

Research

Helicopter Parenting: The Effect of an Overbearing Caregiving Style on Peer Attachment and Self-Efficacy

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Helicopter parenting, an observed phenomenon on college campuses, may adversely affect college students. The authors examined how helicopter parenting is related to self-efficacy and peer relationships among 190 undergraduate students ages 16 to 28 years. Helicopter parenting was associated with low self-efficacy, alienation from peers, and a lack of trust among peers. Implications are provided for counselors and psychologists in college- and university-based counseling centers to help them to understand and provide assessment and treatment for adult children of helicopter parents.

Keywords: helicopter parents, self-efficacy, peer relationships

Born between the early 1980s and early 2000s, millennials have entered college with their parents hovering closely above and managing many areas of their lives (Coomes & DeBard, 2004; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Murray, 1997). These parents have been referred to as *helicopter parents*, or parents who, like helicopters, stay closely overhead, right above their child. Helicopter parents are rarely out of reach, pay extremely close attention to their child, and rush to prevent any harm, particularly at the adult child's educational institution (Rainey, 2006). Helicopter parents are in constant contact with their adult children and the school administration. With their adult children, helicopter parents average 10.4 forms of communication (e.g., e-mail, cell phone, text message) per week, leaving those students with weakened autonomy (Hofer, 2008). These parents tend to make academic decisions for their adult children and feel badly about themselves when their adult children do not do well.

Helicopter parents became particularly apparent on college campuses in the early 2000s as the millennial generation began reaching college age. Children of the millennial generation are the products of baby boomer parents, who have made child rearing a major focus of their adult lives (Gallo & Gallo, 2001). Baby boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, are the wealthiest and best educated

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generation of parents, and they are determined to give their children the best (Kantrowitz & Tyre, 2006). Baby boomer parents highly monitor their adult children with the extensive resources they have at their disposal.

Helicopter parents may unintentionally foster dependence rather than independence. Although the intent of helicopter parents is to help their adult college student to succeed, some practitioners in college counseling centers argue that helicopter parenting has a negative impact on college students. One of the main developmental tasks of growing into an independent adult may be hindered by helicopter parents who direct their college student's affairs. Other harmful effects include the stunting of children's interpersonal sophistication (Dempsey, 2009) and increased tuition costs for the extra resources needed to respond to helicopter parents' demands. Reduced maturation and decreased social competence, among other deficits, can lead to benign inquiries, such as phoning home about what ice cream to purchase, or to more serious inquiries, such as calling home during a meeting with a prospective employer about how to negotiate the salary. Ultimately, helicopter parents may be hindering their adult children from learning accountability, responsibility, and self-sufficiency (Bronson, 2009; Ungar, 2009).

Helicopter parents 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. Parental behaviors have widespread and considerable influences on the thoughts, behaviors, and emotions of children (Maccoby, 1992, 2007). If part of the purpose of adolescence is identity formation, and the purpose of parenting is to gradually foster independence, then delayed identity formation and dependence on one's parents leave college students unprepared for real-life experiences. Specifically, children of helicopter parents will not learn to deal with the consequences of their poor decisions if their parents swoop in and fix their problems. When parents constantly save their children from negative consequences, children do not learn to overcome failure (Kantrowitz & Tyre, 2006). Overprotective parenting may be associated with psychological maladjustment (McLeod, Wood, & Weisz, 2007; Muris, Meesters, & van den Berg, 2003), such as anxiety (Hudson & Rapee, 2001) and low self-worth (Laible & Carlo, 2004).

The term *helicopter parenting* has now become a common term in many industries, including education and the media, to refer to an overbearing caregiving style regardless of the child's age. During in-service training workshops, it is not uncommon for schools to provide training for teachers about how to work with helicopter parents of school-age children. Information about helicopter parenting can also be found in popular books and magazines. For example, one book cover shows yellow caution tape around a child, indicating the high cost of invasive parenting (Marano, 2008). Magazines have depicted similar images, such as a picture of a child wrapped in Bubble Wrap, indicating the fragility of overprotected children and how their parents are setting them up to be overwhelmed (Gibbs, 2009). The impact of helicopter parenting has even been discussed in the opinion pages of the *The New York Times* (Bips et al., 2010). Over the past 20 years, self-help books have been written addressing the issues of establishing helpful boundaries

