Hovering or Grounded?: Exploring Helicopter Parenting as a Valid Construct

Adam M. Volungis (Ph.D.), Suyi Liu (B.A.), Dena Whittle (B.S.), Sherliz Henriquez, & Katherine Schmidt

Presented at the 85th Annual Convention of the Eastern Psychological Association
Boston, MA, March 14th, 2014
What’s The Big Deal?

- Is helicoptering parenting really a unique dimension that deserves further attention?
  - A consequence of media sensationalistic reporting?

- Helicopter parenting may not have negative outcomes; in fact, perhaps positive outcomes (Fingerman et al., 2012; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012)

- Or maybe, there are consistent, long-term negative effects from helicopter parenting (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011; Padilla-Walker & Neslon, 2012)

- Why such varying differences in findings?
  - Media’s negatively biased portrayal of parenting?
  - (In)validity of helicopter parenting as a construct?
Presence in the Media

- Extreme Cases:
  - The Boston Globe
    - BU
    - BC
    - Simmons
  - NBC News
    - Reed Family
  - CNN
    - Parental Interference with job interviews
Associated Negative Effects

- NBC News:
  - “Baby on Board” generation
  - Children’s loss of competence
  - Contagious

- CNN
  - “my dad thinks”
Popular Media Portrayal

Three Major Themes of Helicopter Parenting

- **“Intrusiveness” “Hovering”** contact and guidance in multiple areas (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012)


- **“Support” “Protection”** benevolent intentions NOT manipulation (Segrin, et al. 2012)
Operationalization Measures

- **Parental Involvement in decision making** (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012)

- **Frequency of different forms of parental support** (Fingerman et al. 2012)

- **Children’s perception of parental control** (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011)

- **Parenting style, Family environment, Parent-child communication, etc.** (Segrin, et al. 2012)
Outcome Measures

- (1) **Sense of well-being** (Fingerman et al. 2012 & LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011)

- (2) **Sense of identity as adult** (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012)
  - Developmental demands (Emerging adulthood)

- (3) **Social relationships** (Segrin, et al. 2012)

Cultural or Maladaptive?

- **Well-Being**
  - Guided by cultural expectations
  - The root of childrearing practices

- **Subjective**
  - Varies across cultural beliefs

- **Disparity**
  - What is normative in one culture may be inappropriate in another.
  - Hence, “helicopter parenting” may be viewed differently in various cultural contexts.
Parents’ View

- **Cultural Norms & Experiences**
  - Cognitive Appraisals
  - Emotions
  - Relational Schemas
    (Ingen, More & Fuemmeler, 2008)

- **Motivating Factors**
  - Parents desire for child to succeed
    (Segrin et al, 2012)
  - Unique cultural cues that promise success

**For Example: Chinese Culture**
- Importance of education
- Respect authority
- Devotion to parents
  (Campen & Russell, 2010)
Child’s View

- Perception of Parental Control
  - Some aspects of “parental control” can only be evaluated by the child’s personal experience (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012)
  - Subjective experience
  - Cultural norms

For example: Chinese Culture
- Relationship with mother is based on respect and honor for elders and obligation to family
  (Campen & Russell, 2010)
Questions to Consider

- Can we accurately define helicopter parenting?

- Is it universally applicable?
  - If “No,” how to move forward/future considerations

- Does it even exist?
  - Conflicting research findings
    - Adaptive/Maladaptive
  - Rehashing of previous terms?
    - Authoritarian