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Hovering Is Not Helping: Relationships among Helicopter Parenting, Attachment, Academic Outcomes, and Mental Health in College Students

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Abstract: Helicopter parenting (or overparenting) refers to developmentally inappropriate or intrusive tactics to control a child's behavior. Helicopter parents are usually trying to help their children, but their behavior has been associated with adverse academic, adjustment, and mental health outcomes in older children (i.e., adolescents, young adults), who should be developing more autonomy. The current study examined potential associations between helicopter parenting, attachment security, and academic and mental health outcomes in college students, hypothesizing that higher rates of helicopter parenting would be associated with more insecure attachment with parental figures and closest friends, poorer mental health (i.e., higher rates of depression and/or anxiety), and reduced academic motivation, performance, and self-efficacy. Our sample of 135 college students completed measures of anxiety, depression, and somatization, academic self-efficacy and motivation, perceptions of parental involvement, and dimensions of attachment in multiple relationships (i.e., mother, father, and closest friend). As expected, the bivariate and regression analyses revealed that higher levels of parental involvement (i.e., helicopter parenting) predicted significantly more insecure parental and peer attachment, greater internalizing, and lower effort regulation among college students.

Keywords: overparenting; helicopter parenting; attachment; insecure attachment; self-efficacy; depression; anxiety; college students; emerging adults; mental health



Citation: Miller, R.W.; Rainbolt, C.L.; Tallents, S. Hovering Is Not Helping: Relationships among Helicopter Parenting, Attachment, Academic Outcomes, and Mental Health in College Students. *Youth* **2024**, *4*, 260–271. <https://doi.org/10.3390/youth4010018>

Academic Editors: Terese Glatz and Selma Salihovic

Received: 13 October 2023

Revised: 20 January 2024

Accepted: 2 February 2024

Published: 12 February 2024



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1. Introduction

Helicopter parenting, or overparenting, refers to a distinctive style of parenting [1] involving the use of developmentally inappropriate, overly involved, and intrusive parenting practices. Helicopter parenting often involves excessive proffering of parental advice and guidance, copious assistance (e.g., financial, social) in matters that children may be able to resolve independently, and the removal of barriers and problems that might otherwise provide a child with opportunities to learn and grow [2]. Qualitative accounts of helicopter parenting describe behaviors ranging from negotiating adult children's housing and college internships to accompanying them on job interviews and completing job applications on their behalf [3,4].

As a construct, helicopter parenting appears to be distinct from other familiar parenting styles such as those first introduced by Baumrind [5,6]; however, there are some similarities between this and more commonly studied styles of parenting. Notably, helicopter parents tend to exert inappropriate levels of control on their children, somewhat like authoritarian parents in the traditional Baumrind typology. However, unlike authoritarian parents, it has also been found that helicopter parenting in emerging adulthood may actually be related to patterns of indulgent parenting (which is more similar to Baumrind's permissive style of parenting) earlier in adolescence and childhood [7]. Other studies [8] found that overcontrolling helicopter parents also tended to be surprisingly warm with their children, something which is uncommon amongst parents with a more traditionally authoritarian parenting style.

Generally, most helicopter parents appear to be well-intentioned; they seem to want the best for their children [9]. Such parents are often worried about their children's wellbeing and may regret their own past mistakes and lost opportunities [2]. Hoping to help their children avoid the same negative experiences [2], helicopter parents may pressure their children to make the most of opportunities, advocate for them to have better opportunities and experiences (e.g., higher pay, better scholarships), or try to reduce their children's discomfort or increase their perceived safety and wellbeing [4]. Parental involvement is crucial for children's healthy development [10], and many of the behaviors described above may actually be beneficial for young children. Nevertheless, such parental interventions become inappropriate as children enter older adolescence and emerging adulthood in their late teens and twenties. During these developmental eras, older children are preparing to enter the world of adult roles and responsibilities. Thus, fostering independence and the development of adult competence is imperative [11]. Helicopter parenting during adolescence and emerging adulthood may deprive children of important opportunities to engage in behaviors that would facilitate their successful transition into adulthood [12]. Therefore, while helicopter parenting may theoretically occur at any developmental stage, it is most concerning during these stages.