between parents and their young adult children and creating space for those needing to establish room in relationships (Forward & Buck, 2002; Halpern, 1990; McBride, 2009; Neuharth, 1998). Although several publications about helicopter parenting are available in the popular press, few empirical studies have examined the effect of this parenting style on college students. Much like research on other key areas of parenting, such as parenting prototypes (Baumrind, 1971), parental nurturance (Buri, 1989), paternal warmth (Rohner & Veneziano, 2001), maternal and paternal warmth (Veneziano, 2003), acceptance versus rejection (Rohner, 1980, 2014), consistency (Kazdin, 2005), and how communication patterns can lead to the development of schemas (Beck, Freeman, Davis, & Associates, 2004; Persons, 1989; Young, 1999), this study looks to fill an important gap.

Peer Attachment

Helicopter parents may interfere with the development of peer relationships. The transition from being primarily attached to parents to forming attachments with peers is a normal developmental process (Smollar & Youniss, 1989) and tends to be salient when adolescents go away to college for the first time (Mayseless, 2004). This does not imply that parental attachment is no longer important for young adults or no longer predictive of their functioning (Laible, Carlo, & Roesch, 2004), but rather that the impact of multiple attachment relationships needs to be considered in college-age populations. College students' working models of attachment, developed from parental rearing behaviors, are theoretically related to the quality of their peer attachments (Nickerson & Nagle, 2005). Whereas college students who describe their parents as warm and encouraging of autonomy are likely to report secure peer attachments, college students who describe their parents as cold and controlling are likely to report insecure peer attachments.

Development of healthy peer attachment is important in college students. The quality of peer attachment has been linked to self-esteem, general self-concept, locus of control, empathy, prosocial behavior, optimism, life satisfaction, and scholastic competence (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Cotterell, 1992; Fass & Tubman, 2002; Laible et al., 2004; Wilkinson, 2004). In addition, adolescents who were securely attached to peers but insecurely attached to parents had more sympathy and less depression and aggression than did adolescents who were securely attached to parents but insecurely attached to peers (Laible, Carlo, & Raffaelli, 2000). Thus, an overprotective parenting style may adversely affect a college student's relationship with peers and, consequently, the college student's functioning.

Self-Efficacy

Another area that helicopter parenting may undermine is a college student's sense of self-efficacy. In social situations, individuals with a high sense of self-efficacy possess great confidence that they can successfully interact with

peers, initiate social contacts, and develop new friendships. On the other hand, individuals with a low sense of self-efficacy in social situations believe that close personal relationships form either by luck or by factors outside of their control (Sherer et al., 1982). A secure attachment between parent and child results in increased self-efficacy for prosocial behaviors in the child (Talley, 2001). In addition, self-efficacy has been found to be a significant mediator for both attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance on social support and psychological distress (Mallinckrodt & Wei, 2005).

Self-efficacy has traditionally been conceptualized as more of a domain-specific entity than an underlying personality structure (Bandura, 1977). However, contemporary research with college-age populations has used self-efficacy as a viable outcome measure to approximate social skills or social competence (Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000; Laible & Carlo, 2004; Mallinckrodt, 1992). In light of the evidence supporting its relationship to attachment, self-efficacy represents an appropriate choice for the outcome measure of social competence in this current study, wherein attachment variables (e.g., peer attachment, parenting style) were examined to determine their potential relationship to self-efficacy levels among college students. An examination of these variables has the potential to operationalize the term helicopter parenting for the counseling literature in terms of the nature of its components, as well as its relationship to current student behaviors.

Helicopter parenting and its effect on college students has not been well studied. A major purpose of the present study was to determine ways in which helicopter parenting may affect college students' peer attachment and self-efficacy. We hypothesized that helicopter parenting would be associated with poor peer attachment and low self-efficacy. We also explored how parental and peer attachment were related to self-efficacy in young adults.

Method

Participants

A total of 190 undergraduate students at a midwestern public liberal arts university participated in the present study. Students ranged in age from 16 to 28 years ($M = 20.03$, $SD = 1.81$). Students identified their gender as either female ($n = 132$), male ($n = 55$), or transgender ($n = 3$) and their race/ethnicity as Caucasian (73.8%), Asian/Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (9.7%), African American (7.5%), Hispanic/Latino (4.8%), American Indian/Alaska Native (0.5%), or other (3.7%). Most of the participants (35%) described themselves as 1st-year students, with 25% indicating their class rank as sophomores, 17% as juniors, and 23% as seniors. The majority lived on campus (60.4%) as opposed to off campus (33.7%) or at home (5.9%).

