The Relationship between Parental Involvement and Academic Entitlement in College Students

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This article describes an empirical study investigating the relationship between certain aspects of parenting styles and levels of academic entitlement in college students. In short, this report explores "helicopter parenting" and the role it may play in college students' attitudes and personal accountability regarding their academic performance.

Keywords: academic entitlement, parenting style, entitlement, parental involvement, education, teaching

Introduction

Great debate exists over the seemingly vast differences between Generation Y, the "millenials," and the generations prior. Many people claim to notice differences in those born between 1980 and 2000 and previous generations. Some of those distinctions include increased sensitivity, lower work ethic, and an overwhelming sense of privilege. Most notably, arguments have arisen about whether or not the adolescents and young adults from the millenial generation exhibit a greater sense of entitlement in life, or the inherent right to particular benefits over others. While the jury is still out, evidence exists both for the alleged increase (Twenge & Campbell, 2001; Twenge & Foster, 2008) and against the increase in entitlement (Trzesniewski, Donellan, & Robins, 2008, Psychological Science; Trzesniewski, Donellan, & Robins, 2008, Journal of Personality; Donellan, Trzesniewski, & Robins, 2009).
Parenting Style and Parental Involvement

Many supporters of the argument that there has been an increase in entitlement attribute it to evolving parenting styles. Traditionally, parenting styles are considered to have fallen into one of four main types: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and indifferent. These styles vary on the dimensions of warmth and support, demands and control, and autonomy granting: a permissive style is high in warmth and low in structure and demand; an authoritative parent is both warm and structured, but collaborative; an authoritarian parent is very demanding but lacks warmth and autonomy; and an indifferent parent is neither nurturing nor demand-setting. Authoritative parents, who are both nurturing and communicative but implement structure, have been shown to yield more psychologically well-adjusted children than parents who utilize the other styles (Baumrind, 1967; Baumrind & Black, 1967; Bean, Barber, & Crane, 2006; Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994).

While support and warmth are key in healthy development, it has been well established that parental control can contribute to the psychological development of a child (Barber, 1996; Barber & Harmon, 2002; Bean, Barber, & Crane, 2006), and so does parental involvement. For instance, a recent study investigated the relationship of parental involvement to a child’s academic achievement. Specifically, parental involvement in the home was found to be associated with greater global self-worth and increased student involvement at school; however, greater school-focused parental involvement was related to lower academic achievement in boys, but not girls (Toren, 2013).

Other research has examined the relationships of evolving parenting styles to self-concept. Findings indicate that harsher styles, such as authoritarian and indifferent styles which are known for more parental control comparatively but less parental involvement, are related to unhealthy, maladaptive perfectionism (Kawamura, Frost, & Harmatz, 2002). Conversely, collaborative styles, such as authoritative and permissive parents (characterized by less parental control and more involvement), predict healthy narcissism (Cramer, 2011). While it is clear that both parental involvement and control contribute to child development, the question remains as to whether one or both play a role in the alleged increase in entitlement in the millennial generation.

While it is not necessarily found in psychological research, pop culture highlights parental over-involvement as a potential factor in the generational entitlement increase. Parental
over-involvement refers to parents’ excessive participation in their children’s lives, particularly in areas such as academics, relationships, and jobs. This theme of parental over-involvement, now referred to as helicopter, Velcro or snowplow parenting, or hyperparenting, has been the focus of popular media. In particular, entitlement and a lack of independence in adolescents and young adults are being seen as potential results of parental over-involvement. For example, a survey done at Michigan State revealed parental over-involvement in their child’s job search. Results reported that 15% or parents had complained to a company if their child wasn’t hired and 4% of parents went on job interviews with their child (Gardner, 2007).

A study conducted by Padilla-Walker and Nelson (2012) indicated that helicopter parenting is positively related to parental involvement. Additionally, helicopter parenting was found to be a factor separate from parental control, suggesting that it may be a new approach to parenting. This approach is characterized by high parental involvement, low autonomy granting, and high emotional responsiveness (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012). In a study examining parental over-involvement and test anxiety, greater parental involvement was found to predict test anxiety and general worry in college students (Shadach & Ganor-Miller, 2013). Similarly, parental over-protectiveness is related to lower self-esteem in children (DeHart, Pelham, & Tennen, 2005).