Both mothers and fathers have been found to engage in helicopter parenting; however, researchers seem to differ across the literature regarding the importance they place on comparing potential gender differences in helicopter parenting, and there is considerable variation in the methods researchers have used to examine helicopter parenting among mothers and fathers. Not unlike the broader parenting literature, much of the extant literature on helicopter parenting has focused primarily on mothers [13,14]. However, other studies have collapsed measures of helicopter parenting across both mothers and fathers [1,15], and some more recent investigations have focused on examining gender differences in helicopter parenting [8]. Studies that have examined differences in helicopter parenting among mothers and fathers have often found that mothers more commonly engage in these parenting behaviors than fathers [1,16–18]. For example, in one such study [8], mothers were about twice as likely to engage in helicopter parenting as fathers.

The mismatch between the developmental demands of parenting children in later adolescence and emerging adulthood and the behaviors of helicopter parents seems to negatively affect children, despite the best efforts and intentions of helicopter parents. Although some investigations have suggested that the effects of helicopter parenting may be negligible [19] or even positive [20], the broader literature on helicopter parenting indicates many concerning potential effects including reduced self-efficacy [13,20,21], diminished motivation [22], greater mental health issues [7], and problems with relationships [13]. First, helicopter parenting appears to be associated with reduced academic self-efficacy [13,21–24]. Young people who experience helicopter parenting appear to be less confident about their abilities to succeed academically. Lower self-efficacy, in turn, has been associated with mental health difficulties such as depression and anxiety [20], lower academic performance and adjustment [21], and social problems such as alienation and distrust of peers [21,23]. Problems with academic self-efficacy may even cascade into workplace behaviors. For example, a study [25] found that overparented college students were less successful in simulated workplace scenarios, exhibiting more maladaptive behaviors such as disregarding deadlines and mishandling workplace commitments. Meanwhile, there was no such connection between appropriate parental involvement and these maladaptive workplace responses.

Other studies have found that overparented college students are more likely to have extrinsic motivation to learn, rather than intrinsic [9,26], and are therefore more likely to attribute their successes and failures to external influences (e.g., parents). For example, one investigation [9] demonstrated that helicopter parenting predicted an external locus of control, which in turn, was associated with reduced emotional wellbeing. Likewise, others [22] found associations between helicopter parenting and reduced intrinsic motivation as well as greater perfectionist discrepancy, with overparented students being more likely

to feel that they had fallen short of their own expectations of their academic performance. Overparented undergraduate students were also less engaged in school [1].

Helicopter parenting is also associated with reduced autonomy and competence among emerging adults and adolescents. The extant literature suggests studies that the negative impact of helicopter parenting is largely due to emerging adults feeling that their autonomy is limited, leaving them with fewer opportunities to practice adult competence [1,27–29]. In a study of high school students [30], researchers found that children who experienced helicopter parenting were more likely to procrastinate, which in turn, was associated with reductions in critical academic skills such as performance monitoring, goal-setting, and motivation to pursue goals.

In addition to problems with self-efficacy, motivation, and competence, college students who experienced helicopter parenting tended to report higher levels of neuroticism [31] and other mental health issues. For example, several studies [7,18] found that helicopter parenting was associated with greater internalizing (i.e., depression, anxiety, loss of control) as well as reduced hopefulness and optimism [26]. Others have demonstrated links between helicopter parenting and emotional issues such as excessive interpersonal sensitivity (e.g., self-worth depending on others' evaluations) [18], emotional dysregulation [7], feelings of dissatisfaction with life [7,14], and reduced general wellbeing [28]. Relatedly, higher levels of helicopter parenting were related to reduced self-control in emerging adults, which partially mediated the relationship between helicopter parenting and feelings of burnout, exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced self-efficacy [24]. Finally, overparented college students were less adept at coping with anxiety-provoking stressors [31].

The effects of helicopter parenting may also affect the quality of the parent–child relationship and relationships with peers and romantic partners. Notably, some studies have found associations between helicopter parenting and insecure attachment in emerging adults [32]. Individuals who experienced higher levels of helicopter parenting were more likely to express a worry about abandonment in the parent–child relationship—concerns that seemed to spill over into their relationships with romantic partners, even to the extent that young people who experienced helicopter parenting were less likely to be married [33]. Such trends are concerning, as people who have more insecure attachment (i.e., higher anxiety and/or avoidance) often report higher levels of mental health issues such as depression [34]. Finally, a study found associations between helicopter parenting and poorer peer attachment [23], which suggests that helicopter parenting may impact relationships outside of the parent–child relationship as well.