Procedure

To obtain a cross section of diverse students, we recruited participants from four residence halls, four sections of a 1st-year career planning course,

and four organizations (i.e., Latino Student Union, Asian Student Union, Multiracial Student Union, and Out 'N' About [a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning cultural organization]) over a 1-month period. Students were asked to complete self-report inventories about parental rearing behaviors, peer attachment, self-efficacy, and demographic characteristics. All participants were entered into a raffle as compensation for their participation.

Measures

Helicopter parenting. We used the Overprotection subscale of the Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI; Parker, Tupling, & Brown, 1979) to assess the perceived degree of childhood parental overprotectiveness. The Overprotection subscale consists of 13 items (e.g., “tried to control everything I did”), which are rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = *very unlike my mother/father*, 4 = *very like my mother/father*). Low scores indicate the allowance of independence and autonomy, whereas high scores indicate control, intrusion, and excessive contact. The Overprotection subscale is a reliable measure. It is internally consistent and stable over time (Parker et al., 1979). It is also a valid measure of parenting style for clinical and nonclinical samples (e.g., Enns, Cox, & Clara, 2002; Parker, 1983). Because of our focus on overprotective parenting, we did not use the 12-item Care subscale of the PBI in the present study.

Peer attachment. The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA; Armsden & Greenberg, 1989) is a 25-item self-report measure designed to assess one’s perceived quality of attachment to one’s parents and peers. Respondents rate each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *almost never/never true*, 5 = *almost always/always true*). For purposes of the present study, students were asked to rate only the level of peer attachment. The IPPA consists of three subscales: Trust (10 items; e.g., “My friends accept me as I am”), Communication (eight items; e.g., “I like to get my friends’ point of view on things I’m concerned about”), and Alienation (seven items; e.g., “I feel alone when I am with my friends” [Armsden & Greenberg, 1989]). The IPPA is a reliable and valid measure of peer attachment among college students (Armsden & Greenberg, 1989).

Self-efficacy. The Self-Efficacy Scale (SES; Sherer et al., 1982) is a 23-item self-report measure that assesses one’s self-efficacy in both the general realm (e.g., “I give up easily”) and the social realm (e.g., “It is difficult for me to make new friends”). The items are rated on a 14-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 14 = *strongly agree*), with higher scores indicating higher levels of self-efficacy. Factor analyses support a two-factor structure. The General Self-Efficacy subscale consists of 17 items, and the Social Self-Efficacy subscale consists of six items. The subscales are internally consistent and valid measures of self-efficacy (Sherer et al., 1982). General self-efficacy is correlated with self-esteem, and social self-efficacy is correlated with interpersonal competency.

Results

Correlations

To examine the hypothesized relationship between helicopter parenting and peer attachment and self-efficacy, we calculated Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients. As predicted, perceptions of helicopter parenting were significantly associated with poor peer attachment and low self-efficacy (see Table 1). The perception of an overbearing mother was significantly associated with difficulty trusting one's peers ($r = -.19, p < .01$) and feeling alienated from peers ($r = .22, p < .01$). In addition to lower peer trust ($r = -.23, p < .01$) and a greater sense of peer alienation ($r = .25, p < .01$), the perception of an overbearing father was significantly associated with poor peer communication ($r = -.18, p < .05$). These patterns may indicate that young adults with helicopter parents have difficulty relating to their peers.

Having helicopter parents may also erode a college student's sense of self-efficacy. Low general self-efficacy was linked with perceptions of an overbearing mother ($r = -.25, p < .01$) and an overbearing father ($r = -.18, p < .05$). College students with helicopter parents may feel poorly about themselves and their ability to effect change in their lives. However, social self-efficacy was not significantly correlated with helicopter parenting. This result may seem to contradict the findings that helicopter parenting was associated with poor peer relationships. However, because the SES Social Self-Efficacy subscale is not specific to peer relationships, it is possible that students considered their relationships with their parents, significant others, and coworkers when responding to items on this scale. The effect of helicopter parenting may be specific to peer relationships.

