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### There Will Be Helicopter Parents to Pay

Millennial students in higher education face competitive admissions, rigorous curriculums, and dismal career prospects, but perhaps the greatest threat to students' success is the signature on the tuition check. Helicopter parents are landing on colleges and universities nationwide, creating chaos for professors and administrators. Meanwhile, students are fumbling through the gale, unsure of how to handle the novel concept of independence, and increasingly relying on their parents for support.

Technology and changing social norms have made it easier than ever for parents to control nearly every aspect of their child's life. From installing a nanny cam in an infant's room to using a GPS to track an adolescent's movements, parents can know where their children are and what they are doing at all times. Cell phones, email, and online grade books allow parents to easily communicate with teachers and track students' progress. Children are shuffled into

extracurricular activities that limit free time and provide structured entertainment, rather than being encouraged to create their own amusement (Vinson 428-9). These factors have created a society that limits a child's ability to exercise independence through childhood and adolescence. The children who have grown up in this highly structured, protective bubble are now being sent off to college, where they are wholly unprepared for the challenges ahead. Worse, their parents are just as unprepared to give up control. As such, colleges have seen parental intervention on new levels, which has been dubbed helicopter parenting. This parenting style, also called overparenting, fails to promote independence, self-esteem, and personal relationships, meaning children of helicopter parents are at a distinct disadvantage when entering college.

Millennials have largely reinvented the social norms created by previous generations. In keeping with that tradition, the lack of independence demonstrated by many millennials has given rise to new terminology. The phrase, "emerging adult," is used to describe twenty-somethings who are still somewhat reliant on their parents and who feel that they are not prepared for the demands of adulthood (Willoughby et al. 670). Because their parents constantly intervened, the children of helicopter parents never learned to stand up for themselves. Thus, they continue to rely on their parents, however inappropriate it may be (Brown). Helicopter parents may question professors directly regarding students' academic standing or get involved in disagreements between friends and roommates. Similarly, helicopter parents might attempt to control their children's diets and extracurricular activities and may make frequent, unplanned visits to the child's school (Vinson 431). As millennials are aging, parents have gone so far as to contact graduate schools on their children's behalf (Marano). The former Dean of Freshmen at Stanford University, Julie Lycott-Haims, said in an interview with the Washington Post, "Our job as parents is to put ourselves out of a job." In interfering with their college-aged children,

helicopter parents perpetuate the cycle of dependence and send the message that their children are incapable of dealing with problems.

Millennials are often stereotyped as being unfit to face the challenges that the future holds. If that is true, it is because as children and young adults, they are not given the opportunity to make decisions and mistakes. Instead, parents take on their children's tasks, whether that is doing a fifth graders homework or selecting a college student's major. Therefore, children do not develop a sense of competency. In a study of college student's wellbeing led by Holly Schiffrin, a psychology professor at the University of Mary Washington, children of helicopter parents were found to be less confident in their abilities to solve problems (554). The children of helicopter parents were taught that there would always be someone else to rely upon, so they do not need to solve problems alone. This attitude has carried over into the workplace, where employers find many millennial workers lacking in initiative and responsibility (Bradley-Geist and Olson-Buchanan 324). Since these young adults will soon be entering the workforce in droves, it is imperative that they gain the confidence and responsibility required to be a contributing member of society.

Helicopter parenting can have a profound effect on a child's relationships, both within the family and with future romantic partners. Schiffrin determined that children of helicopter parents are more likely to feel distanced from their parents (554). In a similar study, children of helicopter parents reported a barrier in the parent-child relationship that was not perceived by their parents. It is likely that these children feel that they have not earned their parent's love, as their parents do not seem to trust them to make decisions alone (Segrin et al. 477). Pope Francis addressed the role of parents in his treatise, *On Love in the Family*, saying, "What is most important is the ability lovingly to help them grow in freedom, maturity, overall discipline and

real autonomy” (quoted by Pesce). Helicopter parents fail to promote this development, and the disconnect within the family eventually affects the child’s relationships. Children of helicopter parents tend to wait longer for marriage, preferring to stay single. This attitude toward romantic relationships can be detrimental to overall wellbeing, as studies have shown that those who marry after 25 are more likely to characterize their marriage as unsuccessful (Willoughby et al. 686-687). It is probable that these children are so reticent to marry because they do not have the skills to develop healthy relationships, which most children learn from their parents.

The pressures placed on children by overbearing parents is strongly linked to children’s health. Schriffin determined that children of helicopter parents are three times more likely to be prescribed anxiety or depression medication. The same study found that these children are more likely to use pain medicine for recreation (Schriffin 410-411). In general, the children of helicopter parents exhibit what could be considered immoral behavior including drug use, promiscuity, and academic dishonesty (Vinson 435). Lycott-Haims, was prompted to write a book about overparenting after a number of students committed suicide in the Palo Alto region because they were placed under an inordinate amount of pressure to be a perfect student (Brown). While these situations are the most extreme, they clearly demonstrate the need for change.

Because overparenting is a relatively new trend, there have not been many efforts made at reform. It is also a difficult matter to deal with, because it begins in the privacy of the home. Psychiatrist Abilash Gopal has made progress in using psychotherapy to help children overcome the damage caused by overbearing parents. However, therapy is limited in that it is costly and it can only help individuals who are willing to reform. Lycott-Haims suggests that parents should evaluate their own parenting style to ensure that they are not putting too much pressure on their

children. Lycott-Haims also suggests that colleges can help by making SAT and ACT test scores optional, thereby reducing some of the anxiety associated with applying to college (Brown). In order to help parents let go of their college-aged children, colleges and universities can include orientation sessions involving independence and boundaries. In the classroom, professors can encourage students to study independently and to take responsibility for their actions (Bradley-Geist and Olson-Buchanan 324). While these measures may not eliminate helicopter parenting altogether, they can potentially improve the standards in parenting styles over time.

Parents are oblivious to it, children are dependent on it, colleges are profiting from it, and employers will be hurt by it. Overparenting has had drastic effects on millennials that could have widespread implications for society as a whole, but it is still a largely ignored issue. Parents, children, educators, and employers must deal with the problem at all levels, before it becomes an accepted parenting technique. It is time for society to help millennials learn how to help themselves.

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