For the current study, the aforementioned connections between helicopter parenting and mental health, academic, and attachment issues are the most relevant, but it is also important to note that the extant literature on helicopter parenting has found associations between the parenting style and a variety of other issues for emergent adults. For example, children of helicopter parents tended to report less authenticity (e.g., self-knowledge, susceptibility to others' influence), which in turn was associated with greater levels of depression in college students [34]. Additionally, overparented children reported worse communication with their parents, which in turn predicted reduced satisfaction with their family relationships. These children also reported a greater sense of self-entitlement [35] combined with reduced self-worth [36] and self-control. Overparented children were also more likely to report problems that were both personal (e.g., with friends and self-image) and parental (e.g., wishing for more autonomy from parental demands and expectations) [36].

In the current study, we sought to further explore the relationship between helicopter parenting and problems that are experienced by emerging adult college students. Notably, several previous studies on attachment in emerging adults who experienced helicopter parenting sampled broadly from the US population but they did not specifically examine the effects on young people in college [32,33]. Because helicopter parenting often appears particularly related to the college experience [3,4], we believed that this was an important subgroup of emerging adults to study. Furthermore, we wished to examine the relationships

among variables that are commonly conceptualized as outcomes of helicopter parenting such as associations between insecure attachment and internalizing issues. Previous studies also examined the impact of helicopter parenting on romantic relationships, but the effect on insecure attachment in close platonic relationships has yet to be investigated. Thus, the current study sought to develop the literature on attachment and helicopter parenting among college students while also examining relationships between helicopter parenting and important mental health and academic outcomes. Although we planned to investigate potential differences between helicopter parenting in mothers and fathers, we did not have any specific hypotheses about the nature of those differences; however, based on recent previous studies [8], it seemed likely to us that maternal helicopter parenting would be more relevant to emerging adults than paternal helicopter parenting. The researchers hypothesized that helicopter parenting would be associated with the following:

H1. *More insecure attachment to parents and close friends, operationalized as more anxiety about and avoidance of those relationships.*

H2. *More problems related to academic motivation and self-efficacy.*

H3. *Poorer mental health outcomes.*

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants

One-hundred and thirty-five college students participated in the current study. Students were enrolled in psychology classes at a small, southern, four-year undergraduate liberal arts college. Participants were mostly full-time 'traditional' (i.e., young adult, full-time students) college students in emerging adulthood, between the ages of 18 and 24 (mean age = 19.54 years, SD = 2.28). One student over the age of thirty took the survey but was excluded from analysis because they were not in emerging adulthood. A plurality (49.2%) of our participants identified as female, 47.1% identified as male, and 3.7% identified as non-binary or genderfluid. Students were also given the option to identify their ethnicity, and most self-identified as Caucasian (75.0%), while 9.6% identified as African American, 2.9% identified as Latinx, and 12.5% identified as multiethnic or chose not to report their ethnicity. Both upper- and lower-division students participated, with 45.6% first-years, 10.3% sophomores, 25.7% juniors, and 16.2% seniors participating in the study. On average, participants indicated that their families were of moderate socioeconomic status, with participants reporting a mean financial wellbeing score of 3.21 (SD = 1.00) on a scale of 1 (lowest socioeconomic status) to 5 (highest socioeconomic status). Most (74.3%) participants came from two-parent homes with a mother and a father while 18.3% came from single-parent households (most of which were headed by a single mother).

2.2. Procedure

All procedures were approved by the college's Institutional Review Board prior to data collection. Students in our sample were enrolled in introductory and upper division psychology courses. Students received course credit for their participation. Students were provided with a link to our survey's Google Forms and their course learning management system. After following the link, students were provided with a description of the study and its broad goals, and they were then asked to indicate whether they consented to participate. All participants indicated their informed consent prior to completing the survey. Students were not required to sign into their Google accounts to participate, nor were emails or other identifying information collected. Participants received their course credit by submitting a screenshot of the "Survey Completed" screen to their course professors.