Regressions

Preliminary analyses did not yield any statistically significant relationships between any of the demographic variables and the outcome variables (i.e., social self-efficacy and general self-efficacy); therefore, we computed regres-

TABLE 1
Correlations Between Overbearing Parenting, Peer Attachment, and Self-Efficacy

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Overbearing mother	—						
2. Overbearing father	.54**	—					
3. Peer trust	-.19**	-.23**	—				
4. Peer alienation	.22**	.25**	-.55**	—			
5. Peer communication	-.06	-.18*	.77**	-.45**	—		
6. Social self-efficacy	-.12	-.02	.33**	-.29**	-.29**	—	
7. General self-efficacy	-.25**	-.18*	-.29**	-.39**	-.26**	.42**	—

Note. Listwise $N = 187$.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

sion equations for all students. We conducted separate stepwise regression analyses for students to test the hypothesis that students with higher levels of overbearing parenting (i.e., high overbearing mother and high overbearing father) and poor peer attachment (i.e., low peer trust, low peer communication, and high peer alienation) would lead to lower levels of social and general self-efficacy. We conducted separate equations for each of these variables with social self-efficacy and general self-efficacy.

In the regression equation for social self-efficacy (see Table 2), both overbearing parent variables (i.e., overbearing mother and overbearing father) fell out of the equation. Only peer trust remained, and it predicted 11% of the variance in social self-efficacy. In the regression equation for general self-efficacy (see Table 2), two variables (i.e., peer alienation and overbearing mother) remained in the equation to predict 18% of the variance in general self-efficacy. Peer alienation uniquely accounted for 15% of the variance and overbearing mother accounted for 3% of the variance in general self-efficacy.

Discussion

In the present study, the relationship between helicopter parenting and peer attachment and self-efficacy in college students was examined. Perceptions of helicopter parenting were associated with low general self-efficacy and poor peer attachment. Students who perceived their parents as intrusive felt a diminished capacity to perform or accomplish tasks. Helicopter parenting was also associated with mistrust in peers, feeling alienated from peers, and poor peer communication. However, helicopter parenting was not significantly correlated with social self-efficacy. This result is consistent with previous research (Mallinckrodt, 1992).

There are two striking differences in the relationship between helicopter parenting and general self-efficacy. The first is that helicopter parenting is significantly

TABLE 2
Regression Analysis Summary for Peer Attachment and Overbearing Parenting Variables Predicting Self-Efficacy

Step and Variable	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	Adj. <i>R</i> ²	Inc. <i>R</i> ²	ΔF	<i>df</i>	β	<i>t</i> (181)
Social Self-Efficacy								
Step 1	.33	.11	.10	.11				
Peer trust					21.58**	(1, 180)	.33	4.65
General Self-Efficacy								
Step 1	.40	.15	.15	.15				
Peer alienation					33.20**	(1, 180)	.36	5.18
Step 2	.43	.18	.17	.03				
Overbearing mother					5.80*	(2, 179)	.17	2.41

Note. *N* = 182. Adj. *R*² = adjusted *R*²; inc. *R*² = incremental *R*².
p* < .05. *p* < .01.

and negatively related to general self-efficacy but not to social self-efficacy. Although the absence of a significant correlation does not prove that there is no relationship between these constructs, the relationship between general self-efficacy and helicopter parenting appears to be stronger than the relationship between social self-efficacy and helicopter parenting. Helicopter parenting may undermine a student's general sense of independence and self-agency. The second difference is that helicopter mothers have a stronger relationship to decreased general self-efficacy compared with helicopter fathers (see Table 2). This finding indicates that mothers may be more salient attachment figures than fathers. This idea has also been suggested by Collins and Read (1990), who reported that the mother-child relationship is more influential than the father-child relationship on adult attachment style, and Laible and Carlo (2004), who reported that fathers' support and control are unrelated to adolescent adjustment. Another potential explanation of this finding is psychometric in nature. The Cronbach's alpha for the father Overprotection subscale was moderate to low ($\alpha = .65$), whereas the Cronbach's alpha for the mother Overprotection subscale was substantially higher ($\alpha = .84$). The low reliability of the father Overprotection subscale may have decreased the likelihood of obtaining correlations as strong as those for the mother Overprotection subscale.

Peer attachment is important to social self-efficacy among college students. In particular, peer trust was significantly and positively related to social self-efficacy. When college students present with low social-self efficacy, counselors may consider assessing peer trust levels and intervene in this area as a strategy to increase overall social self-efficacy. The inverse relationship between social self-efficacy and peer alienation indicates that social self-efficacy is an important way to reduce peer alienation. Counselors may consider strengthening social self-efficacy skills as a way to reduce peer alienation. Likewise, the counselor may work directly to reduce peer alienation as a means of strengthening social self-efficacy.

