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**The Effects of Helicopter Parenting in
Emerging Adulthood: An Investigation of the
Roles of Involvement and Perceived
Intrusiveness**



Honors Thesis

Abigail T. Flower

Department: Psychology

Advisor: Jackson A. Goodnight, Ph.D.

April 2021

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Abstract: The term “helicopter parent” describes parents who provide extensive support with high constraint to their children with a variety of possible negative outcomes (Comstock, 2019). The present study examined the effects of intensive (i.e., “helicopter”) parenting among emerging college-aged adults by comparing evaluative and descriptive measures of intensive parenting and examining their differential associations with college students’ achievement and well-being. There were three main hypotheses of the study. First, I predicted that perceptions of parental intrusiveness, captured by an evaluative measure, would be more strongly correlated with negative outcomes (e.g., poorer grades, greater depression etc.) than would the frequency and extent of parental involvement, evaluated by a descriptive measure. Additionally, when applying a “goodness-of-fit” framework, I predicted that the association between the frequency of parental involvement (descriptive measure) and negative outcomes for emerging adults would be stronger for students who demonstrated positive academic and psychological adjustment in high school (i.e., they will perceive high levels of involvement as intrusive). Finally, I expected that helicopter parenting would exhibit many of the characteristics associated with criteria from traditional parenting domains and should subsequently be defined similarly to these conventional categories of parenting (permissive, authoritarian, authoritative). Results concluded that higher evaluative measures of helicopter parenting were associated with lower self-efficacy and lower college GPAs than descriptive measures. While students demonstrating positive academic adjustment in high school did not exhibit expected negative outcomes due to helicopter parenting, those displaying lower academic achievement in high school were associated with higher college GPAs when higher levels of parental involvement were introduced. Results of the study also indicated that evaluative measures of helicopter parenting were associated with authoritarian parenting styles while descriptive measures were correlated with authoritative and permissive domains.

Dedication: I would like to dedicate this body of work first and foremost to my wonderful thesis advisor, Dr. Jackson Goodnight, and my research advisor since my freshman year at the university, Dr. Susan Davis. Both of you have supported, guided, and mentored me academically and personally and I cannot extend enough gratitude for the time and energy you have invested in me. I hope to make both of you proud with the work I accomplish post-graduation. I would also like to dedicate this work to my parents Peg and Steve Flower who have been consistently and unwaveringly supportive of my endeavors at the university and have always encouraged me to pursue my passions. Thank you for all you have done for me in the past 21 years, I love you both so much.



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The Effects of Helicopter Parenting in Emerging Adulthood: An Investigation of the Roles of Involvement and Perceived Intrusiveness

Abigail Flower

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The turn of the 20th century elicited a new wave of parenting that emphasizes increasing involvement and protection in the lives of young and emerging adult offspring. Shifting parenting techniques have arisen from the perception that increased protection and parental intervention is needed to ensure the success of offspring in the current social and economic climate. Many of us can recall instances where we have witnessed parental figures “tightening the reins” on child expectations at younger ages. It is not uncommon to wonder what the effects of these increasingly involved parents are on offspring once they reach an age where they naturally desire autonomy. As we move forward through a new era of parental control, studies on the effects of protective parenting styles will continue to inform the effects on child outcomes and the characterization of traditional parenting domains.

The term “helicopter parent” was created in the 1980s to describe parents who provide extensive supervision for their children with a variety of possible negative outcomes (Comstock, 2019). Helicopter parenting crosses the line of typical parenting behaviors by decreasing the opportunities for their children to establish independence and individuality. The transition to college is typically difficult for both children of helicopter parents and the parents themselves. The involvement and contact that these parents provide often does not dissipate and may actually increase with greater physical distance.

After college, parents may continue to support their children emotionally and behaviorally, leading to the potential for development into adults who are indecisive and non-autonomous individuals. Despite a variety of popular and scholarly criticism of helicopter parenting, some argue that heightened involvement is a natural reaction to the increasing demands placed on children in the early twenty-first century. Parents may feel more pressured to ensure their children have all the advantages possible in order to succeed academically and professionally (Comstock, 2019).

Studies measuring the outcomes of helicopter parenting vary based on the method of measurement. Previous studies have mainly employed evaluative measures of parenting which assess the child or parents' perceptions of intrusiveness and over-involvement. Measures assessing emerging adult perceptions use items that include terms such as "I feel" to capture individual offspring assessments of parenting behaviors on a subjective basis. One study on the relationship between emerging adult outcomes and helicopter parenting found that higher levels of helicopter parenting were associated with more symptoms of depression and lower self-efficacy as well as lower levels of academic and social adjustment in college (Darlow & Norvilitis, 2017). This study employed The Helicopter Parenting Scale (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011) which is a 10-point Likert scale intended to measure the extent to which an individual felt that their parents were controlling throughout their childhood. Many similar studies have used novel measures of helicopter parenting that assess the extent to which individuals feel that their parents have exerted excess control over them throughout their childhoods. The Helicopter Parenting Scale (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011), Helicopter Parenting Instrument (Odenweller et al., 2014), and Parental Control scale (Rohner & Khaleque, 2008) are examples of measures

that assess evaluative perceptions of over-parenting as opposed to more descriptive measures of parental behaviors. As a result, there is a wealth of data from prior studies which measures the construct of helicopter parenting in an evaluative fashion.

In contrast, there is minimal published research on the comparison between an evaluative measure and a descriptive measure when assessing the developmental outcomes associated with helicopter parenting. The importance of perception in evaluating the outcomes of emerging adults has been highlighted by some studies which have employed these measures when assessing helicopter parenting. One study by Dweck (1986) measuring the effect of helicopter parenting on the mindsets of emerging adults suggests that people's perceptions about their relationships predict developmental outcomes more accurately than objective measures of their relationships (Hendrick, 1981; Pelegrina et al., 2003; Thomas et al., 1997). This study used five measures of helicopter parenting that emphasized emerging adults' perceptions of their parents' involvement (Hendrick, 1981; Pelegrina et al., 2003; Thomas et al., 1997). The main finding of this study on perceptions of helicopter parenting was that helicopter parenting increased the degree to which adolescents came to believe that their success was dependent on a fixed level of ability. This resulted in negative outcomes when participants experienced increasing academic demands, specifically when new challenges arose (Dweck, 1986). This study was based on previous findings that the predictive capacity of family measurements is related to children's perceptions of parenting behaviors. Within these findings, academic competence and intrinsic motivation were more strongly predicted by children's perception of parental acceptance as opposed to their parents' measures of

their acceptance, alluding to the importance of subjective evaluation (Pelegrina et al., 2003).

