

Exploring the Associations Between Helicopter Parenting and First-Year College Student's
Mental Health and Academic Outcomes

Thesis

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By

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Abstract

The phenomenon of helicopter parenting (Cline & Fay, 1990) has become an increasing concern with research indicating that this form of parenting may have negative effects on emerging adult college students' mental health (Schriffin et al. 2014). The purpose of this study was to explore the relationships between four key variables which include helicopter parenting, attachment, and anxiety and depression in first year mid-western college students ages 17-19. This study investigated the relationship between helicopter parenting and mental health outcomes in college-aged children, as well as the relationship between helicopter parenting and attachment outcomes in college-aged children. Assessing the strength of the relationships between helicopter parenting and attachment, as well as helicopter parenting and anxiety and depression can provide insight into this type of parenting and associations with mental health outcomes and attachment for college-aged children. This study used a cross sectional design and Path Analysis, an extension of multiple regression to assess the strength of the relationship between helicopter parenting, attachment, and mental health scores indicated by anxiety and depression symptoms.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to first-generation college students.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

College student's mental health is an important context for intervention given the various challenges that emerging young adults face during this major life transition. The first aim of this study is to gain further understanding about the relationship between helicopter parenting and college student's mental health by examining anxiety and depression symptoms in first year college students. The second aim of this study is to examine the relationship between helicopter parenting and attachment in college-aged students.

Mental Health Among College Aged Students

Psychological maladjustment has been a rising concern among college students, particularly considering the lasting effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic on student mental health (Ettman et al., 2020); Firkey et al., 2020; Gassman-Pines et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic created uncertainty and abrupt disruptions that created immense psychological challenges for students (Zhai & Du, 2020). Studies indicate a dramatic increase in anxiety and depressive symptoms for college students due to COVID-related challenges such as loneliness and academic stressors (Haikalis et al. 2022).

Increases in stress, depression, and anxiety may lead students to potentially drop out of college due to the inability to receive proper care for their mental health challenges (Salimi et al. 2021). Research suggests that COVID-19 and its accompanying effects will continue impacting collegiate mental health and wellbeing profoundly (Zhai & Du, 2020). Therefore, it is crucial that universities build awareness of college student's

specific mental health needs and concerns to make sure proper support systems are put in place. College student's mental health and academic outcomes are important concerns for education professionals and policy makers because these factors influence the future generation and workforce (Lederer et al. 2021). Considering the importance of these issues, it is imperative that researchers develop theory and conceptualizations of mental health symptoms that go beyond the individual. That is, understanding the familial and other contexts of college students may provide insight into the development of these symptoms and provide avenues for intervention.

Parenting College Aged Students

Parents continue to play a major role for children during their college years. To support their children's mental and physical wellbeing, some parents tend to have a greater involvement in their children's education and daily lives (Hwang & Jung, 2020). Research supports that parenting style contributes to college students' academic adjustment (Love & Thomas, 2014). Parents have been identified as having an important influence on the academic motivation, wellbeing, and academic performance of children and adolescents (Merlin et al. 2013). A 2017 study concluded that despite an increase in distance between parent and child, emerging adult children's academic engagement can still be affected by past parenting behaviors as well as the quality of their current relationships with their parents (Waterman & Lefkowitz, 2017).

Prior to the emergence of more contemporary parenting styles, two key parenting styles authoritative and authoritarian were identified based on parents' level of demandingness and responsiveness towards their children (Stavrulaki et al. 2020).

Authoritative parenting describes parents who exhibit high levels of demandingness and responsiveness (Stavroulaki et al. 2020). Authoritative parents set high behavioral expectations for children as well as firm behavioral boundaries. Authoritative parents demonstrate responsiveness by allowing their children to explore and develop their own sense of self (Stavroulaki et al. 2020). These parents have generally been recognized as accepting and supportive of their children's decisions (Koestner et al. 1984).

Authoritarian parents demonstrate high levels of demandingness but low levels of responsiveness. They are also strict and controlling and often use an object-oriented disciplinary style, involving the use of threats and/or punishment to enforce rules and expectations. Authoritarian parenting has been correlated with negative psychological outcomes such as

depression, lower self-esteem, poor mental health, and perfectionism (Nguyen, 2008; McKinney et al. 2011; Bolghan-Abadi et al. 2011; Miller et al. 2012). On the other hand, authoritative parenting has been linked to various positive psychological outcomes in emerging young adults (Stavroulaki et al. 2020).

Helicopter Parenting and Mental Health in College-Aged Children

Over the past two decades, a new style of parenting has emerged called "helicopter parenting" which describes the tendency that these parents have of hovering over their child's every move (Van Ingen et al. 2015). In general, helicopter parenting has been characterized as parents who are overly involved in their children's lives (Schriffin et al. 2014). The term "helicopter parenting" has garnered considerable curiosity among researchers within the last decade. Helicopter parents are defined as overly involved and

protective parents who provide substantial support (e.g., financial, emotional, physical health advice) to their emerging adult children, often intervening in their affairs and making decisions for them (Cline and Fay 1990; LeMoyne and Buchanan 2011; Odenweller et al. 2014; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012). Some of the behaviors that helicopter parents engage in include being overly involved and protective, constantly communicating with their children, personally investing in their children's goals, and removing obstacles their children encounter (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012).