2.3. Measures

2.3.1. Parenting

College students reported their experiences with parents via the Consolidated Helicopter Parenting Scale (CHPS) [14]. The CHPS is composed of 10 items that are used to assess emerging adults' perception of their parents' overinvolvement and intrusive parenting practices in their lifetime (e.g., "My parent supervised my every move growing up", "I think my parent is too overly involved in my life", "My parent discourages me from making decisions that they disagree with"). Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement on a scale of 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 7 ("Strongly Agree"). Each participant's responses for items were summed into a final score, with higher scores indicating greater levels of perceived helicopter parenting behavior. Interrater reliability on the CHPS subscales was high for both mothers ($\alpha = 0.912$) and fathers ($\alpha = 0.912$).

2.3.2. Attachment

Participants completed the Experiences in Close Relationships-Relationship Structures Questionnaire (ECR-RS) [37]. The ECR-RS is a self-report questionnaire composed of nine items that are used to assess adults' current attachment in three close relationships (i.e., mother, father, close friend). The ECR combined subscales for avoidance of and anxiety about close relationships. The avoidance items measured the extent to which participants experience discomfort when opening up to others (e.g., "I prefer not to show this person how I feel deep down", "I don't feel comfortable opening up to this person"). The anxiety items measured the extent to which participants are worried about attachment-related concerns (e.g., "I worry that this person won't care about me as much as I care about them", "I'm afraid this person will abandon me"). Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each item on a scale of 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 7 ("Strongly Agree"). Item scores were then summed into total scores for relationships with fathers, mothers, and peers. Higher scores indicated more attachment problems in a given relationship. Internal reliability was high for paternal ($\alpha = 0.896$), maternal ($\alpha = 0.884$), and peer attachment ($\alpha = 0.846$).

2.3.3. Mental health

To measure symptoms of internalizing disorders, participants completed the Brief Symptoms Inventory 18 (BSI-18) [38]. The BSI is an 18-item measure that includes subscales for depression (e.g., "Feeling hopeless about the future"), anxiety (e.g., "Nervousness or shakiness inside"), and somatization (e.g., "Numbness or tingling in parts of your body"). Participants indicate the degree to which each item distressed them in the last week on a scale of 0 ("Not at all") to 4 ("Extremely"). Item scores were summed into a total score, with higher scores indicating greater levels of internalizing mental health issues. Internal reliability was high for the combined global symptoms inventory, which included all 18 items from the BSI ($\alpha = 0.941$).

2.3.4. Academic motivation, anxiety, regulation, and performance

Finally, participants responded to a shortened version of the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) [39]. Participants responded to 4 items pertaining to intrinsic motivation (e.g., "I prefer course material that really challenges me so I can learn new things"), 4 items pertaining to extrinsic motivation (e.g., "I want to do well in my classes because it is important to show my ability to my family, friends, employer, or others"), 8 items pertaining to academic self-efficacy (e.g., "I believe I will receive excellent grades in my classes"), 5 items related to test anxiety (e.g., "When I take a test, I think about how poorly I am doing compared with other students"), and 4 items about their ability to self-regulate when encountering academic frustration and challenges (e.g., "I work hard to do well in my classes even if I don't like what we are doing"). Each statement was scored on a scale of 1 ("Not at all true of me") to 7 ("Very true of me"). Scores for each item of each

subscale were summed, with higher scores on each of the subscales indicating a greater degree of motivation, self-efficacy, anxiety, and self-regulation. Inter-item reliability was acceptable to good for the intrinsic motivation ($\alpha = 0.666$), extrinsic motivation ($\alpha = 0.721$), self-efficacy ($\alpha = 0.871$), test anxiety ($\alpha = 0.870$), and effort-regulation ($\alpha = 0.737$) subscales. We also asked students to self-report their current grade point average (GPA) as a measure of academic performance.