Self-determination theory states that the three critical needs for optimal development include autonomy, competence, and relatedness in caring relationships. The interaction of these components has been associated with lower levels of depression (Wei et al., 2005) and greater life satisfaction (Meyer et al., 2007). In addition to the critical needs for child development, the developmental systems perspective highlights the way in which children benefit from relationships with two or more generations of their family extending through their lifespan (Ford & Lerner, 1992). This perspective highlights that children and parents are fused structurally and functionally in the context of a multidimensional familial system. Within this system, levels of human development are integrated (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These theories suggest that through positive, developmentally sensitive parent-child relationships, parents can promote their children's ability to achieve autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Helicopter parenting has been previously characterized through a variety of definitions that account for intrusive parenting behaviors that are high in control and offer low levels of autonomy (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012; Segrin et al., 2012). Past studies have found that the perception of overbearing parental figures as reported by offspring has been linked to low self-efficacy, mistrust of peers, peer alienation, and poor peer attachment (van Ingel et al., 2015). While some studies have included parent-reported assessments of their own parenting styles, other studies have found the perceptions of their children to be more significant when measuring the outcomes of intrusive parenting behaviors. This is demonstrated through the creation and validation of

one helicopter parenting scale showing that *perceived* helicopter parenting, rather than measures of descriptive behaviors or parental reports, seemed to be the primary predictor of outcomes for emerging adults. In sum, people's perceptions about their relationships are more important predictors of outcomes than more descriptive measures (Hendrick 1981; Pelegrina et al., 2003; Thomas et al., 1997). The present study attempts to address how traditional measures of parenting relate to evaluative assessments of helicopter parenting.

Lemoyne and Buchanan (2011) define helicopter parents in such a way that is consistent with traditional parenting domains. Traditional parenting domains include authoritative, permissive, and authoritarian parenting styles, which are typically characterized through different combinations of responsiveness and control (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011). For the purposes of the present study, helicopter parenting will be used to define parents or parental figures who are considered high in granting warmth and support while also maintaining high levels of control and lower levels of granting autonomy to offspring (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011). While characteristics of nurturance, control, and responsiveness are indicative of traditional parenting domains, (i.e., permissiveness, authoritative, and authoritarian parenting) there is an apparent trend in current academic literature which seeks to characterize helicopter parenting by its negative outcomes. Examples of negative characterizations include terms such as "overly involved" (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012; Segrin et al., 2012) and "developmentally inappropriate levels of control" (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012; Segrin et al., 2012).

The goodness of fit model would suggest that characterizing intrusive parenting behaviors by negative child outcomes is flawed and ungeneralizable. Goodness of fit is

defined by Thomas and Chess (1977) as a result of environmental demands being congruent with an organism's capacities, characteristics, and behavior. A common strategy for measuring goodness of fit compares the characteristics of both parent and child to determine which combination relates to adaptive child functioning (Newland & Crnic, 2017). For example, parental behaviors that appear intrusive may actually be appropriately responsive to a child's need for increased parental directiveness, persistence, and oversight. (Floyd et al., 2004) Caregivers often adapt to challenging behavioral characteristics in children (Crockenberg & Leerkes, 2003), and families of children with developmental delays may exemplify the concept of goodness of fit through increased involvement, demonstrating how one parenting style is not universally adaptable to all child needs. In addition, contingency theory (also known as altruism theory) aligns with the goodness of fit model as it observes a common pattern where family members with greater needs receive more support (Eggebeen, 1992; McGarry & Schoeni, 1997; Silverstein et al., 2006), and solidarity theory suggests that family members provide assistance and support to each other out of love and affection (e.g., Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Silverstein et al., 1995). Highly involved parenting behaviors may be a reflection of these processes, which consider individual child needs and familial responses in parenting styles. The present study seeks to examine the circumstances under which helicopter parenting could contribute to negative outcomes in children, and the circumstances under which it would promote positive adjustment.

The Present Research

The present study has three central aims. First, it will investigate whether the reported negative effects of helicopter parenting in emerging adulthood are a product of

parental involvement or the perceived intrusiveness of such involvement. The study will be conducted with a series of questionnaires with no manipulation of independent variables. Data for the study was collected at a midwestern university having a participant pool consisting of undergraduate female and male students aged 18-25 years old. Variables within the study are assessed through comparing descriptive and evaluative measures of helicopter parenting with self-reports of offspring. Descriptive items reported from offspring examine how often parental figures exhibit intrusive or controlling behaviors towards their emerging adult children. Evaluative measures intended to assess offspring perceptions of their parental figures employ items that emphasize phrases such as “I feel” or “I believe” in reference to parenting behaviors. Dependent variables are assessed through a variety of questionnaires measuring satisfaction with life, academic aptitude, anxiety, depression, autonomy, and self-efficacy in emerging adults. These outcomes are then evaluated alongside the helicopter parenting inventories to assess the relationship between parenting styles and emerging adult outcomes. Second, this study seeks to understand whether the effects of helicopter parenting conform to the goodness of fit. That is, will offspring vary in how helicopter parenting relates to their adjustment, and is it possible that helicopter parenting could be associated with negative outcomes for some offspring and positive outcomes for others. how the goodness of fit. Outcome variables will include college GPA, self-efficacy, depression, and anxiety. Finally, this study assesses how helicopter parenting relates to traditional domains of parenting styles. In other words, is it possible that helicopter parenting can be described in terms of the dimensions of authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive parenting? A parental authority questionnaire was used to assess participant’s

parenting styles on a self-report basis. Three categories of traditional parenting domains were measured, including permissive, authoritative, and authoritarian parenting styles.

