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Continuing Education

# Examining the Impact of Over-Involved Parenting



## **Abstract**

Helicopter parenting is the colloquial term that refers to a unique patterning of parenting dimensions that result in a style both high in behavioral control and levels of warmth and support, and low in autonomy-granting (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012). Parental attachment—distinct from helicopter parenting—typically involves the initial relationship between parent and child which affects the child's overall life satisfaction and well-being (mainly in areas associated with relationships, motivation, and health-related behaviors). Despite what areas may overlap between parent-child attachment and helicopter parenting, little research has been done on the relation among these variables. The current study examined the associations among helicopter parenting and attachment and explored their relations with college life variables (i.e. school engagement, academic entitlement, academic motivation and achievement, drinking behavior, and disordered eating). In general, helicopter parenting and overall attachment were found to have an inverse relationship in which high perceived helicopter parenting indicated a lower feeling of overall attachment. Future research is needed to further examine the relation between these variables and to replicate the current findings.

## Helicopter Parenting and Parent-Child Attachment

Parental support and engagement in a child's life has generally been considered positive. However in recent years, perceptions of highly-involved parents have shifted from supportive to over-intrusive. These "helicopter parents" are depicted in popular media as meddling entities, constantly hovering over their young adult child in areas of decision making, academic studies, and social relationships (Shoup, Gonyea, & Kuh, 2009). This involvement stops benefitting the child and some believe it could be interfering with learning and development (Colavecchio-Van Sickler, 2006; Lipka, 2005; Taylor, 2007). University student affair professionals report that this level of involvement is happening at increased levels of intensity and minutiae (Carney-Hall, 2008; Wartman & Savage, 2008). Few scholarly studies have been done examining the consequences of excessive parent involvement. Despite this, colleges and universities in recent years have begun to intervene with the over-involvement of parents in order to reduce conflict (Shoup, Gonyea, & Kuh, 2009; Coburn, 2006; Cutright 2008).

Advancements in technology have made frequent communications between campus and home cheaper and more accessible. Parents are able to maintain close contact with their students easily (Lipka, 2005). A survey by the College Parents of America (2006) found that 74 percent of parents communicate with their college students at least two to three times weekly, with a third communicating daily. They further found that 90% frequently used a cell phone to stay in touch compared with 26% using a landline or 7% using regular mail (Shoup, Gonyea, & Kuh, 2009).

Additionally, the arrival of the "Millennial" student generation on campus has contributed to increases in parental involvement (Carney-Hall, 2008; Wartman & Savage, 2008). "Millennials" is the term classifying the 'new' generation of students born after 1982. According

to Shoup, Gonyea, and Kuh (2009), the Millennial generation is described as being more sheltered and closer to parents than past generations. Close parental contact and monitoring during childhood is believed to continue into the college years as parents continue to stay in close contact with their children (Shoup, Gonyea, & Kuh, 2009; Howe & Strauss, 2003; Taylor, 2006). Despite the negative consequences on the students (for instance, a contribution to the Millennial's risk adversity and fear of ambiguity) parents see no reason to change their parenting approach after the student has moved out of the house and onto campus (Alexander, 2012; Lum, 2006). Together with the advances in technology, parents have an expectation of consistent and timely communication with their sons and daughters while they are in college. Millennial students may feel pressure to always make the "right" decision, and being unprepared due to having so much of their lives structured in the past; these students often turn back to their parents for advice (Shoup, Gonyea, & Kuh, 2009; Coburn, 2006).

In the current study, undergraduate students were surveyed examining the relations between helicopter parenting and attachment. In addition, college life outcomes thought to be affected by these variables (i.e. school engagement, academic achievement, motivation, academic entitlement, drinking behavior, and disordered eating) were explored.

### **Helicopter Parenting**

The 'helicopter parent' is a term quickly becoming part of the American educational vocabulary, even to the extent that subspecies of helicopter parents are emerging. For example the Black Hawk parent—a helicopter parent whose behavior is not only excessive but in some cases unethical (Wartman & Savage, 2008)—joins lawnmower parents (mowing down anything in their way), submarine parents (hidden below the surface and popping up to attack when things go wrong), and stealth missiles (arriving under the radar and destroying any obstacles in their

path) (Wartman & Savage, 2008). As public knowledge of this phenomenon increases, so does the literature. A growing number of studies have emerged examining the effects helicopter parents have on their college-aged sons and daughters. Despite this emergence however, a consensus is lacking on what this parenting style actually entails. Generally, the term 'helicopter parent' has been used to refer to parents who are over-solicitous and apply developmentally impairing tactics to their sons and daughters who are otherwise able to assume autonomy (Segrin et al., 2012). For the purpose of this study, helicopter parenting will be explored by examining three common themes in the literature: (a) *[high] support shown to a child* (acceptance, affection, involvement, and nurturance) aimed at forming an emotional connection with the child, (b) *[high] behavioral control* (limit setting, supervision, and reasoning about consequences) of the child aimed at promoting mature behavior, and (c) *[low] autonomy granting* (disallowing choice, prohibiting child input into rule making, discouraging the expression of ideas, and other intrusive behavior) aimed at discouraging emotional and psychological self-reliance (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012).

Helicopter parenting has been largely associated with psychological and behavioral problems in young adult development, likely because it is not conducive to promoting growth (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012; Segrin, et al., 2012). Instead, it limits the opportunities of emerging adults to take on responsibilities that will help teach them to become self-reliant during and after college. While helicopter parenting has been associated with the harmful effects on child development, aspects of parental support that are considered positive have traditionally been associated with parent-child attachment.