2.3.5. Covariates for age and socioeconomic status

We asked participants to report their ages, as some research [40] indicates that as adult children age, they are less likely to experience helicopter parenting. We also asked participants to report perceived socioeconomic status via an item that asked them to “[R]ate your family’s financial well-being on a scale of 1 (not very well-off) to 5 (very well-off)”. Average perceived socioeconomic status and ages are reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Correlations among parenting, attachment, academic, and mental health variables.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Mother HP	--													
2. Father HP	0.448***	--												
3. Mother IA	0.447***	0.315***	--											
4. Father IA	0.180*	0.226*	0.367***	--										
5. Peer IA	0.255**	0.288**	0.328***	0.231**	--									
6. Effort Reg.	-0.278**	-0.332***	-0.092	-0.137	0.162†	--								
7. Test Anxiety	0.238**	0.265**	0.266**	0.207*	0.207*	-0.156†	--							
8. Self-Efficacy	-0.231**	-0.128	-0.125	-0.166†	-0.096	0.427***	-0.383***	--						
9. Int. Motivation	-0.075	-0.126	0.017	0.031	-0.074	0.391***	-0.103	0.497***	--					
10. Ext. Motivation	-0.085	-0.131	-0.142	-0.076	-0.086	0.173*	0.297***	0.287***	0.184*	--				
11. Internalizing	0.343***	0.379***	0.420***	0.192*	0.256**	-0.249**	0.584***	-0.299***	-0.156†	0.101	--			
12. Age	-0.044	-0.080	-0.075	-0.095	0.001	0.053	-0.022	-0.019	0.108	-0.069	-0.068	--		
13. SES	0.173*	0.159†	-0.001	-0.064	-0.098	-0.050	0.121	-0.121	-0.087	0.046	0.092	0.103	--	
14. GPA	-0.111	-0.138	0.058	-0.109	-0.048	0.437***	-0.099	0.371***	0.236**	0.139	-0.023	-0.100	-0.053	--
Mean	33.98	28.07	5.19	6.32	5.49	19.03	23.77	38.64	18.27	22.51	27.92	19.54	3.21	3.19
SD	13.93	14.12	2.52	3.08	2.52	4.75	7.85	8.12	4.09	4.19	17.94	1.52	1.00	0.57
MIN	10.00	10.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	7.00	5.00	10.00	7.00	5.00	0.00	18.00	1.00	1.60
MAX	70.00	70.00	13.00	14.00	14.00	28.00	35.00	56.00	28.00	28.00	72.00	24.00	5.00	4.00

Note. HP = helicopter parenting; IA = insecure attachment; Reg. = regulation; Int. = intrinsic; Ext. = extrinsic; SES = socioeconomic status; GPA = grade point average; † $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

3. Results

3.1. Preliminary Bivariate Analyses

We used IBM’s SPSS Statistics (Version 29) to conduct all analyses. Our preliminary bivariate analyses are summarized in Table 1. Notably, corresponding with our first hypothesis, we found that helicopter parenting was significantly associated with insecure attachment. We also found that paternal helicopter parenting was significantly positively correlated with insecurity about the father-child, mother-child, and close friend relationships. Maternal helicopter parenting was significantly correlated with insecurity in the mother-child and peer relationships. Related to our second hypothesis, we found that helicopter parenting was significantly correlated with lower effort regulation, greater test anxiety, and reduced self-efficacy. Finally, helicopter parenting was correlated with internalizing symptoms.

3.2. Primary Analyses

Our primary analyses consisted of a series of hierarchical linear regression analyses. Maternal and paternal helicopter parenting were significantly correlated ($r = 0.448$, $p < 0.001$), but a paired samples t-test indicated that there were significant differences between helicopter parenting in mothers and fathers, $t(122) = 4.48$, $p < 0.001$, with mothers engaging in significantly more helicopter parenting than fathers. This finding was

consistent with prior research [41]; thus, like previous studies we opted to consider these variables separately. We also centered each predictor variable (i.e., maternal and paternal helicopter parenting) around its mean prior to computing regression analyses. Finally, for each regression analysis we added SES and students' age as entered as covariate control variables in step 1. Maternal and paternal helicopter parenting were added in step 2, except for the models that focused on maternal and paternal attachment as outcome variables. In these cases, we only included the helicopter parenting variables for the respective parent (e.g., only paternal, not maternal, helicopter parenting is used in the model predicting paternal attachment). All other regression models included both maternal and paternal helicopter parenting. In these models, significant coefficients represent the influence of maternal or paternal variables over and above the influence of the other parent. A significant change in R² at step 2 indicated that helicopter parenting accounted for variance above and beyond the influence of control variables. Coefficients that are reported for step 2 of each regression analysis represent a full model with all predictors present. Throughout our analyses, the covariates for age and socioeconomic status added at step 1 did not account for significant variance in our outcome variables; however, results are summarized in Tables 2–4.

Table 2. Hierarchical regression analyses for maternal, paternal, and peer attachment.