Method

Participants

Participants were selected from a convenience sample of introductory psychology students at a medium size midwestern university. A total of 223 participants were sampled through a series of online self-report surveys, including 75 men and 145 women. There were 29 participants whose data were discarded from analysis due to incompleteness of surveys, leaving 68 men and 126 women to be included in the analyses. Out of this sample, 86.08% of participants identified as white, 9.79% of individuals identified as Black or African American, 2.06% identified as Asian, 5.67% identified as Hispanic, and .52% of individuals identified as Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. (all others) Due to the small size of data gathered from non-white participants, other identifying groups were grouped together. Each participant received class credit for their participation through an online system. The majority of participants in the study identified as individuals between ages 18-20. The majority of individuals were 19 years old (40.7%) while 28.87% were 18 and 18.56% were 20. Additionally, 9.28% of participants were 21 while only 2.06% of participants were 22 or older. Most (81.44%) participants stated that they were physically living at their university while only 18.04% stated that they did not live on campus.

Materials

The present study employed a series of self-report measures available through an online survey platform. Seven instruments were used in the study, including:

1. Helicopter Parenting Instrument (HPI)
2. Intergenerational Support Index (ISI)
3. Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI)
4. Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ)
5. General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES-12)
6. Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CESD-R)
7. Generalized Anxiety Disorder Questionnaire (GAD-7)
8. Big Five Inventory (BFI)

Predictor Variables

A demographics form was completed by participants to record variables such as age, sex, race, and year in college (See Appendix A and B for informed consent and demographics.) Participants were also asked whether they reside at their university or not, and what their average high school and current college grades are. Next, two parenting measures completed by emerging adult participants were used to evaluate helicopter parenting. The HPI was used as an evaluative measure of helicopter parenting, characterized by perceptions of low autonomy support and overprotection (Odenweller et al., 2014). The HPI is a 15-item measure answered on a 5-point, Likert-type scale, with 1 indicating *strongly disagree* and 5 indicating *strongly agree*. The instrument includes statements such as, “My parent overreacts when I encounter a negative experience.” (See Appendix E for the complete questionnaire.) The measure has internal consistency with a

Cronbach's alpha of .78, (Odenweller, Booth-Butter, & Weber, 2014) and high construct validity for both mothers and fathers ranging from .62 to .69 (Pistella et al., 2020).

Responses to the survey items were averaged together to create an evaluative index of helicopter parenting, such that high scores indicated higher levels of evaluative helicopter parenting.

Additionally, the ISI selected as a descriptive measure of helicopter parenting. The ISI assessed six types of support provided from parents to offspring on an 8-point, Likert-type scale, with 1 indicating *daily* and 5 indicating *less than once a year or never* (Fingerman et al., 2010). Questions on the ISI include, "How often does your mother/parental figure give you advice?" and, "How often do you talk with your mother/parental figure about your daily life?" Responses to the survey items were averaged together to create a descriptive index of helicopter parenting, such that high scores indicated higher levels of descriptive helicopter parenting. (See Appendix F for the complete questionnaire.)

The PAQ was used to measure conventional parenting dimensions. The PAQ measures the parental prototypes outlined by Baumrind (1971) which include permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative parenting. Each parenting scale exhibits adequate internal reliability with Cronbach's alpha ranging from .75 to .87 (Buri, 1991), criterion validity ranging from .56 to .68 for the authoritative parenting domain and divergent validity ranging from .38 to .52 between the three domains (Buri, 1991). Participants were asked to answer questions on the PAQ using a 5-point, Likert-type scale, with 1 indicating strongly disagree and 5 indicating *strongly agree*. The questionnaire includes statements such as, "While I was growing up my mother felt that in a well-run home the children

should have their way in the family as often as the parents do.” Authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive parenting scales were created by averaging items corresponding to each of the scales. (See Appendix H for the complete questionnaire.)

Outcome Variables

Outcome variables assessed within the study included scales measuring self-efficacy, depression, and anxiety. The GSES-12 is a 12-item questionnaire with a three-factor structure measuring initiative, effort, and persistence. The measure consists of a 5-point, Likert-type scale, where 1 indicates *strongly disagree* and 5 indicates *strongly agree*. The scale demonstrates adequate internal consistency with a Cronbach’s alpha of .69 (Bosscher & Smit, 1998) and high criterion validity ranging from .80-.82 for domains including initiative, effort, and persistence (Herrero et al., 2014). Items used in the scale include statements such as, “When I make plans, I am certain I can make them work.” (See Appendix G for the complete questionnaire.)

The CESD-R (Eaton et al., 2004) was used to measure the nine primary symptoms of major depressive disorder according to the DSM-IV. These include symptoms such as anhedonia, psychomotor retardation/agitation, and suicidal ideation assessed on a 4-point, Likert type scale, with 1 indicating *rarely or none of the time* and 4 indicating *most or all of the time*. (See Appendix D for complete questionnaire.) The CESD-R has high internal consistency with a Cronbach’s alpha of .92, and significant convergent validity when compared to the STICSA (.65-.74), SPQ-B (.43-.44) and PANAS-NA (.58), which measure similar constructs (Van Dam & Earleywine, 2010).

The GAD-7 assessed the degree to which participants experienced feelings of nervousness, anxiety, worry, restlessness, and trouble relaxing within the 2 weeks prior to completing the study. The measure demonstrates internal reliability with Cronbach's alpha scores ranging from .79 - .91 (Williams, 2014) and high convergent validity ranging from .69-.76 when compared to measures of anxiety such as the BAI, SCI-90 anxiety, SCI-90 GSI, and the PHQ (Johnson et al., 2019). The GAD-7 uses a 4-point, Likert type scale, with 1 indicating *not at all* and 4 indicating *nearly every day*. Participants were asked to complete the measure including statements identifying feelings or behaviors such as having, "Trouble relaxing within the past two weeks" (See Appendix C for complete questionnaire).