## **Attachment**

Attachment, like “Helicopter Parenting,” has been found to have associations with several areas of a son or daughter’s academics and health (Kolkhorst et al., 2010; Labrie & Sessoms, 2012; Milan & Acker, 2014). The original theory of attachment developed in the 1930s, with John Bowlby's growing interest in the association of maternal loss or deprivation and later personality development (Bretherton, 1992). Around the same time, Mary Ainsworth's interest in security theory was beginning to draw similar conclusions about attachment (Ainsworth, 1989). Bowlby and Ainsworth began to collaborate in 1950 when Bowlby formulated the initial blueprint of attachment theory, drawing on ethology, control systems theory, and psychoanalytic thinking. Together they were responsible for developing a theory explaining the mother-child bond that has been supported in studies since its inception.

As research interest grew, the operational definition of parental attachment developed beyond the infant and mother bond. Parental attachment now refers generally to the initial relationship between a parent or other caregiver and his or her child which later affects how the child forms friendships and romantic relationships (Kolkhorst et al., 2010). Perceived level of attachment has been found to have the potential to influence several aspects of behavior throughout the child’s lifetime. Past research has demonstrated the notion that perceived parental attachment has a positive influence on academic achievement and motivation, and a negative influence on alcohol consumption and abuse (Kolkhorst et al., 2010; Labrie & Sessoms, 2012; Milan & Acker, 2014). Research focusing on the function of parent-child attachment and separation during the leaving home process is limited. In the absence of a substantial body of empirical literature, the most commonly held notions of parent-child bonds are derived from theoretical (Blos, 1967; Freud 1969) and clinical (Bloom, 1980; Elson 1964; Kestenbaum, 1978; Stierlin, 1981) literature, which present a general belief that departure requires a loosening of

family ties. Previous literature has not examined the relation between attachment and the college life variable, school engagement; however school engagement has been associated with helicopter parenting (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012).

### **School Engagement**

According to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), school engagement represents two critical features of collegiate quality. First is the student's amount of time and effort put into his or her studies and other academically important activities. Second is the institution's deployment of its resources and organization of the curriculum and other learning opportunities for students' participation (NSSE, 2014). Behavioral control (limit setting, supervision, and reasoning about consequences) that is characteristic of helicopter parenting could influence the first feature—student time and effort. If a young adult's actions are highly controlled by his or her parents, he or she would be less likely to seek engagement in school (as parents take responsibility for their student's classes, grades, etc.). In a study by Padilla-Walker and Nelson (2012), 438 undergraduate students and at least one of their parents (376 mothers, 303 fathers) were assessed to determine their level of perceived parental control and other behavioral and psychosocial traits. School engagement (i.e. student time and effort in their studies and other academically purposeful activities) was measured using a three item scale. Sample questions include, "I complete homework/assignments on time" and "I regularly attend my classes." Higher scores represented greater school engagement (Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). The results of this study revealed that as predicted, parental control was negatively associated with school engagement such that someone who scored high on the measure of helicopter parenting was more likely to score low on school engagement.

*Academic Achievement.* Parental support and involvement continues to be influential well into early adulthood as the child leaves home and begins college. Responsibility for independent tasks—particularly those related to their academic coursework—is introduced to young adults. A way of demonstrating the preparedness of students for these responsibilities is through achievement within their classes. In a study by Kolkhorst, Yazedjian, & Toews (2010), 2,459 college freshmen were assessed on their parent-child attachment, adjustment to college, and academic achievement through an online survey. Grade point average was found to be positively correlated with higher ratings of attachment to their parents during the first and third year of college. In an earlier study by Navarro, Toews and Yazedjian (2009) the Parental Attachment Questionnaire (Kenny, 1987) compared academic achievement using student GPA with parental attachment and found a significant positive relation (1987). A further study by Cutrona et al. (1994) sought to find relations between social support and academic performance. In the study, researchers defined social support using the Social Provisions Scale (SPS-P; Cutrona, 1989; Cutrona & Russell, 1987), which measured how well parents support their children, and the Family Environment Scale (Moos & Moos, 1986), which measured disagreement within the family and how parents measure success and achievement. They found a significant positive correlation between college undergraduates' GPA and scores of parental support (Cutrona et al, 1994). Each of these studies may indicate the strength of a young adult's attachment to his or her parents as a potential indicator of academic achievement. Literature has not explored the relation between academic achievement and perceived helicopter parenting.

*Academic Motivation.* Academic achievement is highly related to the motivation of students to succeed (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). The demanding curriculum of undergraduate universities requires a drive to work hard to be successful within classes. Gore and Rogers

(2010) defined motivation as “Reasons for Studying” and separated them into two overall sources: autonomous and controlled. Autonomous sources of motivation have intrinsic value to the individual—i.e., the individual does it for his or her own benefit. Controlled sources outline what is required by the individual in order to be successful (Gore & Rogers, 2010). The autonomous category can be further divided into reasons influenced by others, known as relationally autonomous reasons (RARs) and reasons that only reflect the individual’s desires, or personally autonomous reasons (PARs) (Gore & Cross, 2006). Sheldon and Elliott (1999) gathered responses from 169 undergraduate psychology students on their sources of motivation and found that students with autonomous reasons for studying were more likely to have motivation and be successful. An additional study by Bal and Baruss (2011) found a conflicting result. Researchers examined the role of perceived parental attachment in achievement motivation, using the Parental Attachment Questionnaire (Kenny, 1987), Achievement Goals Questionnaire (Elliot & Church, 1997), and the Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory (Conroy, 2003). Researchers collected self-report data from 50 university students and found that students with parents who facilitate independence (i.e. grant autonomy—giving choice, allowing child input into rule making, permitting the expression of ideas, avoiding intrusive behavior) had a higher fear of failure (Bal & Baruss, 2011).