Newer research has begun to include parental involvement and over-involvement in the scope of factors related to entitlement. One research finding demonstrated a negative relationship between an author-developed helicopter parenting scale and school engagement as measured by a commitment to education scale (Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2005, as cited by Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012). In addition, research has demonstrated an inverse relationship between helicopter parenting and parent-granted autonomy (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012). In short, the more involved a parent was in the child’s life outside of the home, the less engaged the child was in school and the less independence the child gained. One possible explanation is that there was neither a need nor an opportunity for the development of independence or engagement at school, because of the high level of parental involvement and the lack of autonomy in this new approach to parenting.

**Academic Entitlement**

While researchers debate the alleged generational increase in entitlement, research continues to explore entitlement and its different forms. A specific dimension of entitlement,
academic entitlement (AE), has also emerged as a focus of attention. A number of researchers have all begun to explore the existence of AE (Greenberger and company, 2008; Chowning and Campbell, 2009; and Boswell, 2012). Early research on academic entitlement has established some important foundations. Chowning and Campbell (2009) have developed a measure that assesses entitlement in the academic domain independent of general psychological entitlement. Academic entitlement (AE) is defined as the “tendency to possess an expectation of academic success without a sense of personal responsibility for achieving that success” (p. 982) and is potentially comprised of two factors: externalized responsibility and entitled expectations (Chowning & Campbell, 2009). In validation studies using undergraduate college students, the subscale of Externalized Responsibility, or the assumed accountability for an individual’s own academic success, was positively associated with measures of entitlement and narcissism, and was inversely associated with self-esteem, personal control, need for cognition, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. To summarize, those who took less responsibility for their academic achievement exhibited a greater sense of entitlement, but lower levels of traditionally positive personality traits: warmth, cooperation, desire to perform well, carefulness, and self-regulation. Similarly, scores on the AE scale predicted students’ ratings of the appropriateness of student behavior and the likelihood that they would engage in those behaviors (Chowning & Campbell, 2004). For example, scores on the AE scale positively predicted if the participants felt certain student behaviors were acceptable, such as asking for extensions on assignments or rescheduling a test due to personal plans. The AE scores also predicted the probability that the participants would engage in such behaviors.

Important distinctions have been made regarding individual differences in the realm of academic entitlement. Greenberger and colleagues (2008) investigated AE with respect to parental involvement and work ethic, sense of entitlement, type of entitlement (exploitative vs. non-exploitative; Lessard, Greenberger, Chen, & Farruggia, 2011) narcissism, self-esteem, and social commitment. They also explored parental warmth, grade point average (GPA), academic dishonesty, academic motivations, and parental social comparison pressure. Results from the first study indicated that individuals with higher scores on the AE scale had a greater general sense of entitlement as measured by the Psychological Entitlement Scale (PES), greater exploitative entitlement, and a greater level of narcissism, as measured by the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI). Additionally, individuals who scored higher on AE had a lower level of work
ethic, lower social commitment, and lower levels of self-esteem. Exploitative entitlement accounted for the greatest variance in AE, but general entitlement, social commitment, and narcissism accounted for some as well. These conclusions suggest that AE is different than narcissism in an academic domain. The second study indicated that higher scores on AE were related to greater amounts of academic dishonesty, greater parental academic expectations, and greater extrinsic academic motivation (e.g., perceiving grades as more important than the act of learning). Additionally, research has concluded that gender accounts for some differences in academic entitlement. Ciani, Summers, and Easter (2008) surveyed a sample of college students and results indicated that across classes and time, men exhibit more academic entitlement than did women (Ciani, Summers, & Easter, 2008). Further, Witsman (2013) researched demographic variables in relation to academic entitlement and results suggested that age, gender, and ethnicity predicted levels and type of academic entitlement.

While the foundation has been established, research on entitlement and academic entitlement is still limited. With that in mind, the present study aims to investigate the predictors of academic entitlement while incorporating some methods and constructs from earlier research. Based on previous research, it was posited that parental involvement, and a general sense of entitlement would predict levels of academic entitlement. Specifically, it was hypothesized that:

**H1**: Parenting style (broken into three predictors: parental warmth, involvement, autonomy granting), helicopter parenting, and psychological entitlement would predict academic entitlement. Specifically, higher levels of parental involvement, psychological entitlement, and helicopter parenting, and lower levels of parental warmth and parental autonomy granting would predict greater levels of academic entitlement.