Given that emerging adulthood is an important developmental period where young people continue to grow and develop (Van Ingen et. al 2012) it is important that research captures any influential parenting factors that may be at play in shaping the mental health challenges that college students face (Cook, 2020). Since current research around helicopter parenting and its effects on college student's psychological well-being is limited, it is imperative that the mental health field investigates whether an association exists between helicopter parenting and young adult mental health. Although research surrounding helicopter parenting is limited, scientific and anecdotal evidence has linked intense parental involvement to several negative child outcomes.

Helicopter parenting (Cline & Fay, 1990) has become an increasing concern with some research suggesting that this form of parenting may have negative effects on emerging adult college students' mental health (Schriffin et al. 2014). Helicopter parenting has been recognized as a form of parental control that inhibits the child's growth and restricts opportunities for children to develop key skills (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012).

Several studies have posited that helicopter parenting may be coupled with psychological control, in that parents may induce guilt, use manipulation, and withdraw love to change the child's behavior to reflect the parent's desires (Barber & Harmon, 2002).

Much of the literature surrounding helicopter parenting involves parents who are well- educated, dual income Baby Boomers who have been fortunate enough to acquire a multitude of resources such as money, time, connections, and negotiating skills, all of which are used to overindulge and shelter their children (Krantowitz & Tyre, 2006). Some research suggests that helicopter parenting is associated with an increased risk of mental health challenges for college aged children (Duncan et al. 2016). These studies suggest that college-aged children with parents who engaged in helicopter parenting behaviors report feeling less satisfied overall with family life and had lower levels of psychological well-being (Schiffrin et al. 2014).

Overall, the transition to college can be a stressful time in which emerging adults and their parents may struggle to adjust to their child's new sense of autonomy (Reed et. al 2016). Research suggests that feeling autonomous and confident in one's abilities is a critical part of healthy development for emerging adults (Hwang & Jung, 2020).

However, research on helicopter parenting has posited that helicopter parents tend to pay less attention to their adult children's desire for autonomy and instead exert excessive control over their children's functioning and decision making (Reed et al. 2016; Rosseau and Scharf, 2015).

Relationships between parents and children change considerably across life stages. Helicopter parenting is used most often to describe parents of college aged students

because of the relationship changes that occur during the major life transition of leaving home to attend college. Typically, when children move through adolescence into adulthood, the dynamic of the parent-child relationship shifts in significant ways. Despite the importance of this particular stage in the life cycle, there is a scarcity of research on parent-child relationships during these formative years (Gitelson & McDermott, 2006). Thus, given that emerging adulthood is an important developmental period where young people continue to grow and develop (Van Ingen et. al 2012) it is important that research captures any influential parenting factors that may be at play in shaping mental health challenges (Cook, 2020).

One example of this is that researchers have empirically linked helicopter parenting to children's use of recreational painkillers and anxiety and depression medications (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011). Results indicated that helicopter parenting was associated with increased depressive symptoms, substance use problems, and decreased relationship competence and that these relationships were similar across males and females and youth of different racial/ethnic backgrounds (Cook, 2020). My study will add to existing literature exploring the strength of associations between helicopter parenting and anxiety and depression in first-year college aged students, and also utilize attachment theory to further explore these associations.

Helicopter Parenting and Attachment Styles in College-Aged Children

Bowlby and Ainsworth's attachment theory provides a framework for understanding how individuals develop paradigms for interpersonal relationships (Ainsworth, 1982; Bowlby 1982). Bowlby's theory, uses an evolutionary and ecological

approach (Ainsworth, et al. 1978). Based on the caregiver's ability to be emotionally available and responsive to the child's needs, Bowlby argued that a child develops internal "working models" that contain beliefs and expectations about whether the caretaker is caring and responsive. Bowlby also proposed that this impacts beliefs about whether the self is worthy of care, love, and attention (Bowlby, 1973). These working models are used as a foundation for forming new relationships because they guide expectations, perception and behavior (Bowlby, 1973). Therefore, attachment style plays a key role in understanding how early relationships with caregivers affect and influence young adults in their relationships.

Both attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance can have detrimental effects on emerging adult's ability to form intimate bonds (Jiao & Segrin, 2022). In fact, in addition to reflecting insecure feelings in close relationships, attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance imply difficulties with developing and maintaining positive and healthy relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Results from a 2022 study revealed that overparenting was highly related to emerging adults' insecure attachment with both parents and romantic partners (Jiao & Segrin, 2022).

Despite there being significant overlap between key concepts found in both parent-child attachment and helicopter parenting, little research has been done on the relation among these two variables (Fitzgerald, 2015). For this reason, it is important that researchers begin to investigate if there is an association between helicopter parenting and attachment styles. One study examining the associations between helicopter parenting and attachment explored college students lives in relation to variables including

school engagement, academic entitlement, academic motivation and achievement, drinking behavior and disordered eating (Fitzgerald, 2015). Overall, helicopter parenting and attachment were found to have an inverse relationship in which high perceived helicopter parenting indicated a lower feeling of overall attachment (Fitzgerald, 2015).