Student attachment to parents (as a source of pressure to succeed in school) could highly influence their motivation. The more of a secure attachment the student has to his or her parent, the greater the desire is to please them. Students with a poor attachment to parents may therefore lack motivation or seek it elsewhere. In a study conducted by Moller, Elliot, and Friedman (2008), researchers explored academic motivation in terms of self-reported goals for an upcoming exam and a perceived closeness to parents scale to assess attachment. Using regression

analyses, they found that students had higher motivation to master the exam when they reported feeling closer to their parents (Moller, Elliot, & Friedman, 2008). A further college life variable that has been found to associate with parental support and involvement is academic entitlement (Segrin et al., 2012).

### **Academic Entitlement**

Overinvolved parenting has also been shown to be associated with lower self-efficacy in young adults (Givertz & Segrin, 2012). One of the apparent consequences of parents attempting to solve all of their children's problems and to assume responsibility for their child's well-being well into adulthood is that the child never develops a strong belief in his or her own ability to solve problems and achieve goals. This low self-efficacy is understandable in that the child would have little experiential basis for such beliefs (Segrin et al., 2012). Entitlement has traditionally been conceptualized as an aspect of narcissism (Emmons, 1987); however researchers have increasingly examined it as an independent construct. In a study by Segrin et al. (2012), entitlement scores from 538 young adult children were assessed using the Entitlement Rage subscale of the Pathological Narcissism Inventory (Pincus et al., 2009) and the Entitlement subscale of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin & Terry, 1988). Researchers defined overparenting, or "helicopter parenting" as parenting that both shares features with parental emotional over-involvement and contains unique qualities including risk aversion, a preoccupation with the child's happiness, and the drive to solve problems for the child (1988). The study developed items to measure overparenting based on descriptions of overparenting in clinical and professional literature. These items included offering advice, problem solving for the child, providing tangible assistance to the child, protecting the child from risk, monitoring and attention to the child, removing obstacles for the child, and management of the child's emotions

and moods, based on descriptions of overparenting that appear in the clinical literature and professional literatures (e.g., Munich & Munich, 2009; Taylor, 2006). Overparenting was found to be associated with a greater sense of entitlement in young adult children.

Research on academic entitlement—entitlement specific to academic settings—has increased in recent years (Achacoso, 2002; Chowning & Campbell, 2009; Ciani, Summers, & Easter, 2008; Greenberger, Lessard, Chen & Farruggia, 2008; Kopp et al., 2011). Academic Entitlement involves the expectation that the student receives certain positive academic outcomes (e.g., high grades, sympathy for absences, etc.), without taking responsibility for achieving that success (Chowning & Campbell, 2009). Academic entitlement is viewed by many as a significant problem in higher education (Dubovsky, 1986; Twenge, 2009). Further research is therefore needed to address this issue. In addition to the college life variables related to academics, parental involvement may also relate to health behaviors in young adult children such as drinking behavior (Labrie & Sessoms, 2012).

### **Drinking Behavior**

College students constantly face decisions that are detrimental to their health and well-being, particularly with the use of alcohol. Alcohol has the potential to have harmful effects on academic success, particularly if it is heavily used (Labrie & Sessoms, 2012). Risky drinking behaviors such as binge drinking or drinking multiple days per week can hinder the transition to college life and school responsibilities as well as lower students' chances of success in school (Labrie & Sessoms, 2012). Students who drink multiple drinks within a short time period multiple days per week are at the highest risk, and a less secure attachment of young adults to parents has the potential to affect students in the area of drinking behavior (2012). It is expected that if a student has a strong relationship to his or her parents, he or she may be more inclined to

please them by not engaging in excessive drinking behavior. In a study Labrie and Sessoms (2012), 139 college freshmen self-reported their drinking motivations and habits using the Kerns Security Scale (Kerns et al., 1996). Researchers found that on average, students who reported higher attachment levels to their mother were less likely to drink, and had less undesirable effect from alcohol six months later (Labrie & Sessoms, 2012). A similar study by Molnar, Sadava, DeCourville and Perrier (2010) compared 696 college students who reported some drinking to their attachment style in relationships, measured by the Relationship Scales Questionnaire (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994) in which participants read and rated phrases that reflected either anxious or avoidant attachment. The results of this study demonstrated that students whose ratings indicated anxious or avoidant attachment styles were more likely to experience negative alcohol consequences. A further health behavior that may be affected by parental support and involvement is disordered eating (Milan & Acker, 2014).

### **Disordered Eating**

Healthy eating behavior is an important aspect of maintaining student health during college, particularly since young adults are no longer able to depend on their parents to encourage a balanced diet. A growing number of studies have been conducted to understand the relation between disordered eating of young adults and perceived attachment to parents or guardians. Researchers Milan and Acker (2014) determined in their study on early attachment and risk of acquiring an eating disorder that attachment quality was not associated directly with disordered eating attitudes and behaviors (DEABs), but did moderate relations between adolescent eating disordered risk factors and DEABs (Milan & Acker, 2014). In a literature review by War, Ramsey, and Treasure (2000), insecure attachment was found to be common in eating disordered populations. The relationship between eating disorder symptoms and

attachment to parents was studied in an American inpatient female sample (N = 68) with eating disorders and a control group of college women (N = 162) (Kenny & Hart, 1992). Using the Parental Attachment Questionnaire (Kenny, 1987) with subscales: affective quality of relationship, parents as source of support, and parents as facilitators of independence, researchers found that weight preoccupation, bulimic behavior, and feelings of ineffectiveness were associated with the lack of affectively positive and emotionally supportive parental relationships, and poor parental fostering of autonomy (Ward, Ramsey, & Treasure, 2000). Further research is needed to explore the relation among helicopter parenting, attachment, and college life variables in order to better understand the associations between them.