**H2**: Academic entitlement would positively predict academic dishonesty.

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants in this study consisted of 103 undergraduate students at a regional Midwestern university. Females constituted 76.7% (79 students) of the sample and males made
up 23.3% (24 students) of the sample. The mean age was 19.87 years ($SD = 3.39$), with a range of 18 to 42. The sample was predominantly Caucasian (93.2%), with small percentages of African American (4.8%), Asian (1%), and Hispanic (1%). No significant differences in level of AE between the groups were detected. Therefore, all groups were used equally in subsequent analyses.

**Materials**

**Demographics.** Participants responded to a list of questions regarding basic demographics (age, gender, ethnicity, year in school). These particular subject variables were chosen for this study because of the previous research on academic entitlement.

**Psychological Entitlement Scale.** Participants completed the Psychological Entitlement Scale (PES) as developed by Campbell and colleagues (2004). The PES is a 9-item self-report measure where participants respond on a Likert-scale that ranges from 1 (*strong disagreement*) to 7 (*strong agreement*). The PES demonstrated adequate reliability within the current sample ($\alpha = .89$).

**Academic Entitlement.** The Academic Entitlement Scale (Greenberger, Lessard, Chen, & Farruggia, 2008) was used to measure AE. Participants responded to 15 items on a Likert scale ranging from 1 “Strongly Disagree” to 6 “Strongly Agree.” In the current sample, AE demonstrated adequate reliability ($\alpha = .88$).

**Parenting Style.** Participants completed the Perceptions of Parents Scale (POPS), College Student, an abridged version of the original scale by Grolnick, Ryan, and Deci (1991). Participants responded to 42 items regarding parental warmth, involvement, and autonomy, on a 7-point Likert-scale ranging from “not at all true” to “very true.” In the current sample, maternal autonomy granting ($\alpha = .91$), warmth ($\alpha = .92$), and involvement ($\alpha = .91$) showed sufficient reliability. Similarly, paternal autonomy granting ($\alpha = .91$), warmth ($\alpha = .92$), and involvement ($\alpha = .92$) also showed adequate reliability.

**Helicopter Parenting.** Participants responded to a 5-item scale created by Padilla-Walker and Nelson (2012) to assess for the media-named parental involvement style known as “helicopter parenting.” Respondents indicated how similar the items resembled their single most involved parent’s involvement on a Likert-scale ranging from 1 (*not at all like him/her*) to 5 (*a lot like him/her*). In the current sample, reliability was demonstrated where $\alpha = .85$. 
**Academic Dishonesty.** Participants completed a scale that assesses the likelihood that they would participate in behaviors considered to be academic dishonesty. The 10-item scale was created by Bolin (2004) as an abridged version of McCabe and Trevino’s Academic Dishonesty Scale (1997). Participants indicated if they have participated in acts of academic dishonesty and how often on a 5-point Likert-scale ranging from “Not even once” to “Many times.” Reliability was demonstrated in the current sample ($\alpha = .92$).

**Procedure**

All data was collected through SONA, an online computer system, at a Midwestern university. Participants completed an online survey lasting approximately 25 to 30 minutes. Following informed consent, participants first completed a short demographic questionnaire. Second, a series of the mentioned surveys appeared in a randomized order. After the surveys were completed, individuals saw a short debriefing statement regarding the purpose of the study and contact information for questions or concerns.

**Results**

A preliminary correlation analysis was conducted for all variables with academic entitlement (AE). Several variables were positively correlated with AE, including academic dishonesty ($p < .001$), helicopter parenting ($p < .001$), and psychological entitlement ($p < .001$). Conversely, AE was inversely related to maternal involvement, warmth, and autonomy granting ($p < .03; p < .02; p < .007$), and paternal involvement, warmth, and autonomy granting ($p < .007; p < .002; p < .05$). Each of these significantly correlated variables was used in the subsequent analyses.

The first hypothesis posited that parental dimensions (involvement, warmth, and autonomy granting), helicopter parenting, and psychological entitlement would predict AE. Results suggested that after controlling for psychological entitlement in the first step, only three of the parenting variables added a significant increase in variance in the second step ($F(2, 102) = 13.36, p < .001$). Helicopter parenting ($p < .05$), paternal autonomy granting ($p < .05$), and maternal autonomy granting ($p < .05$) each added significant variance. These results provided evidence for the first hypothesis of the study. See Table 1.
Finally, AE was explored as a positive predictor of academically dishonest behavior. Based on the simple Pearson’s correlation between AE and AD ($r = .45, p < .001$), AE accounted for over 20% of the variance ($r^2 = .203$). Therefore, this hypothesis was supported.