Given that this particular study approached attachment from a rather broad and unspecific lens, further research is needed to examine the association between these two variables— helicopter parenting and attachment in first year college students. Attachment plays a significant role in influencing relationships in young adulthood (Grossmann et al. 2008). Studies have demonstrated associations between attachment organization and a wide range of beliefs and behaviors connected with satisfaction in intimate relationships (Collins & Read, 1990). The nature and quality of an individual's close relationships in adulthood are strongly impacted by affective events that took place during childhood, most notably within the child-caretaker relationship (Collins & Read, 1990). Special attention has been placed on child's early attachment relationships with caretakers, due to the fact that these relationships form critical beliefs about the self and social world. These relationships, in turn guide relationships in adulthood (Collins & Read, 1990). Therefore, it is extremely important to expand upon existing research to explore possible associations between parenting styles and attachment styles in young adults.

Attachment plays a fundamental role in one's ability to form these kinds of relationships (Ainsworth, 1991). While research exists regarding how helicopter parenting influences parent- child attachments and peer attachments, little is known about the relationship between helicopter parenting and mental health in college- aged children.

Little is also known about the relationship between helicopter parenting and attachment outcomes in college-aged children. One study found helicopter parenting to be associated with decreased relationship competence (Cook, 2020). Yet, there is still a gap in the research which presents an important opportunity to increase the field's knowledge surrounding parenting styles and the subsequent ability of college-aged children to form attachment bonds in adulthood.

Current attachment research suggests that insecure attachment may increase mental health risks in university students. (Nottage et al. 2022). It has been hypothesized that loneliness may explain this association between insecure attachment and mental health issues. Loneliness concerns social relationships and is similarly associated with negative mental health outcomes (Nottage et al. 2022). In a 2022 study, students with insecure attachment styles experienced more depressive symptoms than securely attached students (Nottage et al. 2022). Another study points to the added stressors that COVID-19 introduced, showing that individuals with higher levels of attachment anxiety experienced higher levels of depression and anxiety during the pandemic (Vowels et. al 2021).

Hypotheses

1. Helicopter parenting will be associated with anxious attachment in first-year college students.
2. Helicopter parenting will be associated with avoidant attachment in first-year college students.

3. Helicopter parenting will be associated with anxiety symptoms in first-year college students.
4. Helicopter parenting will be associated with depressive symptoms in first-year college students.
5. Anxious and avoidant attachment will mediate the association between helicopter parenting and depressive and anxious symptoms.

Chapter 2. Method

Participants

The Office of Student Academic Success generated a random sample of first-year college students ages 17-19 that were recruited from a large, Midwestern research University to complete a survey via Qualtrics software to collect demographic information and explore the variables of interest. Any of the first-year college students that did not fall within 17-19 years of age were filtered out of the survey. A random sample of 800 first-year college students were acquired and surveyed continuously in 400-participant increments with the hope of reaching a 25 % response rate (200 responses). Student Academic Success provided a sample with 50% minoritized populations, 50% first-generation college students, 50% male, and 50% female.

Of this random sample that was surveyed, 120 first-year college students ($N = 120$) make up the sample for this study due to participant response rate, and some participants who clearly did not complete the survey in a meaningful way (i.e. very brief response times). As presented in Table 1, the ages of the first-year college students in the sample ranged from 15 to 21 years old. Only 1 participant (0.8 %) fell between 15-17 years of age, while the remaining 119 participating first-year college students (99.2 %) fell within 18-21 years of age. In examining gender, of the 120 first-year college students that participated in the study, 59.2 % of the students were women, 38.3 % of the students were men, and 2.5% of the students identified as non-binary/non-conforming.

In looking at race/ethnicity demographics of the sample, 26.7% of first-year college students were Asian, 12.5% were Black or African American, 6.7% were Hispanic or Latino, 49.2% were white, and 5% of students did not identify with any of these racial/ethnic groups, thus falling into the “other” category. Another variable that was accounted for is the highest level of education attained by the parent/legal guardian of the first-year college students. 1.7% of parents/legal guardians completed no schooling, 4.2% completed some high school, 19.2% have a high school diploma, GED or equivalent, 29.2% completed some college, 5.8% have an Associate’s Degree, 19.2% have a Bachelor’s Degree, 10.8% have a Master’s Degree, 6.7% have a professional degree beyond a Bachelor’s Degree, and 3.3% have a Doctorate Degree.