### **Current Study**

The effects of helicopter parenting and attachment may have implications on young adult behaviors, particularly in reference to college life variables. Previous research has focused mainly on these topics distinctly—surveying effects on motivation, relationships, etc. singularly. Past literature has not yet connected the phenomenon of helicopter parenting and perceived parent-child attachment. In order to address this absence of research, the current study surveyed undergraduate students examining the relations between the two, and college factors associated with each (school engagement, academic motivation and achievement, academic entitlement, drinking behavior, and disordered eating).

Consistent with previous research by Padilla-Walker and Nelson (2012), a correlation between helicopter parenting and school engagement was hypothesized, such that someone who scored high in helicopter parenting would score lower in school engagement. Consistent with research by Segrin et al. (2012), an additional correlation was hypothesized between helicopter parenting and academic entitlement such that those scoring high in helicopter parenting would

also score high in academic entitlement. Third, consistent with the finding by Cutrona et al. (1994), a significant positive correlation was hypothesized between helicopter parenting and academic achievement, as well as attachment and academic achievement, such that some who scores high on parental support would also scores high in academic achievement. Additionally, a correlation between attachment and academic motivation was postulated such that those with high scores of attachment would also have higher scores of academic motivation, consistent with the findings by Moller, Elliot, and Friedman (2008). Further, I hypothesized, consistently with Labrie and Sessoms (2012), a correlation between attachment and drinking behavior, such that students who report higher attachment levels are less likely to engage in alcohol consumption. Similarly, attachment and disordered eating were hypothesized to correlate, supporting work by Ward, Ramsey, and Treasure (2000), such that someone who scores low on attachment would be more likely to engage in disordered eating behaviors.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The study consisted of 91 undergraduate students currently attending a four-year college (24 males and 67 females). Participant age ranged from 18 to 23 ( $M = 19.54$ ,  $SD = 1.3$ ). The ethnicity of the sample consisted of 73% White, 10% Asian/Pacific Islander, 4% Black/African American, 2% Hispanic/Latino, and 3% Other/Unknown. Students were recruited through the participant pool for general education psychology courses. They received course credit for their participation.

### **Materials**

**Helicopter Parenting.** Helicopter Parenting was measured using a modified version of the Helicopter Parenting measure established by Padilla-Walker and Nelson (2012), the

Overparenting measure (Segrin et al., 2012), and the Intergenerational Support Index (Fingerman et al., 2010).

Helicopter parenting was assessed using ten items written by Padilla-Walker and Nelson (2012) and modified to assess the degree of intrusive behavior of parents in the lives of their young adults. Emerging adults answered questions on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all like him/her) to 5 (a lot like him/her). Items included, “My parent makes important decisions for me (e.g., where I live, where I work, what classes I take)”, “My parent intervenes in settling disputes with my roommates or friends”, “My parent intervenes in solving problems with my employers or professors”, “My parent solves any crisis or problem I might have”, and “My parent looks for jobs for me or tries to find other opportunities for me (e.g., internships, study abroad, etc.)”, “My parent tries to limit or control who my friends are”, “My parent tries to set rules about what I do with my free time”, “My parent tries to tell me what I can and can’t do on nights and weekends”, “My parent tries to control how I spend my money”, and “My parent tries to control which classes I take or what my major is” (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012).

Reliability for the current study was acceptable ( $\alpha = .85$ ).

Segrin et al. (2012) developed items for their study to assess such phenomena as offering advice, problem solving for the child, providing tangible assistance to the child, protecting the child from risk, monitoring and attention to the child, removing obstacles for the child, and management of the child’s emotions and moods, based on descriptions of overparenting that appear in the clinical literature and professional literatures (Segrin et al., 2012). Response options were on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The scale was conceptualized as three subscales: advice/affect management, child self-direction and tangible assistance. Reliability for the current study was adequate for advice/affect management ( $\alpha = .77$ ),

and tangible assistance ( $\alpha = .79$ ), and acceptable for child direction ( $\alpha = .87$ ). Overall overparenting reliability was sufficient ( $\alpha = .79$ ).

Finally, the intergenerational support index (Fingerman et al., 2010) indicates how often parents provide six forms of support to their young adults: (a) emotional, (b) practical, (c) socializing, (d) advice, (e) financial support, and (f) listening to them talk about daily events. Responses were made on an 8-point scale (1 = less than once a year or not at all, 2 = once a year, 3 = a few times a year, 4 = monthly, 5 = a few times a month, 6 = weekly, 7 = a few times a week, and 8 = daily) (Fingerman et al., 2010). Reliability for the current study was acceptable ( $\alpha = .79$ ).

**Parental Attachment.** Parent-child attachment was measured using the Parental Attachment Questionnaire (Kenny, 1987). This measure consists of 55 questions recorded on a 5 point Likert scale to create an overall score and three subscale scores. The subscales include affective quality of relationship (“In general, my parents are persons I can count on to provide emotional support when I feel troubled”), parents as source of support (“When I have a serious problem or an important decision to make, I look to my family for support, encouragement, and/or guidance”), and parents as facilitators of independence (“In general, my parents have provided me with the freedom to experiment and learn things on my own.”) A higher rating on questions suggests a stronger relationship to parents, indicating more security in the attachment relationship. Reliability for the current study was acceptable for affective quality of relationship ( $\alpha = .91$ ), parents as source of support ( $\alpha = .75$ ), parents as facilitators of independence ( $\alpha = .87$ ), and overall parental attachment ( $\alpha = .93$ ).

**School Engagement.** Academic Engagement was measured using the School Engagement Scale with three items assessing emerging adults’ commitment to education

(Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2005). Emerging adults responded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (on occasion) to 5 (all of the time). Questions included, “I pay attention in class”, “When I am in class, I just act as if I am working”, “I follow the rules at school”, “I get in trouble at school”, “I feel happy in school”, “I feel excited by the work in school”, “I like being at school”, “I am interested in the work at school”, “My classroom is a fun place to be”, “When I read a book, I ask myself questions to make sure I understand what it is about”, “I study at home even when I don’t have a test”, “I try to watch TV shows about things we are doing in school”, “I check my schoolwork for mistakes”, “I read extra books to learn more about things we do in school” Reliability for the current study was sufficient ( $\alpha = .72$ ).