The negative correlation between peer communication and social self-efficacy was counterintuitive. Provided that this finding is replicated in further studies, this result suggests that the construct of peer communication may be more nuanced and complex than previously understood. One can imagine the case of a college student who knows how to communicate very well with a peer group and yet is simply conforming to group norms and feels unable to express his or her unique thoughts and feelings. Not only does this student need education on the mechanics of how to communicate clearly, but he or she needs opportunities to explore the boundaries between self-realization and group belonging.

Implications and Guidelines for Individual Counseling

Parent relationships. Our findings indicate that both parent relationships and peer relationships are important aspects of college counseling, and both types of relationships require different kinds of counseling approaches. Because helicopter parenting is related to poor peer communication, a lack of peer trust, and general self-efficacy problems, an assessment of the parenting style of a student's parents might be beneficial. If a student's parents do have a helicopter parenting

style, then addressing this issue may be necessary. The course of treatment will vary greatly depending on the student's thoughts and attitudes about his or her parents' behavior. If the parenting style is not perceived negatively by the student but is contributing to the presenting problems for the student and his or her overall health, then the counselor would be wise to proceed carefully and with sensitivity to the student's capacity to tolerate critical reflection. Even if the parenting style is perceived negatively by the student, the student may have a range of reactions when confronted by the counselor about his or her parents' overprotectiveness. Responses may involve defensiveness, obliviousness, anger, distress, or helplessness. From the counselor's perspective, the parents' behavior may be hindering the general self-efficacy of the student; therefore, the counselor will want to decrease the hindrance to help the student to become more self-sufficient, thereby improving the student's well-being. However, the counselor ought to proceed with caution, and a counselor's treatment decisions may need to be contingent upon the student's emotional responses.

If the student is defensive with regard to having experienced helicopter parenting, then the counselor may want to focus on behavioral strategies regarding the student's college life as opposed to addressing the family system. The counselor may want to gently raise awareness by stating, "I know this is normal for you, but a lot of parents don't do this for their children." If the student is angry, then the counselor may want to proceed carefully. This may involve avoiding criticism of the family system but empowering the student and talking about choices. If the student expresses dissatisfaction with parental overinvolvement, then Socratic questioning to shed light on what the student finds helpful or unhelpful about his or her parents' parenting practices may be beneficial. The goal of counseling, then, is to establish boundaries in the parent-child relationship and move the client toward individuation. In the very act of establishing boundaries, students will be developing their self-efficacy. The objective of the counselor is to assess the student's readiness to change (i.e., the contemplation stage in the Stages of Change model; Norcross, Krebs, & Prochaska, 2011; Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992). If a student is not ready for some rejecting behaviors by the parent, then the counselor may want to limit how much light is shed on the lack of boundaries in the family. The counselor may consider strengthening the client's sense of self before discussing family dynamics directly.

Some helicopter parents, however, may place limitations or restrictions on their relationships with their children. In extreme examples, parents may pay for tuition only if they are happy with the parent-child relationship. Processing choices and consequences of particular communications is critical in such cases. Students of particularly difficult helicopter parents may find role playing helpful in developing the communication skills and self-agency needed to establish healthy boundaries. For example, a student might learn to say the following through role playing: "Mom (Dad), I appreciate you being concerned about me, but calling me every day interferes with my studying. I will call you once a week so we can talk about how things are going." More research is needed on the best and most effective ways to create boundaries for helicopter parents.

Peer relationships. Peer factors are important to self-efficacy among college students. Peer trust had a significant, positive relationship to social self-efficacy. Therefore, when a student presents with social self-efficacy difficulties, counselors may want to consider assessing the student's level of peer trust. As previously discussed, the negative relationship between peer communication and social self-efficacy may be difficult for counselors to interpret. More research is needed in this area. However, currently, it is recommended that counselors have a nuanced approach toward peer communication. Counselors should consider that students may have the skills to communicate but may not be using those skills in ways that are self-efficacious. Therefore, counselors may choose to target interventions that will help students to tie their communication skills to self-expression, thereby improving their social self-efficacy. Because peer alienation was negatively correlated with both general and social self-efficacy, counselors may consider including the goal of decreasing peer alienation to the goal of addressing helicopter parenting. A reduction in peer alienation, or a corresponding increase in peer connection, may assist students in the difficult task of establishing healthy boundaries with helicopter parents.