The average household income of the families with first-year college aged students was also calculated. 11.8% of participating families had an average household income that is less than \$20,000 per year. 9.2% had an average household income between \$20,000- \$34,000. 14.3% had an average household income between \$35,000- \$49,999. 15.1% had an average household income between \$50,000- 74,999. 12.6% had an average household income between \$75,000- \$99,999. 37% had an average household income over \$100,000. Table 1 displays the demographic characteristics of the sample.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Current Sample

Variables	<i>n</i> (%)
Age:	
15-17 years old	1 (0.8 %)
18-21 years old	119 (99.2%)
Gender:	
Female	71 (59.2%)
Male	46 (38.3%)
Non-Binary/Non-Conforming	3 (2.5%)
Race/Ethnicity:	
Asian	32 (26.7%)
Black or African American	15 (12.5%)
Hispanic or Latino	8 (6.6%)
White	59 (49.2%)
Other	6 (5%)
Highest Level of Education Attained by Parent/Legal Guardian:	
No Schooling Completed	2 (1.7%)
Some High School	5 (4.2%)
High School Diploma, GED or equivalent	23 (19.2%)
Some College	35 (29.2%)
Associate's Degree	7 (5.8%)
Bachelor's Degree	23 (19.2%)
Master's Degree	13 (10.8%)
Professional Degree Beyond Bachelor's Degree	8 (6.7%)
Doctorate Degree	4 (3.3%)
Average Household Income:	
Less than \$20,000	14 (11.8%)
\$20,000-\$34,999	11 (9.2%)
\$35,000-49,999	17 (14.3%)
\$50,000-\$74,999	18 (14.9%)
\$75,000-\$99,999	15 (12.6%)
Over \$100,000	44 (37%)

Procedures

A stratified random sample was utilized to ensure diversity of the sample. Stratified random sampling through survey methodology provides an effective tool for gathering demographic information as well as for assessing for relationships between scale items (McIntyre, 1999). Participants who completed the Qualtrics survey were entered into a raffle for the chance to win a \$50 Amazon gift-card. In total, four gift cards were raffled. A total of 800 email addresses were used in order to recruit the targeted sample size ($N = 120$). It is important to note, that with regard to generalizability, the sample is limited to reflecting outcomes from first year college students ages 17-19 recruited from a large, midwestern research university.

Measures

Helicopter Parenting: To measure helicopter parenting, the Helicopter Parenting Scale (Lemoyne and Buchanan, 2011) was used. The Helicopter Parenting Scale (HPS) contains 10-items measured on a 5-point Likert scale that analyzes the extent to which individuals feel that their parents treat them in a controlling, pressuring, and transactional manner. The items attempt to capture a global assessment of their experience leading up to their college years (Okroy, 2016). The respondents were asked to reflect on the past in the present moment as the survey was delivered. The first-year college students were asked the extent to which they agreed with statements relating to their experience with their parents while growing up (Lemoyne and Buchanan, 2011). This measure consists of sample items such as “ I sometimes felt that my parents didn’t feel I could make my own decisions;”, and “ my parents often stepped in to solve life’s problems for me” (Buchanan

& Lemoyne, 2020). It has been hypothesized that helicopter parenting is a collection of habits that consist of appropriate parenting approaches taken to an inappropriate level (Lemoyne and Buchanan, 2011). This scale measures how this inappropriateness manifests itself in the parents' inability or unwillingness to allow their child to experience life's challenges independently (as seen through the perception of the first-year college student) (Lemoyne and Buchanan, 2011). The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for reliability was calculated as 0.71 in a study examining young college students (Okray, 2016). Another study points to the face validity of using this measure with emerging adults (Schriffrin et al. 2019). Items 3, 5, and 10 were reverse scored. Items 8, 9, and 10 were removed from the Helicopter Parenting Scale. In examining correlation, items 8, 9, and 10 did not correlate or measure the expected effect. Reliability for the current study using the new measure was found to have a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.832.

Attachment: To measure attachment the Experiences in Close Relationships-Relationships Structure Measure (ECR-RS) was used (Fraley et al., 2006). The ECR-RS assesses a total of anxious and avoidant attachment to a specific person assessed. The scale was used to measure the degree of anxiety and avoidance in the relationship between the parent and the child. In our evaluation of attachment in this study, we used 9 items to examine parent-child relationships, as reported by the child, rated on a 7-point scale. Some items were reversed scored. The reliability of this scale was established in a 2018 study in which Cronbach's alpha coefficients for attachment anxiety in mother, father, romantic partner, and close friend forms were .88, .90, .91, and .90, respectively,

and for attachment avoidance in mother, father, romantic partner, and close friend forms, the Cronbach alpha coefficients were .92, .90, .87, and .88, respectively (Karatas & Demir, 2018). This study further established the validity of the instrument cross-cultural and face validity (Karatas & Demir, 2018). Items 1-4 were reverse scored to ensure that the scale was measuring the expected effect. A reliability analysis was performed for items 7-9 and items 1-6. Reliability for the current study using the new measure was found to have a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.832.

Anxiety: To measure anxiety, we used the Generalized Anxiety Disorder 2-item (GAD-2). The GAD-2 includes the first two items of the GAD-7. The first item is, over the last two weeks how often have you been bothered by feeling nervous anxious or on edge. The second item is over the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by not being able to control or stop worrying (Spitzer et al, 2006). In a study that involved college students, Cronbach alpha coefficient were (>0.70 and ≤ 0.85) (Byrd-Bredbenner et al. 2021). This same study also confirmed the scales construct validity and face validity (Byrd-Bredbenner et al. 2021). A GAD-2 with the cut off score of ≥ 2 (Hughes et al. 2018).