**Academic Motivation.** Motivation was assessed using a modified version of the Academic Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ-A) developed by Ryan and Connell (1989). The original survey, geared towards elementary school children, contained four overall questions regarding reasons for trying in school with 32 responses to be rated on a 4 point Likert scale. For the purpose of this study, three of the main questions were included and modified to apply to college students: “Why do I study for my classes?”, “Why do I work on assignment?”, and “Why do I try to do well in school?” Responses that involved “fun” or “rewards” were not included in this study. Answers that involved “teachers” or “rules” were changed to “parents.” The four-point Likert scale was changed to seven-point, but was measured the same way as the original study in which each response was given a value (not true at all = 1, very true = 7). Example responses included “Because I want my parents to think I’m a good student”, “Because I’ll get in trouble with my parents if I don’t”, and “Because that’s what my parents say I’m supposed to do.” Reliability for the current study was acceptable ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

**Academic Entitlement.** Academic Entitlement was measured using the final 8 items of the Academic Entitlement Questionnaire (AEQ) developed by Kopp et al. (2011). College-aged adults answered questions on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Items included “If I don’t do well on a test, the professor should make tests easier or curve grades”, “Professors should only lecture on material covered in the textbook and assigned readings”, “If I am struggling in a class, the professor should approach me and offer to help”, “It is the professor’s responsibility to make it easy for me to succeed”, “If I cannot learn the material for a class from lecture alone, then it is the professor’s fault when I fail the test”, “I am a product of my environment. Therefore, if I do poorly in class, it is not my fault”, “I should be given the opportunity to make up a test, regardless of the reason for the absence”, and “Because I pay tuition, I deserve passing grades” (Kopp et al., 2011). Reliability for the current study was acceptable ( $\alpha = .80$ ).

**Drinking Behavior.** Drinking behaviors were measured by questions used by Labrie and Sessoms (2012). The selected questions examined frequency and amount of drinking alcohol. Higher scores on the nine point Likert scale indicated riskier drinking habits. The following questions were included: “How many days do you drink per month?”, “How many drinks on average do you consume each time you drink?”, “How many drinks do you consume each week?”, “What is the maximum number of drinks you consumed at one time in the past month?”, “How many times have you consumed at least four (females) or five (males) drinks within a two-hour period over the past two weeks?” Reliability for the current study was good ( $\alpha = .92$ ).

**Disordered Eating.** Disordered eating was measured using the Eating Attitudes Test-26 (EAT-26; Garner, Olmsted, Bohr, & Garfinkel, 1982), a widely used self-report measure comprised of 26 statements that describe behavioral and attitudinal characteristics of individuals

with eating disorders or at risk for developing eating disorders. Items assess dieting and compensatory behaviors, drive for thinness, food preoccupation and perceived pressure from others to gain weight and/or control eating. Responses for the EAT-26 were on a six-point Likert scale ranging from Never to Always. Scores of never, rarely, and sometimes are recoded to equal 0, often equals 1, usually equals 2 and always equals 3. Total scores can range from 0 to 78, with scores above 20 indicating a potential eating disorder. Although the EAT-26 does not directly measure all DSM V ED symptoms, it can differentiate individuals with and without eating disorders, as well as those with subclinical symptoms (Mintz & O'Halloran, 2000). Reliability for the current study was satisfactory ( $\alpha = .88$ ).

**Demographics.** Participant information regarding age, gender, primary ethnicity, place of residence, cumulative GPA, and class/year was recorded through a participant survey. Participants were also asked of their paternal and maternal status (i.e. married, divorced/separated, single, widowed, remarried, or deceased).

### **Procedure**

Participants signed up online for a specific study timeslot in order to complete paper questionnaires in a classroom setting. Upon arrival, participants signed their names in a binder and I provided them with a consent form to read over before beginning. Participants were given 45 minutes to fill out the packet of questionnaires. Once packets were completed, participants placed them in a box to ensure anonymity and a debriefing form was provided.

### **Results**

Hypothesized associations were analyzed using correlations. Associations between measures of helicopter parenting were considered first, then compared with scores of overall attachment and attachment subscales. Finally, all helicopter and attachment variables were

compared with college life variables (i.e. school engagement, academic entitlement, academic motivation and achievement, drinking behavior, and disordered eating).

Scores from the 10-item Padilla-Walker and Nelson (2012) measure of helicopter parenting positively correlated with those from the overall overparenting measure (Segrin et al., 2012) ( $r = .49, p < .01$ ), such that high scores of helicopter parenting indicated high scores of overall overparenting. However, analyses examining the three subscales from the overall overparenting yielded mixed results. Helicopter parenting was positively correlated with child self-direction ( $r = .47, p < .001$ ) and tangible assistance ( $r = .28, p < .01$ ). No significant correlation was found between helicopter parenting and advice/affect management ( $r = -.01, p = .92$ ). Intergenerational support also positively correlated with overall overparenting ( $r = .42, p < .001$ ) such that high parental support indicated high overall overparenting. Intergenerational support includes emotional, financial, practical and other parental support. Intergenerational support was positively correlated with two of the subscales: advice/affect management ( $r = .42, p < .001$ ), and tangible assistance ( $r = .38, p < .001$ ). No significant correlation was found between intergenerational support and child self-direction ( $r = .12, p = .27$ ). The correlation between the 10-item helicopter scale and intergenerational support index was significant but weaker than the other correlations ( $r = .27, p < .05$ ).