Moderator Variables

The moderating variable of personality was measured through the use of the BFI which assessed the five-factor structure of personality with trait domains including Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience on a 5-point, Likert-type scale, with 1 indicating *strongly disagree* and 5 indicating *strongly agree*. Items on the BFI included identifying statements such as, "Can be moody" (See Appendix I for complete questionnaire). The BFI demonstrates significant internal and convergent reliability with Cronbach's alpha scores of .69 - .83 and convergent validity of .56 - .60, respectively, when compared to the Big Five Questionnaire (Caprara et al.,1993).

Procedure

Participants in the study were recruited through a private, self-paced, online recruitment system. The study was administered using the online platform Qualtrics™. Data were analyzed with SPSS™. After consenting to participate, participants completed a demographic questionnaire asking questions about their age, race and ethnicity, biological sex, current and high school GPA, current residence, and household composition (number of siblings, marital status of parents, birth order.) They then proceeded to complete questionnaires measuring the evaluative and descriptive dimensions of intensive parenting along with measures of self-efficacy, anxiety, and depression. Participants completed a debriefing form at the end of the study and were given the option of downloading it if they wished to (see Appendix J for debriefing form).

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Average depression scores for participants in the study were 2.16 out of 5 with a total range of 2.30 and standard deviation of .42. Mean anxiety scores were 2.07 out of 4 with a range of 3.00 and standard deviation of .79. Self-efficacy scores for participants included a range of 3.75, mean of 3.52 out of 5, and a standard deviation of .74. Average neuroticism scores were 3.13 out of 5 with a range oof 2.78 and standard deviation of .54. The evaluative helicopter parenting inventory yielded a mean of 2.48 out of 5 with a standard deviation of .52 and a range of 2.57 for both mothers and fathers of participants. Descriptive helicopter parenting evaluations yielded a mean of 4.59 out of 8 with a

standard deviation of .99 and a range of 5.70. Average high school GPAs of participants were in the A-B range while average college GPAs were in the B range. Cronbach's alpha scores for each of the scales are reported in Table 4.

Testing Unadjusted Associations Between Helicopter Parenting and Young Adult Functioning

Bivariate correlations were estimated to test the associations of evaluative and descriptive measures of helicopter parenting with outcome measures of self-efficacy, anxiety, depression, and college GPA. Higher levels of evaluative helicopter parenting were associated with lower college GPA, $r(192) = -.19, p = .08$. Additionally, higher levels of evaluative helicopter parenting were associated with lower self-efficacy, $r(192) = -.15, p = .007$. There were no other significant correlations found. An r to z transformation was computed to test the statistical significance of the differences in correlations of evaluative and descriptive parenting measures with the measures of self-efficacy, anxiety, depression, and college GPA. There was a significant difference between the two measures in relation to self-efficacy, where the negative correlation between evaluative helicopter parenting and self-efficacy was found to be significantly different than the positive correlation between descriptive helicopter parenting and self-efficacy ($z = -2.72, p = .007$). No significant differences were found between the correlations of descriptive and evaluative helicopter parenting with depression, anxiety, and college GPA. See Table 1 for the complete set of outcomes of the correlation.

Table 1

Bivariate Correlations of Descriptive Versus Evaluative Helicopter Parenting on Outcome Variables

	Evaluative Helicopter Parenting	Descriptive Helicopter Parenting	z score	p value
College GPA	-.19**	-.02	1.74	.08
Anxiety	.09	.03	.6	.55
Depression	.10	.02	.75	.45
Self- efficacy	-.15*	.13	-2.72	.007

** $p < .01$

* $p < .05$

Testing Goodness-of-Fit Between Parenting and Youth Functioning

Multiple regression was conducted to evaluate the effects of descriptive helicopter parenting on the outcome variables of depression, anxiety, self-efficacy, and college GPA, with two moderator variables- (neuroticism and high school GPA), and controlling for three covariates (sex, year in school, and residency). The results indicated that higher high school GPAs were associated with lower levels of anxiety in college-aged individuals, $b = -.12$, $t(184) = -2.19$, $p = .03$, whereas higher levels of neuroticism were associated with higher levels of anxiety, $b = .95$, $t(184) = 11.45$, $p < .001$. Higher high school GPAs ($b = .29$, $t(184) = 4.75$, $p < .001$) and higher scores of descriptive helicopter parenting behaviors ($b = .13$, $t(184) = 2.62$, $p = .01$) were found to be associated with higher levels of self-efficacy, and neuroticism was found to be associated with lower levels of self-efficacy, $b = -.56$, $t(184) = -6.26$, $p < .001$. Neuroticism was the only variable that was significantly associated with depression, $b = .42$, $t(184) = 8.42$, $p < .001$.

The tests of the interaction effects (i.e., neuroticism and high school GPA as moderators) indicated that the association between descriptive helicopter parenting and college GPA differed depending on high school GPA, $b = -.19$, $t(183) = -2.40$, $p = .02$. Follow-up testing of this interaction indicated that high levels of parental involvement were significantly associated with higher college GPAs for low-achieving students who performed within the bottom 4.69% of the distribution of high school GPA. Although high levels of parental involvement were associated with lower college GPA for high-achieving students, this effect was not statistically significant. The interaction between descriptive helicopter parenting and high school GPA was not significant for any other outcome measure. Additionally, the interaction between helicopter parenting and neuroticism was nonsignificant for all outcomes. See table 2 for the complete set of regression coefficients.

A significant proportion of variance was explained for each of the models. R-squared for each of the regression models were as follows: GPA $\Delta R^2 = .22$, $F(8, 183) = 6.40$, $p < .001$; self-efficacy $R^2 = .30$, $F(8, 184) = 9.88$, $p < .001$; depression $R^2 = .33$, $F(8, 184) = 11.23$, $p < .001$; and anxiety $R^2 = .45$, $F(8, 184) = 18.90$, $p < .001$.