Depression: To measure depression, the Patient Health Questionnaire-2 (PHQ-2) was used. The PHQ-2 includes the first two items of the PHQ-9 measure including: over the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems: little interest or pleasure in doing things: feeling down, depressed, or hopeless (Kroenke

& Spitzer, 2002). In a study that included a diverse sample of college students, the Cronbach's alpha values ranged from .86 to .93 across sample groups (Keum, et al. 2018). This same study demonstrated that the PHQ-2 had both construct validity and face validity (Keum, et al. 2018). A PHQ-2 score ranges from 0-6. A PHQ-2 cutoff score of 3 is considered the optimal cut point for screening purposes (Löwe et al. 2005).

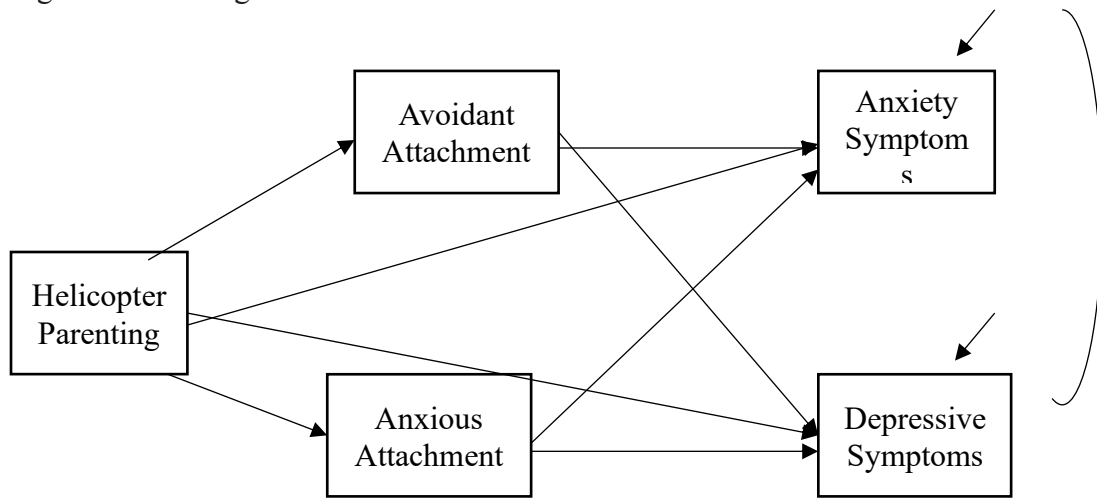
Controls

Demographic indicators were controlled for including gender, race/ethnicity, first generation status, and income.

Analytic Plan

This study used a cross sectional design. In this study, a quantitative analysis was performed to determine the associations among the scores of measured variables. To analyze survey data, Path Analysis was used (Wright, 1918). Path Analysis was used to assess the strength of the relationship between helicopter parenting, attachment anxiety or avoidance and mental health symptoms (i.e. anxiety and depression). Path analysis is an extension of multiple regression that allows for the examination of relationships between the variables of interest included in this study. Figure 1 depicts the model that was estimated. It shows helicopter parenting being directly associated with mental health symptoms, and indirectly associated with mental health symptoms through attachment indicators. The fit of this model was tested and compared to a model without the direct paths from helicopter parenting to determine mediation.

Figure 1. The Original Model



Chapter 3: Results

Correlation analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between variables in the model to determine which independent variables would be entered into the regression model. The correlations with means and standard deviations for the variables of interest are presented in Table 2. Helicopter parenting scores and anxious attachment scores were significantly correlated ($r(120) = .242, p < .05$), suggesting that helicopter parenting is associated with anxious attachment in first-year college students. Helicopter parenting scores and scores from the GAD-2 were significantly correlated, suggesting that helicopter parenting is associated with anxiety symptoms in first-year college students.

As reported in table 2, the results demonstrate a significant association between anxious attachment and the GAD-2, with ($r(120) = .406, p < .05$). This suggests that a correlation exists between anxious attachment and anxiety symptoms. No significant associations were found for avoidant attachment and helicopter parenting. No significant associations were found for avoidant attachment and the GAD-2 or PHQ-2.