The next set of analyses explored associations between the helicopter parenting measures and the attachment measure. Overall parental attachment (Kenny, 1987) was negatively correlated with the 10-item scale of helicopter parenting (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012) ( $r = -.49, p < .001$ ) such that students who reported high perceived helicopter parenting also reported low overall feelings of attachment to their parent. Analyses examining the three attachment subscales: Affective quality of relationship, parents as facilitators of independence, and parents

as source of support yielded opposite associations with helicopter parenting. Subscales affective quality of relationship and parents as facilitators of independence negatively correlated with helicopter parenting such that high helicopter parenting indicated lower affective quality of relationship and lower parents as facilitators of independence ( $r = -.42, p < .001$ ;  $r = -.66, p < .001$ ). No significant correlation was found between helicopter parenting and parents as source of support ( $r = -.04, p = .68$ ). The overall attachment measure and overall overparenting measure (Segrin et al., 2012) were not significantly correlated, however significant associations were found when examining the subscales of both measures (see Table 1).

There were no significant correlations between overall attachment and intergenerational support. As expected, the attachment subscale measuring parents as source of support was positively correlated with intergenerational support ( $r = .41, p < .001$ ) such that participants who saw their parents as high sources of support also scored high on intergenerational support. No significant correlations were found for intergenerational support and affective quality of relationship ( $r = .18, p = .09$ ) or intergenerational support and parents as facilitators of independence ( $r = -.09, p = .40$ ).

Helicopter parenting and attachment variables were then considered with outcome variables (i.e. school engagement, academic motivation and achievement, academic entitlement, drinking behavior, and disordered eating). School engagement was measured using the School Engagement Scale, with subscales of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. I predicted that higher scores of helicopter parenting would be negatively correlated with school engagement, such that someone who scores high in perceived helicopter parenting will score low in school engagement. The 10-item helicopter parenting scale was negatively correlated with behavioral school engagement ( $r = -.31, p < .01$ ), such that students who reported high scores of

helicopter parenting reported lower scores of school engagement. Conversely, advice/affect management of the overparenting measure was positively correlated with overall school engagement ( $r=.40, p < .01$ ), behavioral school engagement ( $r=.22, p < .05$ ), emotional school engagement ( $r=.34, p < .01$ ), and cognitive school engagement ( $r=.29, p < .01$ ), such that students who reported high scores of advice and affect management also reported high scores of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive school engagement. Higher school engagement scores were positively correlated with attachment ( $r=.37, p < .001$ ). Particularly, high overall attachment scores and subscale scores were correlated with high scores of behavioral and emotional school engagement ( $r=.38, p < .001$ ;  $r=.30, p < .01$ ) (see Table 2).

I further examined the relations of parent variables with perceived parents as academic motivation and academic achievement. A positive correlation was found for parents as academic motivation and the 10-item helicopter parenting scale ( $r=.43, p < .001$ ), parents as academic motivation and overall overparenting ( $r=.29, p < .01$ ), parents as academic motivation and child self-direction ( $r=.22, p < .05$ ), and parents as academic motivation and tangible assistance ( $r=.24, p < .05$ ). Parents as academic motivation negatively correlated with overall parental attachment ( $r=-.31, p < .01$ ), parents as academic motivation and affective quality of relationship ( $r=-.26, p < .05$ ), and parents as academic motivation and parents as facilitators of independence ( $r=-.46, p < .001$ ).

Academic achievement was measured using GPA. There was a negative correlation between GPA and the 10-item helicopter parenting scale ( $r=-.27, p < .05$ ) such that more perceived helicopter parenting was associated with a lower GPA. Conversely, GPA positively correlated with advice/affect management ( $r=.35, p < .01$ ) such that higher reported scores of advice and affect management were associated with higher GPA. GPA did not significantly

correlate with overall overparenting ( $r = -.01, p = .95$ ), child self-direction ( $r = -.16, p = .13$ ), or tangible assistance ( $r = -.03, p = .80$ ), suggesting that the positive correlation was driven by advice/affect management and was not indicative of the overparenting measure overall. GPA and overall attachment was positively correlated ( $r = .22, p < .05$ ) and GPA and parents as facilitators of independence was positively correlated ( $r = .28, p < .01$ ), such that higher scores of overall attachment and parents as facilitators of independence were associated with higher GPA.

Academic entitlement was measured using the AEQ (Kopp et al., 2011). The correlation between the 10-item helicopter parenting scale and academic entitlement was significant, such that those scoring high in helicopter parenting also scored high in academic entitlement ( $r = .40, p < .001$ ). A further positive correlation was found between academic entitlement and tangible assistance ( $r = .21, p < .05$ ) such that students reporting higher entitlement scores also reported higher tangible assistance from his or her parent. A negative correlation was found between academic entitlement and overall attachment ( $r = -.24, p < .05$ ). Further negative correlations were found between academic entitlement and affective quality of relationship ( $r = -.28, p < .01$ ) and academic entitlement and parents as facilitators of independence ( $r = -.28, p < .01$ ). No significant correlations were found for academic entitlement and parents as source of support (see Table 3).

Drinking behavior was measured using a series of questions assessing the amount and frequency of alcohol consumption. I predicted positive correlations between attachment and drinking behavior in which students who reported higher attachment levels were less likely to engage in alcohol consumption. No significant negative correlations were found between any of the helicopter parenting variables. No significant correlations were found between drinking behavior and attachment (see Table 4).

Disordered eating was measured using the EAT-26. A negative correlation was found between disordered eating and both helicopter parenting and overall overparenting ( $r = -.26, p = .01$ ;  $r = -.22, p < .05$ ), such that high scores of helicopter parenting and overparenting indicated less disordered eating behaviors. Disordered eating was divided into three subscales: dieting, bulimia/food preoccupation, and oral control. Specifically, high scores of helicopter parenting correlated with lower scores of bulimia and food preoccupation ( $r = -.27, p = .01$ ) and lower scores of oral control ( $r = -.27, p = .01$ ). No significant correlations were found between disordered eating and overall attachment ( $r = .15, p = .15$ ). However contrary to my prediction, disordered eating was found to be positively correlated with parents as facilitators of independence ( $r = .24, p < .05$ ) such that students who reported high scores of parents as facilitators of independence also reported higher scores of disordered eating (see Table 5).