Table 2

Unstandardized Regression Coefficients of Helicopter Parenting on Outcome Variables

Predictors	Anxiety		Depression		Self-Efficacy		College GPA	
	Coefficient	<i>p</i> value	Coefficient	<i>p</i> value	Coefficient	<i>p</i> value	Coefficient	<i>p</i> value
High School GPA	-.13*	.03	-.07	.05	.29**	<.001	.64**	<.001
Neuroticism	.95**	<.001	.42**	<.001	-.56**	<.001	-.14	.35
Descriptive Helicopter Parenting	.02	.58	.01	.82	.12*	.01	.0004	.99
Descriptive HP x High School GPA	.04	.41	.001	.96	.04	.41	-.19*	.02
Descriptive HP x Neuroticism	-.002	.98	.03	.50	-.11	.16	-.05	.69

***p* < .01**p* < .05

Testing Associations Between Helicopter Parenting and Traditional Parenting Dimensions

Bivariate correlations were estimated to test associations between the two measures of helicopter parenting and the traditional parenting dimensions of authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive parenting. Evaluative helicopter parenting was positively correlated with authoritarian parenting, $r(193) = .30, p < .001$, while descriptive helicopter parenting was negatively correlated with authoritarian parenting, $r(193) = -.16, p = .03$. The difference between these correlations was significant, $z = 4.59, p < .001$. Descriptive helicopter parenting positively correlated with authoritative parenting, $r(163) = .23, p = .003$, while the correlation between evaluative helicopter parenting and authoritative parenting was nonsignificant. The difference between these correlations was significant, $z = -2.90, p = .004$. Finally, descriptive helicopter parenting

was positively correlated with permissive parenting, $r(190) = .18, p = .011$, while evaluative helicopter parenting was not significantly correlated with permissive parenting. The difference between these correlations was nonsignificant. See Table 3 for the complete set of correlations.

Table 3

Bivariate Correlations of Descriptive Versus Evaluative Helicopter Parenting on Traditional Parenting Domains

	Evaluative Helicopter Parenting	Descriptive Helicopter Parenting	z score	p value
Permissive	.02	.18*	-1.58	.11
Authoritarian	.30**	-.16*	4.59	<.001
Authoritative	-.09	.23**	-2.90	.004

** $p < .01$

* $p < .05$

Table 4

Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Scores for Independent and Dependent Variables

	M	SD	Inter-item range	Reliability
ISI_c_mf	91.55	18.38	.84-.86	.86
ISI_h_mf	81.38	16.92	.78-.82	.80
HPI_c_mf	73.12	14.62	.81-.83	.82
HPI_h_mf	80.45	15.87	.82-.84	.83
GAD	14.52	5.51	.89-.91	.91
CESD	43.12	8.46	.75-.82	.78
GSES	42.22	8.93	.86-.88	.88

Discussion

The present study had three aims. First, I examined the effects of intensive (i.e., “helicopter”) parenting among emerging college-aged adults by comparing evaluative and descriptive measures of intensive parenting and examining emerging adult’s outcomes through academic achievement (i.e., GPA) and well-being (i.e., depression, anxiety, and self-efficacy). The second hypothesis applied a goodness of fit framework by examining possible adaptive outcomes for emerging adults receiving descriptive helicopter parenting. Third, I sought to characterize helicopter parenting through traditional parenting dimensions of authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive parenting (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011).

Results from analyses pertaining to the first aim provided evidence that evaluative and descriptive measures of helicopter parenting are related differently to college GPA and self-efficacy. Specifically, while higher levels of evaluative helicopter parenting were linked to lower college GPA’s and lower self-efficacy in emerging adults, descriptive helicopter parenting was not associated with any of the outcome variables. This finding is consistent with past research showing that perceptions of helicopter parenting are more predictive of negative outcomes than more descriptive measures (Cite the study you cited in the intro).

Results from analyses pertaining to the second aim indicated some support for goodness-of-fit. Specifically, the goodness of fit model was applied to participant’s outcomes to determine whether descriptive levels of helicopter parenting could be associated with positive outcomes under some circumstances, and negative outcomes

under others. The goodness of fit model suggests that the best outcomes are achieved when the demands placed on an individual by their parents were congruent with the individual's abilities and characteristics (Thomas & Chess, 1977). Results from the present study indicated that the association between descriptive helicopter parenting and college GPA varied depending on high school GPA. Specifically, high levels of descriptive helicopter parenting were associated with higher college GPAs, but only for students in the bottom 4.69% of their high school GPA distribution.

Results from analyses pertaining to the third aim indicated that helicopter parenting is associated with traditional parenting domains- (i.e., permissiveness, authoritative, and authoritarian parenting), and that evaluative and descriptive assessments of helicopter parenting capture different aspects of conventionally measured parenting. According to the results, descriptive parenting measures were positively correlated with permissive and authoritative domains and negatively correlated with the authoritarian parenting domain. Conversely, evaluative helicopter parenting measures were positively correlated with higher authoritarian styles. These findings suggest that differences in the effects of evaluative versus descriptive measures of helicopter parenting may reflect differences in conventional parenting dimensions.

The present study highlights that the effects of helicopter parenting depend heavily upon whether it is assessed solely on negative evaluations (e.g., describing parents as intrusive) or using impartial criteria (e.g., describing amount of support received by parents). Moreover, the findings of the present study suggest that positive academic outcomes for low-achieving high school students experiencing high levels of parental involvement, suggesting that the effects of parenting must be considered in the

context of child characteristics. Results from the study did not show significant psychological differences between individuals experiencing high versus low levels of helicopter parenting as expected for either the correlations or regression. Additionally, the interaction between neuroticism and helicopter parenting was also nonsignificant when compared to the outcome variables, contradicting the idea that personality could be a moderating variable.

Limitations of the present research include the restricted, nonrandom midwestern sample composed mainly of white female participants, posing potential issues with generalizability across geographic locations and ethnicities. Results from the study were correlational, and cross-sectional, prohibiting inferences of causation or directionality between variables. Additionally, retrospective and self-report measures were used which could result in biased or forgotten information from participants.

Future research directions could include other outcome and moderator variables to widen the scope of effects captured by helicopter parenting behaviors. For example, moderators could be expanded to incorporate additional personality dimensions and parent-child relationship characteristics. Autonomy and life satisfaction could be included in the outcome variables. Additionally, a longitudinal study would be useful in examining different outcomes for evaluative versus descriptive helicopter parenting measures over time, allowing for potentially more insight and less variability in retrospective self-report measures that were used in the current research.