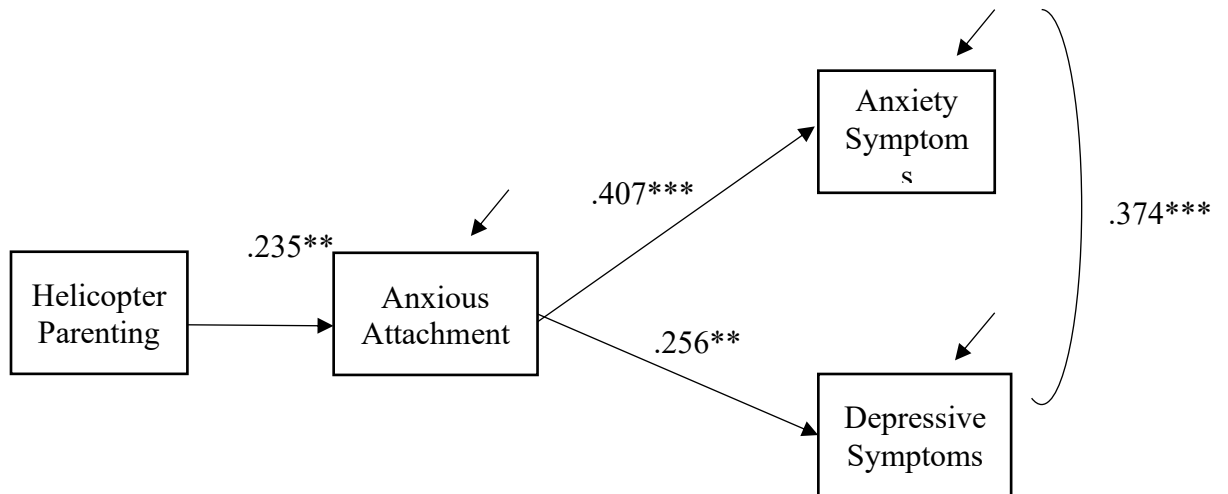
Table 2. Correlations with means and standard deviations for study variables

	1	2	3	4	5	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Helicopter parenting	–					2.9009	.86579
2. Avoid	.120	–				22.713	6.39595
3. Anxious	.242*	.134	–			14.3276	4.87902
4. Phqtot	.189	.095	.258**	–		2.3025	1.24570
5. Gadtot	.223*	.114	.406**	.430 **	–	2.6102	1.76400

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$. Path Analysis

Since there was no association between avoidant attachment and the other variables, this was removed from further analysis. A full model was estimated that included direct effects from helicopter parenting to anxiety and depression along with a direct effect to anxious attachment, and anxious attachment to anxiety symptoms and depressive symptoms. The degrees of freedom of this model were 0. To test for mediation, we estimated the full model for direct effects as well as for indirect effects through anxious attachment. We then tested a model without the direct effects from helicopter parenting to psychological symptoms. The chi-square for this model was 2.2 with 2 degrees of freedom. Since this chi-square was not significantly different than 0, this suggests we did not lose fit when removing the direct effects, which suggests mediation. Based on our test, there is an indirect effect for helicopter parenting and anxiety through anxious attachment. Therefore, our results suggests that helicopter parenting is associated with anxious attachment, which is then associated with psychological symptoms. Thus, it is possible that a parent that uses helicopter parenting with a college-aged child who has lower levels of anxious attachment would not have psychological symptoms. The model with standardized coefficients can be seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2. The final model with standardized estimates.



Chapter 4: Discussion

The first purpose of this study was to examine the effects of helicopter parenting on the mental health of first-year college-aged children, as measured by anxiety and depressive symptoms. The second purpose of this study was to analyze the effects of helicopter parenting on attachment, measured by the degree of anxiety and avoidance in the relationship between the parent and college-aged child. The overall aim of this study was to provide evidence that would support that proper therapeutic support could be put in place at colleges and universities to intervene so that helicopter parenting does not impede first-year college student's academic outcomes.

Of the original hypotheses posed, three of the hypotheses were supported by the data. There was an association between helicopter parenting and anxious attachment in first-year college students, as well as an association between helicopter parenting and anxiety symptoms in first-year college students. The other hypotheses were not supported. No significant correlations were found between helicopter parenting and avoidant attachment. No significant correlations were found between helicopter parenting and depressive symptoms. Regarding the final hypothesis: anxious and avoidant attachment will mediate the association between helicopter parenting and depressive and anxious symptoms, the results demonstrated that anxious attachment fully mediated the association between helicopter parenting and anxiety symptoms.

Given that results yielded a significant correlation between helicopter parenting and anxious attachment in first-year college students, as well as a significant correlation between helicopter parenting and anxiety symptoms in first-year college students, it is important to consider the possible impact that these associations may have on college

dropout levels. Higher levels of anxious attachment could affect college student's ability to form healthy bonds and connections, which in turn could affect students' overall mental health making it more challenging to perform in an academic setting. One study found that individuals transitioning to college that are unable to form or maintain secure attachment bonds face a more challenging transition, putting them at risk for attrition (Kurland & Siegel, 2013). Insecurely attached individuals tend to handle the anxiety and stress less aptly than secure individuals (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Increased levels of anxiety symptoms could have a similar impact in that anxiety could lead to overwhelm in first-year college students. The inability to navigate the transition and deal with various stressors may also lead to feelings of helplessness (Kurland & Siegel, 2013). This feeling of overwhelm may lead more students to drop out without proper resources and coping strategies to help manage this increase in anxiety. A 2023 study involving 290 first-year college students, attachment anxiety was found to be associated with higher burnout and lower engagement (Bumbacco & Scharfe, 2023). Furthermore, this study found that higher levels of burnout increased chances of college drop-out (Bumbacco & Scharfe, 2023).