### **Discussion**

The results of this study suggest that helicopter parenting and attachment are not the same, though they appear to relate in some way. An overall inverse relation was found between the 10-item helicopter parenting scale (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012) and overall parental attachment (Kenny, 1987) such that students who scored high on perceived helicopter parenting scored lower on overall parental attachment. However, scores from the subscales of overparenting (Segrin et al., 2012) and Parental Attachment Questionnaire (Kenny, 1987) generated more complex associations with parent and college life variables than the overall scores. For example, overall overparenting (2012) did not significantly correlate with overall attachment (1987). However, the parents as source of support subscale of attachment had a significant positive correlation with overall overparenting, and the parents as facilitators of independence subscale of attachment had a significant negative correlation with overall overparenting. When considering

the subscales of these measures independently, associations with other variables were different than those revealed when considering the overall scores alone. This finding may have important implications on the use of these overall scales in the future.

Based on the results of this study, helicopter parenting and attachment variables do not appear to yield the same associations among college life variables. While the subscales of the overparenting measure (2012) and Parental Attachment Questionnaire (1987) give the impression of measuring similar characteristics (i.e. support, behavioral control and autonomy-granting), correlations with college life outcomes were incongruent. For example, the child self-direction subscale of the overparenting measure (2012) and the parents as facilitators of independence subscale of the Parental Attachment Questionnaire (1987) appear to measure the same feature of granting autonomy. However when associated with school engagement, child self-direction, though not significant, appeared to have a negative correlation while parents as facilitators of independence positively correlated with school engagement. The masking of subscale scores by overall scores further continues to be an issue in associations among college life variables. For example, GPA was found to be positively correlated with the advice/affect management subscale of the overparenting measure (2012) such that higher reported scores of advice and affect management were associated with higher GPA. However, GPA did not significantly correlate with overall overparenting or its two other subscales, suggesting that the positive correlation was driven by advice/affect management and was not indicative of the overparenting measure overall.

According to results of this study, helicopter parenting appears to remain a complicated yet fascinating phenomenon that warrants further investigation. This unique pattern of parenting has been described as a combination of certain features (high support, high behavioral control, and

low autonomy-granting) (Segrin et al., 2012). However, the current study did not examine the importance of order or thresholds of these characteristics. It is unclear if a certain amount of support, behavioral control, and autonomy is needed to classify a parent as a helicopter parent, or if it is simply the combination of all three. Future research should explore these elements further in order to determine what is necessary to consistently distinguish a helicopter parent from other parents. The current study also did not consider how helicopter parenting may affect college life variables differently as a result of the student's class or year. Specific attention was paid to college freshman and while perceived helicopter parenting may have certain effects on young adults entering college, the same behaviors may develop differently as the student ages. For example, although the current study found perceived helicopter parenting to be negatively associated with GPA, a longitudinal investigation of the same relation may yield a different result. Perhaps the same parenting effects that were associated with lower GPA encouraged the student to work even harder to achieve academic success, resulting in an overall increase in GPA. Finally, the current study did not consider how certain personality traits of students may encourage helicopter parenting behavior from their parents. Further research should consider how children of helicopter parents may be influencing their parents' over-supportive behaviors.

Results of the study inquired whether helicopter parenting may be another variable entirely; one that is not yet known. The ten-item scale (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012) yielded associations consistent with my hypotheses and previous literature on helicopter parenting; however, it is not clear what the items really measure. This scale should be further examined in future research in order to determine what characteristics of helicopter parenting are being measured, as well as to replicate the findings of the current study. Finally, while student perception of helicopter parenting is important, the current study was unable to examine

behavioral evidence or parent self-reported scores of helicopter parenting. Future research should examine perceived helicopter parenting and attachment scores from both the parent and the child. Differences in perception of overparenting between student and parent may provide a new area of interest for researchers.

Despite its inadequacies, the current study provided thought-provoking results and continued investigation of the variables is essential. Measures of attachment and the advice/affect management of overparenting were positively associated with school engagement. Moreover, most of the same variables were associated with GPA. According to these results, encouragement of parent support is suggested—students perceiving a strong attachment to parents flourished in the college academic environment. Further, helicopter parenting variables were associated with parents as academic motivation and entitlement. If students are only motivated academically by their parents, their success will be dependent upon that relationship. Additionally, having entitled beliefs about their experiences in college may leave them ill-prepared for the responsibilities of adult life. The impact of college life behaviors related to health is less understood by the results of this study. No significant relations for drinking behavior were found and an unexpected association was found for disordered eating, in which high reported scores of perceived helicopter parenting corresponded with lower scores of disordered eating. Additional research is needed to better understand the relations among these variables, particularly with a larger sample size. Future studies should also consider additional college health behaviors such as drug use, sexual intercourse behaviors, and extracurricular involvement as they relate to helicopter parenting and parental attachment.