Despite its limitations, the study sheds light on the differences between child perceptions when compared to objective parenting behaviors. The potential for adaptive outcomes of children experiencing high descriptive levels of helicopter parenting was

uncovered, highlighting the goodness of fit framework and exposing flaws in previous research that characterizes parenting styles solely through negative outcomes. As helicopter parenting is a relatively new phenomenon, it will be important in future research to continue the examination of outcomes and the categorization of this parenting style in ways similar to traditional parenting domains.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Project

Project Title:	<i>Parenting and College Students</i>
Investigator(s):	<i>Abigail Flower and Jackson Goodnight, Ph.D.</i>
Description of Study:	<i>We are interested in understanding how parenting relates to academic success and well-being among college students. You will be presented with information relevant to your past and present experiences with your parents or primary caretakers. You will be asked to answer some questions about those experiences and asked to report on past and current aspects of your well-being, such as your experiences with depression and anxiety, your independence, and your self-confidence. You will also complete a questionnaire about your personality. In addition, you will be asked to provide personal information such as grades, gender, age, and ethnicity.</i>
Adverse Effects and Risks:	<i>No adverse effects are anticipated. However, It is possible that you may experience distress when reflecting on your well-being and relationship with your parents. You may stop at any time if you experience any distress and you will still receive full credit for participation. If you experience distress any time throughout the course of the study and wish to seek outside support, you can contact the University of Dayton counseling center at (937)-229-3141. Counseling services are free for University of Dayton undergraduate students and offer a wide variety of support</i>

services.

Duration of Study:

The study should take you approximately 40 minutes to complete.

Confidentiality of Data:

Your name will be kept separate from the data. Both your name and the data will be kept in a secure online file. Only the investigators named above will have access to the secure file. Your name will not be revealed in any document resulting from this study; however, there is the possibility that you could become identified based on your responses to the demographic questions.

Contact Person:

Participants may contact Abigail Flower at flowera1@udayton.edu or Jackson Goodnight, Ph.D. at jackson.goodnight@udayton.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant you may also contact the chair of the Research Review and Ethics Committee, at rrec@udayton.edu or (937) 229-2713 or in SJ 329.

Consent to Participate:

I have voluntarily decided to participate in this study. If I had questions about this study, I have contacted the investigator named above and he or she has adequately answered any and all questions I have about this study, the procedures involved, and my participation. I understand that I may voluntarily terminate my participation in this study at any time and still receive full credit. In addition, I certify that I am 18 (eighteen) years of age or older. By typing my name and date below, I consent to participate in this study. If I do not want to participate, I can close the browser.

Student's Name (typed)
Date (typed)

The University of Dayton supports researchers' academic freedom to study topics of their choice. The topic and/or content of each study are those of the principal investigator(s) and do not necessarily represent the mission or positions of the University of Dayton.

Appendix B

Demographic Questionnaire

Please answer each question to the best of your ability. Your responses, along with the rest of the information that you supply during this study, will remain confidential. However, if you feel that answering any of the following questions could uniquely identify you, please do not answer that question.

1. What is your age?

- | | |
|----|-------------|
| 18 | 21 |
| 19 | 22 or older |
| 20 | |

2. What year of college are you in at the university?

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 1 | 4 |
| 2 | > 4 |
| 3 | |

2. Choose one or more races that you consider yourself to be:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| White | Asian |
| Black or African American | Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander |
| American Indian or Alaska Native | Hispanic |
| Other _____ | |

3. What is your biological sex?

- Male
- Female
- Other

4. Are you currently living at your college/university?

Yes

No

5. What are your average grades in college (select one)?

A A-B B B-C C C-D D D-F F

6. What were your average grades in high school (select one)?

A A-B B B-C C C-D D D-F F

Appendix C

GAD-7

Answer the following survey by indicating feelings or behaviors you have experienced in the last two weeks ranging from not at all to nearly every day. Please answer questions to the best of your ability.

	Not at all	Several days	More than half the days	Nearly every day
Feeling Nervous, anxious, or on edge	1	2	3	4
Not being able to stop or control worrying	1	2	3	4
Worrying too much about different things	1	2	3	4
Trouble relaxing	1	2	3	4
Being so restless that it is hard to sit still	1	2	3	4
Becoming easily annoyed or irritable	1	2	3	4
Feeling afraid as if something awful might happen	1	2	3	4

Appendix D

CESD-R

Answer the following survey by indicating feelings or behaviors you have experienced in the last week ranging from rarely or none of the time to most or all of the time. Please answer questions to the best of your ability.

	Rarely or none of the time (less than 1 day)	Some or a little of the time (1-2 days)	Occasionally or a moderate amount of time (3-4 days)	Most or all of the time (5-7 days)
I was bothered by things that usually don't bother me	1	2	3	4
I did not feel like eating; my appetite was poor	1	2	3	4
I felt that I could not shake off the blues even with help from my family or friends	1	2	3	4
I felt I was just as good as other people	1	2	3	4
I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing	1	2	3	4
I felt depressed	1	2	3	4
I felt that everything I did was an effort	1	2	3	4
I felt hopeful about the future	1	2	3	4
I thought my life had been a failure	1	2	3	4
I felt fearful	1	2	3	4
My sleep was restless	1	2	3	4
I was happy	1	2	3	4

I talked less than usual	1	2	3	4
I felt lonely	1	2	3	4
People were unfriendly	1	2	3	4
I enjoyed life	1	2	3	4
I had crying spells	1	2	3	4
I felt sad	1	2	3	4
I felt that people dislike me	1	2	3	4
I could not get "going"	1	2	3	4