Implications and Guidelines for Campus-Based Counseling Interventions

Helicopter parenting is associated with lower self-efficacy, lower peer communication, more peer alienation, and decreased peer trust. Because of the relationships between these constructs, it is suggested that college and university counselors consider addressing overbearing parenting in the context of broad campus outreach. For example, during parent–student orientation, campus counselors may facilitate group conversations about helpful parent–student communication, the pros and cons of allowing adult children to make their own decisions, and how to find a balance between letting go and staying connected. As with any topic of a sensitive nature, it is recommended that counselors plan for a wide range of reactions among parents and students. It is also recommended that follow-up services (e.g., one-on-one counseling, group counseling) be made available that can address helicopter parenting.

Given the importance of peer trust and peer alienation to self-efficacy, it is recommended that counseling centers actively create opportunities for university students to build connections and a sense of community. This work strengthens the mandate that counseling centers have to assist students in developing healthy peer relationships. One common response to this mandate is to conduct outreach related to peer communication. Counseling centers can conduct large-group outreach sessions that educate students directly on how to communicate in ways that increase a sense of self-efficacy. This type of education might involve discussions about the conflicting experiences that college students have between communicating with the purpose of belonging to a group and communicating to express oneself.

Multicultural Considerations

When considering what is best for students and their education, counselors will need to modify the aforementioned framework to address the needs and concerns of multicultural and bicultural students and their families. For example, particular interventions may not be appropriate for certain cultures or for a student's cultural identity development. Different cultures have different norms for parent-child relating, and they have different models of ideal parent-child interactions. Counselors need to take into consideration that creating boundaries will look vastly different with students and families from varying cultures.

Limitations

The results of the present study should be interpreted in the context of several limitations. First, the results are based on correlational analyses. Therefore, although the results are described in terms of helicopter parenting leading to decreased self-efficacy, it is important to keep in mind that dependent college students may lead to overprotective behaviors among parents or that a third variable may account for the relationship between helicopter parenting and self-efficacy. In addition, the findings completely rest on the subjective reporting of perceived parental rearing behavior, thus raising concerns about the use of a retroactive self-report measure of parental rearing behaviors with students who are away from home at college. However, findings by Andersson and Eisemann (2004) showed memories of parental rearing behavior to be stable and nonbiased. Future studies would benefit from triangulating data by combining measures of both students' and parents' perceptions of parental rearing behaviors. Also, current psychological instruments may need to be revised to effectively capture the essence of the unique construct of helicopter parenting. For example, a compulsive caregiving style (Kunce & Shaver, 1994) may represent a more pathological construct than helicopter parenting, and attempts to assess helicopter parenting with existing measures may not fully encapsulate the nature of this emerging dynamic.

Another limitation is the potential for a more appropriate outcome variable. Instead of social and general self-efficacy, other outcome variables, such as autonomy or independence, may more appropriately tap into the potentially differential effects of parental attachment, especially when this dynamic is examined in conjunction with peer attachment variables combined with risk and responsibility (Ungar, 2009). The more specific outcome variables of autonomy and independence may also be preferred given that self-efficacy is a broad construct that encompasses many possible areas of functioning.

Finally, definitions for helicopter parenting in the psychological literature may need to expand to include more than simply an overbearing parenting style. A helicopter parent might be better described as a parent who is highly caring and highly overbearing. The authors of the PBI (Parker et al., 1979) referred to this combination

of caring and overbearing as *affectionate constraint*. However, the type of caring that is involved in helicopter parenting may not be measured by the PBI or by other existing psychological models. It may be that helicopter parents actually care too much about their children and become overbearing as a result, but this caring style might not reach a pathological level or may not meet the parameters for the definition of affectionate constraint. Therefore, a new instrument or model may be needed to assess this unique combination of extreme caring and overprotection.

Conclusion

Despite these limitations, this study represents an initial step toward addressing many issues that are rapidly gaining attention in other fields (e.g., student affairs) but that have not been fully explored in the psychological literature. These notions are clearly seen and discussed often by staff counselors in college counseling centers. This study introduces helicopter parenting as an important element of the attachment literature and to the language of psychology in general. Student service providers would benefit greatly from a more comprehensive understanding of this readily observable and potentially detestable dynamic. For example, programming could be directed toward parents to channel the benefits of the elevated caring of helicopter parents while harnessing the potentially deleterious effects of the overbearing component of helicopter parenting.

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