**Table 1** – Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Academic Entitlement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>$SE$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$\Delta R^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.21***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Entitlement</td>
<td>.33***</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.13***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helicopter Parenting</td>
<td>.16*</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternal Involvement</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Maternal Warmth</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Maternal Autonomy Granting</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.37</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paternal Involvement</td>
<td>-.04</td>
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<td>Paternal Warmth</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.37</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paternal Autonomy Granting</td>
<td>.18*</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.32</td>
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</table>

**Total $R^2$** .34***

*Note. $N = 103$.

* $p < .05$, ***$p < .001$

**Discussion**

Academic entitlement is still an emerging concept. Therefore, researchers are still gathering evidence to establish AE as a form of entitlement, not just entitlement expressed in a specific domain. Results indicated a moderate, positive correlation between AE and PES. Since AE is a form of entitlement, this was to be expected. Furthermore, while pathological narcissism (a variable not discussed in the current report) and general psychological entitlement were positively correlated, AE and pathological narcissism were not. These results provide support for the argument that AE is separate from general entitlement, at least in college student populations.

Academic dishonesty, helicopter parenting, and psychological entitlement were all positively correlated with AE; likewise, AE was inversely related to maternal involvement, warmth, and autonomy granting, and paternal involvement, warmth, and autonomy granting. However, once psychological entitlement was accounted for within the regression, helicopter parenting, maternal autonomy granting, and paternal autonomy granting each significantly predicted AE. Helicopter parenting is thought to be a new style of parenting that is emerging,
characterized by over-involvement and low autonomy granting. These significant relationships suggest a relationship between parenting styles and AE. It does contribute some evidence toward the notion that helicopter parenting, and parental autonomy granting by definition, could be related to the level of AE in students. Interestingly, further analyses that removed extraneous non-predictors indicated that paternal autonomy granting was not a predictor, but that maternal autonomy granting and helicopter parenting maintained their status as significant predictors. This is an important distinction that adds to the media-driven debate with respect to parents’ over-involvement in children’s activities, specifically their responsibilities as students. As discussed earlier, helicopter parenting has been posited as a near absence of autonomy granting even in early adulthood. Furthermore, helicopter parenting is most often exhibited in mothers, not fathers. In short, less maternal autonomy granting and greater levels of helicopter parenting may predict levels of AE in their children. These results may have implications for emerging parenting styles defined by excessive involvement. In particular, those styles may play a role in levels of entitlement and sense that an individual inherently deserves more than others around them.

The last goal of the current study was to investigate whether or not levels of AE would predict the likelihood of engaging in academic dishonesty. Results indicated that higher levels of AE predicted a greater likelihood of engaging in academic dishonesty. Similar to antagonism, this relationship is unsurprising. Those who feel they are entitled to certain outcomes may not view cheating and dishonest behaviors as unfair, but rather perfectly acceptable because these behaviors may lead to what they feel they deserve. Furthermore, greater levels of academic entitlement may make individuals feel that academic dishonesty policies apply to others but not to them.

The current study is not without its limitations. First, as discussed earlier, many of the measures were selected based on limited choice. For instance, academic entitlement, helicopter parenting, and academic dishonesty are all concepts that do not have a battery of reliable and validated measures available to researchers. Because these constructs are new and not yet widely researched, most measures used in this study were author-developed for specific studies and deemed reliable based on the sample within that experiment. Furthermore, social desirability may play a role in responses. The measures used for academic dishonesty, and even the measure for academic entitlement, exhibit good face validity and may have deterred respondents from
answering honestly. Further studies may consider controlling for social desirability. Finally, the timing of this study may have created a selection bias. Data was collected nearing the end of an academic semester. Students who participated in this study were nearing deadlines for student research participation. The tendency to wait until due dates to complete assignments may be indicative of greater levels of academic entitlement. Collecting data throughout different periods in the academic year may have yielded different results.

Future research should focus on continuing to examine helicopter parenting as a fifth parenting style, and the other areas of self-concept and personality that this style effects. Additionally, it would be beneficial to investigate the traits and tendencies of helicopter parenting and a helicopter parent, and examine the implications on all types of entitlement at various ages. Finally, research following the evolution of academic entitlement would add greatly to this discussion. Longitudinal studies examining levels of academic entitlement through younger children as they progress through school may provide more information.
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