Predictors	Paternal Attachment				Maternal Attachment				Peer Attachment			
	ΔF	ΔR ²	β	SE B	ΔF	ΔR ²	β	SE B	ΔF	ΔR ²	β	SE B
Step 1	1.901	0.031			0.166	0.003			0.0400	0.007		
Age			−0.131	0.119			−0.029	0.097			−0.012	0.097
SES			−0.110	0.296			−0.041	0.236			−0.081	0.248
Step 2	6.065	0.047			33.611	0.217			7.537	0.116		
Paternal HP			0.221 *	0.020							0.241 *	0.017
Maternal HP							0.475 ***	0.015			0.163	0.018

Note. * $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 3. Hierarchical regression analyses of self-efficacy and motivation.

Predictors	Self-Efficacy				Intrinsic Motivation				Extrinsic Motivation			
	ΔF	ΔR ²	β	SE B	ΔF	ΔR ²	β	SE B	ΔF	ΔR ²	β	SE B
Step 1	0.625	0.011			0.402	0.007			0.025	0.000		
Age			0.083	0.311			0.068	0.158			0.018	0.153
SES			−0.065	0.794			−0.050	0.408			0.009	0.391
Step 2	1.597	0.027			0.683	0.012			1.750	0.030		
Paternal HP			−0.050	0.058			−0.119	0.030			−0.194	0.028
Maternal HP			−0.139	0.060			0.025	0.030			0.081	0.029

Table 4. Hierarchical regression analyses of test anxiety, effort regulation, and internalizing.

Predictors	Test Anxiety				Effort Regulation				Internalizing			
	ΔF	ΔR ²	β	SE B	ΔF	ΔR ²	β	SE B	ΔF	ΔR ²	β	SE B
Step 1	1.234	0.021			0.812	0.014			1.335	0.022		
Age			−0.106	0.303			0.115	0.182			−0.148	0.697
SES			0.102	0.774			0.023	0.464			0.027	1.779
Step 2	4.346	0.069			8.338	0.127			15.075	0.204		
Paternal HP			0.181	0.055			−0.264 **	0.032			0.280 **	0.117
Maternal HP			0.132	0.057			−0.157	0.033			0.258 **	0.120

Note. ** $p < 0.01$.

For paternal insecure attachment, helicopter parenting accounted for additional variance in paternal insecure attachment, above and beyond the influence of covariates

($\Delta R^2 = 0.047$, $F(1, 118) = 6.07$, $p = 0.015$). Paternal helicopter parenting was significantly associated with insecure paternal attachment ($\beta = 0.221$, $p = 0.015$). The full model with all independent variables entered was significant ($R^2 = 0.078$, $F(3, 118) = 3.343$, $p = 0.022$). See Table 2.

For maternal insecure attachment, helicopter parenting accounted for additional variance in maternal insecure attachment, above and beyond the influence of covariates ($\Delta R^2 = 0.217$, $F(1, 121) = 33.661$, $p < 0.001$). Maternal helicopter parenting was significantly associated with insecure maternal attachment ($\beta = 0.475$, $p < 0.001$). The full model with all independent variables entered was significant ($R^2 = 0.220$, $F(3, 121) = 11.344$, $p < 0.001$). See Table 2.

For insecure peer attachment, helicopter parenting accounted for additional variance in peer insecure attachment, above and beyond the influence of covariates ($\Delta R^2 = 0.116$, $F(2, 114) = 7.537$, $p < 0.001$). Paternal helicopter parenting was significantly associated with insecure peer attachment ($\beta = 0.241$, $p = 0.016$), but maternal helicopter parenting was not significantly associated with peer attachment. The full model with all independent variables entered was significant ($R^2 = 0.123$, $F(4, 114) = 3.991$, $p = 0.005$). See Table 2.

Our regression analyses for intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, self-regulation, and test-anxiety did not indicate any significant associations between said variables and helicopter parenting; however, the results are summarized in Tables 3 and 4. Nevertheless, for effort regulation, control variables entered in step 1 did not account for significant variance, nor did either control variable account for the unique variance in effort regulation. In step 2, helicopter parenting accounted for additional variance in effort regulation ($\Delta R^2 = 0.127$, $F(2, 113) = 8.338$, $p < 0.001$). Paternal helicopter parenting was significantly associated with effort regulation ($\beta = -0.264$, $p = 0.008$), but maternal helicopter parenting was not significantly associated with effort regulation. The full model with all independent variables entered was significant ($R^2 = 0.141$, $F(4, 117) = 4.627$, $p = 0.002$). See Table 3.