Since helicopter parenting focuses on the relationship between the parent and the child, it is important that intervention strategies focus on treating the parent-child dyad. Colleges and universities should have additional support put in place to mediate the possible effects that helicopter parenting has on first-year college student's academic outcomes. Family therapy services should be offered to parents and students in which the parent child relationship is the focus of treatment. The increase in telehealth services since the pandemic minimizes the barriers to providing this type of treatment at colleges and universities. The accessibility of virtual platforms makes the distribution of this type of service easier to implement to parents and first-year college students.

Previous research on helicopter parenting has been limited. Some research suggests that helicopter parenting interferes with a child's ability to develop autonomy (Lemoyne, Terri & Buchanan, 2011). A 2011 study asserts that helicopter parenting prevents children from independently learning how to solve their own problems, given that helicopter parents tend to intervene on their children's behalf (Lemoyne, Terri & Buchanan, 2011). This study also looked at the effects of helicopter parenting on a child's well-being. Children's use of prescription medications to treat anxiety and depression were examined. Results demonstrated that the odds of a child having a prescription for anxiety or depression were 3.13 times more likely for every one unit increase in perceived helicopter parenting (Lemoyne, Terri & Buchanan, 2011).

A 2014 study (Schiffrin et al. 2014) found that helicopter parenting behaviors were related to higher levels of depression and decreased satisfaction with life. These results expand upon Lemoyne and Buchanan's 2011 study, in that data also demonstrated an increase in the use of prescription drugs for depression among college students who reported helicopter parenting (Schiffrin et al. 2014). Unlike Lemoyne and Buchanan's study, this 2014 study did not find a relationship between helicopter parenting and increased anxiety in children (Schiffrin et al. 2014).

In a 2017 study by Darlow, Norvilitis, and Schuetze, helicopter parenting was examined with regards to anxiety, depression, and self-efficacy in college aged students. Results from this study indicated that higher levels of helicopter parenting were associated with more symptoms of depression and with lower self-efficacy which, in turn were associated with lower levels of academic and social adjustment to college (Darlow, Norvilitis & Schuetze, 2017). This study differed from the current study and previous literature in that helicopter parenting did not predict anxiety (Darlow, Norvilitis & Schuetze, 2017). Darlow et al.'s study acknowledges that the strong correlation between

depression and anxiety in college students could have influenced the relationship between helicopter parenting and anxiety in prior studies (Darlow, Norvilitis & Schuetze, 2017). Darlow et al. (2017) also recognized the importance of doing further research given that the bivariate correlations between helicopter parenting and anxiety were not significant. Thus, this could be the result of the measure used to assess for anxiety.

A 2022 study collected data from 418 Chinese university students three times (in the second, fourth, and fourteenth months after enrollment) about perceived helicopter parenting, emotional issues (anxiety and depressive symptoms), and autonomy (Gao et al. 2022). The results of the cross-lagged panel models demonstrated that emotional problems in emerging adults predicted the later assessment of helicopter parenting, the reverse relationship between the two variables was not the case (Gao et al. 2022). Emerging adults emotional issues at time 1 reduced their autonomy at time 2, leading to increased helicopter parenting behaviors at time 3. However, helicopter parenting at time 1 did not affect emerging adults' autonomy at time 2, which also had no relation to their emotional problems at time 3 (Gao et al. 2022). These findings suggest that helicopter parenting is more likely a reaction to maladjustment in emerging adults than an influencing factor (Gao et al. 2022). This study demonstrates steps forwards in determining causality, which is important to know more about from an intervention standpoint. If the field has more insight into the direction of the relationship between helicopter parenting and mental health symptoms and attachment outcomes in emerging college-aged children, clinicians will gain clarity around how to effectively apply interventions to manage any distress and psychological symptoms associated with helicopter parenting. Further research is needed to clarify the direction of the relationship between helicopter parenting and psychological symptoms and attachment outcomes. It is important to invest in this research because it will help the field generate insight into

changes in parent-child interactions during the transition to adulthood and will promote the adaptation of emerging adults in college (Gao et al. 2022).

A rising number of studies have examined the impact of helicopter parenting on emerging adults (which has been identified as the age range of 18 to 29) (Arnett, 2015). Some studies have explored the impacts of helicopter parenting on emerging adults' school adaptations, career developments, and intimate relationships, aiming to determine whether parents' care and support go beyond what is needed and whether helicopter parenting has detrimental effects on emerging adult children (Gao et al. 2022). According to these studies, emerging adults who experienced helicopter parenting are more likely to have anxiety and depressive symptoms (Cui et al., 2018).