Appendix E

Helicopter Parenting Inventory

The following 2 questionnaires will require you to answer both currently and retroactively (from High School). Questions will range from daily to less than once a year or never. The questions will ask about interactions with parents or primary caretakers. If you have more than one primary caretaker (e.g a mother and a father) please answer the questions based on both parents. Please answer the questions to the best of your ability. *Questionnaires will be copied and answered based on experiences both currently and in high school.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
My parent(s)/parental figure(s) tries to make all of my major decisions	1	2	3	4	5
My parent discourages me from making decisions that he or she disagrees with	1	2	3	4	5
If my parent doesn't do certain things for me (e.g., doing laundry, cleaning room, making doctor appointments), they will not get done	1	2	3	4	5
My parent overreacts when I encounter a	1	2	3	4	5

negative experience					
My parent doesn't intervene in my life unless he or she notices me experiencing physical or emotional trauma	1	2	3	4	5
Sometimes my parent invests more time and energy into my projects than I do	1	2	3	4	5
My parent considers oneself a bad parent when he or she does not step in and "save" me from difficulty	1	2	3	4	5
My parent feels like a bad parent when I make poor choices	1	2	3	4	5
My parent voices his or her opinion about my personal relationships	1	2	3	4	5
My parent considers himself or herself a good parent when he or	1	2	3	4	5

she solves problems for me					
My parent insists that I keep him or her informed of my daily activities	1	2	3	4	5
When I have to go somewhere (e.g., doctor appointments, academic meetings, the bank, clothing stores), my parent accompanies me	1	2	3	4	5
When I am going through a difficult situation, my parent always tries to fix it	1	2	3	4	5
My parent encourages me to take risks and step outside of my comfort zone	1	2	3	4	5
My parent thinks it is his or her job to shield me from adversity	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix F

Intergenerational Support Index

	Daily	A few times a week	Weekly	A few times a month	Monthly	A few times a year	Once a year	Less than once a year or never
How often do you provide your mother/parental figure with emotional support?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
How often do you provide your mother/parental figure with technological assistance?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
How often do you provide your mother/parental figure with other practical	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

1 assistan ce?								
How often do you socializ e with your mother/ parental figure?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
How often do you provide your mother/ parental figure with financia l support ?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
How often would you say your mother/ parental figure provide s you with emotion al support ?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
How often does your mother/ parental	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

figure provide you with technological assistance?								
How often do you talk with your mother/parental figure about your daily life?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
How often does your mother/parental figure give you advice?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
How often does your mother/parental figure provide you with financial support?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

Appendix G

GSES-12

Answer the following questions based on current feelings and attitudes. Select answers based on the 5-point scale (0= strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree)

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
If something looks too complicated I will not even bother to try it	1	2	3	4	5
I avoid trying to learn new things when they look too difficult	1	2	3	4	5
When trying to learn something new, I soon give up if I am not initially successful	1	2	3	4	5
When I make plans, I am certain I can make them work	1	2	3	4	5
If I can't do a job the first time, I keep trying until I can	1	2	3	4	5
When I have something unpleasant to do, I stick to it until I finish it	1	2	3	4	5

When I decide to do something, I go right to work on it	1	2	3	4	5
Failure just makes me try harder	1	2	3	4	5
When I set important goals for myself, I rarely achieve them	1	2	3	4	5
I do not seem capable of dealing with most problems that come up in my life	1	2	3	4	5
When unexpected problems occur, I don't handle them very well	1	2	3	4	5
I feel insecure about my ability to do things	1	2	3	4	5

Parental Authority Questionnaire

For each of the following statements, circle the number on the 5-point scale (0= strongly disagree, 4= strongly agree) that best describes how that statement applies to you and your parental figure(s). Try to read and think about each statement as it applies to you and your parent or parents during your years of growing up at home. There are no right or wrong answers, so don't spend a lot of time on any one item. We are looking for your overall impression regarding each statement. Be sure not to omit any items.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
While I was growing up my mother felt that in a well-run home the children should have their way in the family as often as the parents do	1	2	3	4	5
Even if her children didn't agree with her my mother felt that it was for our own good if we were forced to conform to what she thought was right	1	2	3	4	5
Whenever my mother told me to do something as I was growing up, she expected me to do it immediately without asking any questions	1	2	3	4	5
As I was growing up, once family policy had been	1	2	3	4	5

established, my mother discussed the reasoning behind the policy with the children in the family					
My mother has always encouraged verbal give-and-take whenever I have felt that family rules and restrictions were unreasonable	1	2	3	4	5
My mother has always felt that what children need is to be free to make up their own minds and to do what they want to do, even if this does not agree with what their parents might want	1	2	3	4	5
As I was growing up my mother did not allow me to question any decision she had made	1	2	3	4	5
As I was growing up my mother directed the activities and decisions of the children in the family through reasoning and discipline	1	2	3	4	5

My mother has always felt that more force should be used by parents in order to get their children to behave the way they are supposed to	1	2	3	4	5
As I was growing up my mother did not feel that I needed to obey rules and regulations of behavior simply because someone in authority had established them	1	2	3	4	5
As I was growing up I knew what my mother expected of me in my family, but I also felt free to discuss those expectations with my mother when I felt that they were unreasonable	1	2	3	4	5
My mother felt that wise parents should teach their children early just who is boss in the family	1	2	3	4	5
My mother felt that wise parents should teach their children early just	1	2	3	4	5

who is boss in the family					
Most of the time as I was growing up my mother did what the children in the family wanted when making family decisions	1	2	3	4	5
As the children in my family were growing up, my mother consistently gave us direction and guidance in rational and objective ways	1	2	3	4	5
As I was growing up my mother would get very upset if I tried to disagree with her	1	2	3	4	5
My mother feels that most problems in society would be solved if parents would not restrict their children's activities, decisions, and desires as they are growing up	1	2	3	4	5
As I was growing up my mother let me know what behavior she expected of	1	2	3	4	5

me, and if I didn't meet those expectations, she punished me					
As I was growing up my mother allowed me to decide most things for myself without a lot of direction from her	1	2	3	4	5
As I was growing up my mother took the children's opinions into consideration s when making family decisions, but she would not decide for something simply because the children wanted it	1	2	3	4	5
My mother did not view herself as responsible for directing and guiding my behavior as I was growing up	1	2	3	4	5
My mother had clear standards of behavior for the children in our home as I was growing up, but she was willing to adjust those standards to the needs of	1	2	3	4	5

each of the individual children in the family					
My mother gave me direction for my behavior and activities as I was growing up and she expected me to follow her direction, but she was always willing to listen to my concerns and to discuss that direction with me	1	2	3	4	5
As I was growing up my mother allowed me to form my own point of view on family matters and she generally allowed me to decide for myself what I was going to do	1	2	3	4	5
My mother has always felt that most problems in society would be solved if we could get parents to strictly and forcibly deal with their children when they don't do what they are supposed to as they are growing up	1	2	3	4	5