Finally, for internalizing symptoms, helicopter parenting accounted for additional variance in internalizing, above and beyond the influence of covariates ($\Delta R^2 = 0.204$, $F(2, 114) = 15.075$, $p < 0.001$). Paternal helicopter parenting was significantly associated with internalizing ($\beta = 0.282$, $p = 0.003$), and maternal helicopter parenting was also significantly related to internalizing. ($\beta = 0.258$, $p = 0.006$). The full model with all independent variables entered was significant ($R^2 = 0.200$, $F(4, 114) = 8.367$, $p < 0.001$). See Table 4.

4. Discussion

The current investigation further explored the impact of helicopter parenting on emerging adults. We found support for our hypotheses that helicopter parenting (a) was linked to significantly more problems with attachment, (b) predicted more academic issues, and (c) was associated with more mental health problems including depression, anxiety, and somatization.

A key consideration about helicopter parenting is that it is developmentally inappropriate; thus, parents who helicopter parent, regardless of their intentions, are often violating their children's expectations about how they should be treated and what the parent-child relationship should become in early adulthood. Notably, our study suggests that such parental behavior may undermine parents' relationship with their emerging adult children. Young people who experienced helicopter parenting were more likely to worry about their relationships with parents and were less likely to come to their parents in times of emotional need or discuss their problems with their parents. In this case, for many parents who engage in helicopter parenting behaviors, their children's feelings about the relationship are likely the opposite of what they would like, with young people reporting more avoidance and distrust of their overly-involved parents. Unfortunately, these problems also seemed to spill over into peer relationships. Overparented students were also more likely to experience worry and avoidance in their relationship with their closest friend. Based on the results of this investigation, it was unclear whether such peer problems were a result of problematic relationship expectations or dynamics learned from the parent-child rela-

tionship or were more related to parental attempts to manage or control peer relationships (e.g., parents expressing disapproval of friends). Future investigations may benefit from further exploring this dynamic.

Extant research on helicopter parenting has, as we discussed earlier, strongly supported the idea that helicopter parenting would be associated with academic challenges [19,22]. Our results, however, were mixed regarding the relationship between helicopter parenting and academic outcomes. Notably, students in our sample did not report reduced self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, or grades related to higher levels of helicopter parenting. Instead, we found helicopter parenting to be associated with several less-explored academic variables, including effort regulation and academic anxiety. Students in our study were less likely to report persevering or thriving when faced with academic challenges, and they were more likely to experience significant stress and worry about their academic performance. It is also worth noting that although our investigation did not find that helicopter parenting was associated with academic issues, it also did not suggest that such an approach to parenting was associated with any benefits for college students. This finding, while unexpected, is nevertheless important, as helicopter parents themselves often seem to be operating on the assumption that their interventions will aid their children and contribute to their success in college [2,3].

As expected, we also found clear support for the idea that helicopter parenting predicts more internalizing of mental health challenges. Students who experienced more helicopter parenting were also more likely to experience symptoms of depression, anxiety, and somatization. These findings further support the conclusions of previous studies [7,18], but our study also suggests that these problems may sometimes manifest physically for students in the form of somatic symptoms such as nausea, numbness, or weakness. This finding may provide a valuable context to previous work [13] which found that helicopter parenting was associated with poorer physical health in college students. Our investigation suggests that some of these physical issues that are encountered by children of helicopter parents may be, at least in part, psychosomatic.

An interesting finding was that paternal, but not maternal, helicopter parenting seemed to be the most relevant factor when predicting peer attachment and self-regulation. Such differences were especially surprising since, similarly to other studies [8,16,27], we found that rates of helicopter parenting were significantly higher among mothers compared to fathers. Another possibility is that mothers may be more likely to engage in helicopter parenting while still being very warm. Although we did not measure warmth in the current study, previous work has found that mothers are often warmer than fathers with their emerging adult children [8,42]. However, we also speculate that this finding may suggest that while helicopter parenting is less common among fathers, those fathers who do engage in such parenting practices may have a particularly pronounced impact on their children, perhaps because it is less expected. Another difference that we found, which is consistent with van Ingen et al.'s 2015 study [13], is that maternal helicopter parenting had a stronger relationship to lower levels of self-efficacy compared to paternal helicopter parenting, though this finding in our study was limited to a bivariate association (see Table 1).