A 2020 study examined the effects of helicopter parenting on female college students specifically. Findings from this study build upon previous research that suggests a link between helicopter parenting and student's level of self-efficacy, which in turn fuels anxiety symptoms (Love et al. 2020). This study was limited to focusing on the link between helicopter parenting and anxiety among female university students (Love et al. 2020). Interestingly, this study found that only paternal, and not maternal helicopter parenting was associated with anxiety symptoms among female university students through competence and self-efficacy (Love et al. 2020). The strength of the association for mothers differed significantly from that of fathers (Love et al. 2020).. Future research should be geared towards testing gender by parent gender differences in these same associations (helicopter parenting from dad, anxious attachment to dad, and symptoms, versus all of that for mom, and then testing separately for males and females. This would add valuable information to the literature regarding the impact that gender has on the dynamics of helicopter parenting, mental health outcomes, and attachment-based outcomes.

Strengths, Limitations, & Future Research

A major strength of this study is that efforts were made to get a random representative sample. The sample is diverse in nature compared to if the sample had been collected using another method. The results of this study can be generalized to first-year college students at The Ohio State University. Another major strength of this study is its contribution to the literature of examining attachment in relation to helicopter parenting and anxiety and depression symptoms. While there is conflicting evidence in the previous literature about whether helicopter parenting is associated with depression or anxiety in college aged children, these studies did not account for attachment. Therefore, this study's focus on attachment provides significant findings that are helpful in conceptualizing helicopter parenting and mental health outcomes with the additional focus on associates with attachment.

One limitation of this study is that the measures only capture the perspective of the child but not the perspective of the parent(s). The Helicopter Parenting Scale utilized in this study captures only the emerging adult child's perspective of their parents' parenting style. This measure does not capture the parents' view. Another limitation is that because this study uses a cross-sectional design, inferences about causality are limited. Results could have been different if the subjects were assessed at various points in time. Although we are able to draw conclusions about associations between the variables, the direction of the relationship between those variables is not captured in this study.

Future Research should examine how demographics predict the helicopter parenting score to gain more insight into populations in which this parenting style is most prevalent. Future research should also expand upon the attachment elements that are presented in this study, to grow the field's understanding of the associations between

helicopter parenting and attachment outcomes for emerging college aged children. Future research should also account for testing gender by parent gender differences to explore how helicopter parenting might look different for various gender dynamics present within the parent-child relationship. A 2019 study revealed that competence and self-efficacy mediated the association between paternal helicopter parenting and female university students' anxiety symptoms (Love et al. 2019). No mediation effect was found for maternal helicopter parenting (Love et al. 2019). This same study found that paternal and maternal effects of helicopter parenting differed significantly (Love et al. 2019). Therefore, creating further insight into how gender roles impact the parent-child relationship and the emerging child's mental health and attachment outcomes is necessary towards understanding how to best construct interventions to address these presenting concerns in a clinical setting. While gender dynamics are starting to emerge in the literature surrounding helicopter parenting, further clarity could be gained around how gender impacts helicopter parenting and emerging adult outcomes.

An important clinical implication is to consider what makes the most sense from an intervention standpoint in terms of how to best provide support to emerging college-aged children with regards to helicopter parenting. Since there is no treatment that exists to intervene in the effects of helicopter parenting on emerging adult children, utilizing Attachment-Based Family Therapy might be a logical choice for providing a framework for treatment. Attachment-Based Family Therapy is an empirically supported treatment that promotes the significance of meaningful and secure relationships on mental health (Diamond et al. 2016). In this model, the therapy is grounded in attachment theory and provides an interpersonal, process-oriented, trauma-focused approach to treatment (Diamond et al. 2016). Attachment-Based Family Therapy offers a clear structure and road map to help therapist quickly address attachment ruptures that lie at the core of

family conflict (Diamond et al. 2016). Several clinical trials and process studies have demonstrated empirical support for the model and its proposed mechanisms of change (Diamond et al. 2016). Therefore, Attachment-Based Family Therapy should be considered as a possible method of treatment for intervening in the parent-child relationship in family dynamics where helicopter parenting is present.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Emerging adults often encounter a variety of specific and complex challenges in the process of differentiation (Gao et al. 2022). With the rise of the impacts of helicopter parenting in emerging adulthood research (Arnett, 2015), understanding the associations between this parenting style and mental health outcomes generally is significant in furthering mental health research. Creating targeted interventions to mediate the effects of helicopter parenting on emerging adults' mental health outcomes, which thus far the research measures through anxiety and depressive symptoms, is incredibly important in providing emerging adults and college aged children the support that they need to succeed into adulthood (Gao et al. 2022).

As this study points out, it is also important to consider the impact that helicopter parenting has on attachment outcomes for emerging adults. This is important because forming attachments and maintaining relationships, and attachment theory specifically, are considered essential factors in determining mental health outcomes into adulthood (Widom et al. 2018). For this reason, Attachment-Based Family Therapy provides a potential framework for colleges and universities to incorporate future mental health support services that intervene in the parent-child relationships in which helicopter parenting is present. The overarching goal of this study was to further understand helicopter parenting and its associations with college aged children's mental health and attachment outcomes. Understanding these associations is critical and further research on

the topic is necessary to ensure that colleges and universities are intervening appropriately and effectively to provide additional support as needed to protect student's academic and psychological outcomes.

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