### **Future Directions**

While the current study was unable to examine all possible components underlying helicopter parenting, further investigation of these elements is important for future research. First, additional studies should consider the developmental stage of the student. Individual differences in the student may play an important role in how the behavior of his or her parent affects him or her. With that said, an additional area of interest for future research involves the parent-child relationship (i.e. student satisfaction and well-being). Several limitations of this study are important to consider. Primarily, helicopter parenting is a novel concept with no universal definition. Future studies are needed to investigate the features characteristic of helicopter parenting in order to determine an accurate and consistent definition. Another major limitation of the study was the small sample size. Future studies would benefit from a larger sample size that encompasses an array of students of differing class years. In addition, the current study was limited by the late scheduling of data collection (e.g., data was collected during the second half of spring semester). Future studies should consider collecting data earlier in the semester when students are more academically mindful. An additional limitation was that only one measure of parental attachment was used. Parent-child attachment has traditionally been measured by dividing scores into strict categories of attachment styles. However the Parental Attachment Questionnaire, like more recent scales, measured it on a continuum (Kenny, 1987). Future studies should attempt to use a variety of attachment measure to compare results. Overall, this study served to introduce to literature the relations among helicopter parenting, attachment, and college life variables in a way that has not yet been explored.

Table 1

*Summary of Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Scores on the Subscales of Parental Attachment and Overparenting*

Measure	Overall Parental Attachment	Affective Quality of Relationship	Parents as Source of Support	Parents as Facilitators of Independence	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Overall Overparenting	-.09	-.04	.38**	-.47**	3.18	.38
Advice/Affect Management	.52**	.50**	.64**	.16	4.13	.49
Child Self-Direction	-.45**	-.36**	-.02	-.66**	2.17	.58
Tangible Assistance	.02	-.00	.24*	-.11	3.79	.72
<i>M</i>	3.97	4.23	3.72	3.87	-	-
<i>SD</i>	.40	.45	.49	.59	-	-

*Notes:* \*\* correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

\* correlation significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 2

*Summary of Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Scores on Subscales of School Engagement, Helicopter Parenting, Subscales of Overparenting, Intergenerational Support, and Subscales of Parental Attachment*

Measure	School Engagement	Behavioral	Emotional	Cognitive	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<b>Helicopter Parenting</b>	-.20	-.31**	-.14	-.05	1.66	.58
Overall Overparenting	-.01	-.05	-.06	.07	3.18	.38
Advice/Affect Management	.40**	.22*	.34**	.29**	4.13	.49
Child Self-Direction	-.15	-.15	-.19	.00	2.17	.58
Tangible Assistance	-.13	-.03	-.15	-.08	3.79	.72
Intergenerational Support	.05	.01	-.03	.14	5.12	1.15
<b>Overall Parental Attachment</b>	.37**	.38**	.30**	.17	3.97	.40
Affective Quality of Relationship	.37**	.38**	.32**	.15	4.23	.91
Parents as Source of Support	.28**	.25*	.25*	.13	3.72	.75
Parents as Facilitators of Independence	.21*	.29**	.13	.09	3.87	.87
<i>M</i>	3.33	4.24	3.50	2.44	-	-
<i>SD</i>	.38	.39	.60	.53	-	-

*Notes:* \*\* correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

\* correlation significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 3

*Summary of Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Scores of Academic Entitlement, Helicopter Parenting, Subscales of Overparenting, Intergenerational Support, and Subscales of Parental Attachment*

Measure	Academic Entitlement	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<b>Helicopter Parenting</b>	.40**	1.66	.58
Overall Overparenting	.29**	3.18	.38
Advice/Affect Management	-.16	4.13	.49
Child Self-Direction	.12	2.17	.58
Tangible Assistance	.21*	3.79	.72
Intergenerational Support	.18	5.12	1.15
<b>Overall Parental Attachment</b>	-.31**	3.97	.40
Affective Quality of Relationship	-.28**	4.23	.91
Parents as Source of Support	.06	3.72	.75
Parents as Facilitators of Independence	-.28**	3.87	.87
<i>M</i>	1.66	-	-
<i>SD</i>	.58	-	-

Notes: \*\* correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

\* correlation significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 4

*Summary of Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Scores of Drinking Behavior, Helicopter Parenting, Subscales of Overparenting, Intergenerational Support, and Subscales of Parental Attachment*

Measure	Drinking Behavior	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<b>Helicopter Parenting</b>	.15	1.66	.58
Overall Overparenting	-.14	3.18	.38
Advice/Affect Management	-.04	4.13	.49
Child Self-Direction	-.18	2.17	.58
Tangible Assistance	.08	3.79	.72
Intergenerational Support	.07	5.12	1.15
<b>Overall Parental Attachment</b>	-.03	3.97	.40
Affective Quality of Relationship	-.05	4.23	.91
Parent as Source of Support	-.04	3.72	.75
Parent as Facilitator of Independence	.03	3.87	.87
<i>M</i>	1.66	-	-
<i>SD</i>	.58	-	-

Table 5

*Summary of Correlations, Means and Standard Deviations for Scores on the Subscales of Disordered Eating, Helicopter Parenting, Subscales of Overparenting, Intergenerational Support, and Subscales of Parental Attachment*

Measure	Disordered Eating	Diet	Bulimia/Food Preoccupation	Oral Control	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<b>Helicopter Parenting</b>	-.26*	-.17	-.27**	-.27**	1.66	.58
Overall Overparenting	-.22*	-.20	-.15	-.17	3.18	.38
Advice/Affect Management	-.16	-.13	-.11	-.13	4.13	.49
Child Self-Direction	-.06	-.00	.04	-.25	2.17	.58
Tangible Assistance	-.19	-	-.18	.08	3.79	.72
Intergenerational Support	-.17	.24*	-.20	-.07	5.12	1.15
<b>Overall Parental Attachment</b>	.15	.08	.18	.17	3.97	.40
Affective Quality of Relationship	.13	.05	.18	.16	4.23	.91
Parents as Source of Support	-.00	.03	.04	-.12	3.72	.75
Parents as Facilitators of Independence	.24*	.14	.19	.33**	3.87	.87
<i>M</i>	4.59	4.27	5.14	4.70	-	-
<i>SD</i>	.61	.89	.68	.65	-	-

*Notes:* \*\* correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

\* correlation significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)



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