As I was growing up my mother often told me exactly what she wanted me to do and how she expected me to do it	1	2	3	4	5
As I was growing up my mother gave me clear direction for my behaviors and activities, but she was also understanding when I disagreed with her	1	2	3	4	5
As I was growing up my mother did not direct the behaviors, activities, and desires of the children in the family	1	2	3	4	5
As I was growing up I knew what my mother expected of me in the family and she insisted that I conform to those expectations simply out of respect for her authority	1	2	3	4	5
As I was growing up, if my mother made a decision in the family that hurt me, she was	1	2	3	4	5

willing to discuss that decision with me and to admit it if she had made a mistake					
--	--	--	--	--	--

Appendix I

Big Five Inventory

The questionnaire below presents a number of characteristics that may or may not apply to you. Please select the answer next to each statement using the five-point scale

(0=Disagree strongly, 4=Agree strongly) to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree.

I see myself as someone who....	Disagree strongly	Disagree a little	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree a little	Agree strongly
Is talkative	1	2	3	4	5
Tends to find fault with others	1	2	3	4	5
Does a thorough job	1	2	3	4	5
Is depressed, blue	1	2	3	4	5
Is original, comes up with new ideas	1	2	3	4	5
Is reserved	1	2	3	4	5
Is helpful and unselfish with others	1	2	3	4	5
Can be somewhat careless	1	2	3	4	5
Is relaxed, handles stress well	1	2	3	4	5
Is curious about many different things	1	2	3	4	5
Is full of energy	1	2	3	4	5
Starts quarrels with others	1	2	3	4	5
Is a reliable worker	1	2	3	4	5
Can be tense	1	2	3	4	5
Is ingenious, a deep thinker	1	2	3	4	5
Generates a lot of enthusiasm	1	2	3	4	5
Has a forgiving nature	1	2	3	4	5
Tends to be disorganized	1	2	3	4	5
Worries a lot	1	2	3	4	5
Has an active imagination	1	2	3	4	5
Tends to be quiet	1	2	3	4	5
Is generally trusting	1	2	3	4	5
Tends to be lazy	1	2	3	4	5

Is emotionally stable, not easily upset	1	2	3	4	5
Is inventive	1	2	3	4	5
Has an assertive personality	1	2	3	4	5
Can be cold and aloof	1	2	3	4	5
Perseveres until the task is finished	1	2	3	4	5
Can be moody	1	2	3	4	5
Values artistic, aesthetic experiences	1	2	3	4	5
Is sometimes shy, inhibited	1	2	3	4	5
Is considerate and kind to almost everyone	1	2	3	4	5
Does things efficiently	1	2	3	4	5
Remains calm in tense situations	1	2	3	4	5
Prefers work that is routine	1	2	3	4	5
Is outgoing, sociable	1	2	3	4	5
Is sometimes rude to others	1	2	3	4	5
Makes plans and follows through with them	1	2	3	4	5
Gets nervous easily	1	2	3	4	5
Likes to reflect, play with ideas	1	2	3	4	5
Has few artistic interests	1	2	3	4	5
Likes to cooperate with others	1	2	3	4	5
Is easily distracted	1	2	3	4	5
Is sophisticated in art, music, or literature	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix J

Debriefing Form

Information about Parenting and College Students study

Objective:

The purpose of this study is to examine the how intensive parenting, sometimes referred to as helicopter parenting, relates to psychological well-being, independence, and self-confidence in college students. Two parenting measures were used to compare associations with evaluative parenting measures (capturing perceptions of over involvement) to associations with descriptive parenting measures (capturing frequency of involvement). Previous research has suggested that excessive parental involvement may be associated with reduced psychological well-being and academic success. This study examines the possibility that adverse effects depend on college students' perceptions of involvement and depend on college students' need for support.

Hypothesis:

We predicted that emerging adult's perceptions of parental over involvement would be more strongly linked to negative outcomes than descriptive measures of parental involvement. Additionally, this study predicts that positive outcomes may result from experiencing high levels of parental involvement if a student has a history of academic or personal difficulties that require interpersonal support.

Your Contribution:

Your participation in this study will help us better understand the links between well-being, adjustment to college, and parents' or caretakers' levels of involvement.

Benefits:

Your participation will help us understand factors associated with success in college and provides you with direct, hands-on experience in psychological research. You will receive 1 research credit for participating in this study.

Assurance of Privacy:

We are studying the effects of helicopter parenting in emerging adults and are not evaluating you personally in any way. Your responses will be kept completely confidential and your responses will only be identified by a participant number in the data set with other participant numbers. Your name will not be revealed in any reports resulting from this study. Please be aware that because your name is not listed on the response forms, we have no way of contacting you based on any response you have provided.

Please note:

- We ask you to kindly refrain from discussing this study with others in order to help us avoid biasing future participants.
- If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact any of the individuals listed on this page.

Contact Information:

Students may contact *Abigail Flower* at flowera1@udayton.edu or *Jackson Goodnight, Ph.D.* at Jackson.goodnight@udayton.edu if you have questions or problems after the study. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant you may also contact the chair of the Research Review and Ethics Committee at rrec@udayton.edu, or (937) 229-2713, or in SJ 329. If you experienced discomfort during the study and wish to seek outside support, you can contact the University of Dayton counseling center at (937)-229-3141. Services at the counseling center are free for undergraduate students at the University of Dayton. Thank you for your participation. I will update your research credit on SONA.

Disclaimer:

The University of Dayton supports researchers' academic freedom to study topics of their choice. The topic and/or content of each study are those of the principal investigator(s) and do not necessarily represent the mission or positions of the University of Dayton.

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