuals in their quest for enlightenment and faculty and counseling and student affairs professionals can significantly assist in such efforts, rather than providing them students safe places. Perspective taking may provide the balance that has been touted for millennia.

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