While the current study adds valuably to the growing literature on helicopter parenting in emerging adults, it did have some limitations. First, our study features cross-sectional examination of correlates between helicopter parenting and other relevant variables in emerging adult college students. In future studies, a longitudinal investigation may help to elucidate causal links between helicopter parenting and outcomes in college students. For example, the current study provides valuable support for hypotheses that helicopter parenting is associated with issues such as higher rates of mental health problems, but it is possible that helicopter parenting is a reaction to these problems in college students rather than an antecedent. Similarly, while we think it is most likely that the attachment issues observed in the current study are a result of parents' overly intrusive parenting practices, it is also possible that the issues with attachment that were observed in relationship to higher levels of helicopter parenting predated said parenting practices; in other words,

children's anxiety and avoidance of the parent–child relationship may have led to intrusive parenting practices as children grew older. Future, longitudinal studies of helicopter parenting may be able to further elucidate this relationship. Next, our sample, while perhaps representative of other smaller, regional colleges, was comprised predominantly of white female college students in their late teens and early twenties. We are unsure whether factors such as ethnicity would impact the relationship between helicopter parenting and other variables, and other studies have indicated that gender may not have a significant effect on this relationship [27], but future studies may endeavor to recruit a more diverse sample. Additionally, it should also be noted that our study operationalized levels of helicopter parenting based on the emerging adults' perceptions of parental involvement, an approach that filters parental behavior through the perspective of adult children and may potentially be less accurate than parents' own perceptions of their behavior. However, such an approach has the benefit of tapping into what adult children see as most subjectively meaningful and impactful to them.

A final potential limitation of the current investigation is that the researchers used a single measure of parenting to investigate helicopter parenting. Although this has been the standard in researching helicopter parenting [1,2], some recent studies [17] seem to suggest that the impact of helicopter parenting may be influenced by other parenting dimensions. For example, Padilla-Walker et al. identified “warm helicopter”, “controlling helicopter”, and “high controlling helicopter” parents [17]. These different profiles were associated with varying levels of parental warmth as well as mental health outcomes for children; for example, children of warm helicopter parents were less likely to experience depression or engage in delinquent behaviors compared to those with controlling helicopter parents. This study concluded that helicopter parenting was not the distinguishing factor in developmental outcomes, rather it appeared that levels of parental control and warmth were also influential. Relatedly, another recent study [8] indicated that helicopter parenting interacted with perceived overcontrol—in other words, helicopter parenting had a more negative influence on emerging adults when they felt that their parents were being too controlling. These recent studies suggest that there is still much to be explored in the developing literature on helicopter parents and their children.

5. Conclusions

The current study indicates that parental “hovering” does not seem to help college students. Instead, helicopter parenting seems to have a significant negative impact on the quality of the parent–child relationship, may be associated with academic anxiety and reduced academic effort, and does not seem to be associated with positive academic outcomes in college students. Additionally, we found that helicopter parenting was associated with significant mental health challenges, including higher rates of depression, anxiety, and somatization symptoms. Thus, it appears likely that helicopter parenting is associated with more potential harms than benefits. Especially when considering that this style of parenting also seems to take a toll on parents, who themselves report experiencing more stress, depression, and anxiety when engaging in helicopter parenting [7], it would seem that the potential costs of helicopter parenting far outweigh any perceived benefits.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, R.W.M., C.L.R. and S.T.; methodology, R.W.M. and C.L.R.; software, R.W.M. and C.L.R.; validation, R.W.M. and C.L.R.; formal analysis, R.W.M. and C.L.R.; investigation, R.W.M., C.L.R. and S.T.; resources, R.W.M. and C.L.R.; data curation, R.W.M. and C.L.R.; writing—original draft preparation, R.W.M., C.L.R. and S.T.; writing—review and editing, R.W.M., C.L.R. and S.T.; visualization, R.W.M. and C.L.R.; supervision, R.W.M.; project administration, R.W.M. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: This study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Lyon College (19 October 2022) for studies involving humans. Approval Code: FA22-04-101922.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Data for this study are not publicly available, but the corresponding author invites readers to reach out with questions or for more information about the dataset.

Acknowledgments: The researchers would like to thank their research participants for their time.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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