

Exploring College Students' Reports of Parental Involvement and Levels of Self-Compassion

Haley Kruegel, Autumn Vaassen, and Bre Schultz

Faculty Mentor: Mary Beth Leibham, Ph.D.

University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Department of Psychology



University of Wisconsin
Eau Claire

Background

While parent involvement has been linked to many positive young adult outcomes (e.g., autonomy), recent research has highlighted potential negative outcomes (e.g., anxiety) of excessive levels of parent involvement (Schiffirin et al., 2013; Segrin et al., 2012). **Overparenting** is the term used to refer to excessive levels of parent involvement, and more specifically, overparenting refers to developmentally inappropriate levels of parent involvement. There is concern that children and adolescents who are overparented are missing important opportunities to develop autonomy and effective coping mechanisms. One specific coping mechanism that may be inhibited through overparenting practices is self-compassion.

Self-compassion is a way of responding to one's personal inadequacies with kindness and gentleness and it does not entail blaming or judging oneself (Neff, 2016). Self-compassion has been associated with lower levels of anxiety, depression, and fear of failure (Neff, 2011). We are not aware of any studies examining the link between self-compassion and overparenting.

The **purpose** of this study was to explore the relationships between self-compassion and overparenting.

Method

Participants

A total of 173 undergraduate college students (36 males, 137 females; 83 first-years, 43 sophomores, 25 juniors, 17 seniors, 5 fifth-year or more) participated in this study.

Materials

• **Self-Compassion Survey:** The *Self-Compassion Scale* (Neff, 2003; 1 = *Strongly Disagree*; 7 = *Strongly Agree*). This scale consists of 6 subscales:

- **Self-Kindness** (5 items, $\alpha = .84$; e.g., "I'm tolerant of my own flaws and inadequacies.")
- **Self-Judgment** (5 items, $\alpha = .79$; e.g., "When times are really difficult, I tend to be tough on myself.")
- **Common Humanity** (4 items, $\alpha = .77$; e.g., "I try to see my failings as part of the human condition.")
- **Isolation** (4 items, $\alpha = .77$; e.g., "When I fail at something...I tend to feel alone in my failure.")
- **Mindfulness** (4 items, $\alpha = .72$; e.g., "When something upsets me, I try to keep my emotions in balance.")
- **Overidentification** (4 items, $\alpha = .75$; e.g., "When something upsets me I get carried away with my feelings.")

• **Overparenting Survey:** Three subscales were used to measure overparenting.

- The **Parental Involvement Scale** (Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, 2014; 9 items, $\alpha = .80$ 1 = *Never*; 5 = *Always*)
- **Over-parenting Scale** (Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, 2014; 5 items, $\alpha = .84$ 1 = *Strongly disagree*; 5 = *Strongly agree*)
- **Helicopter-Parenting Instrument** (Odenweller, 2014; 15 items, $\alpha = .82$ 1 = *Strongly disagree*; 7 = *Strongly agree*)

Procedure

Students completed the questionnaires in an online (Qualtrics) context. Surveys were distributed using the Psychology Department online participation system (SONA). Extra credit was offered as incentive to participate at the discretion of each professor.

Results

Means, SD and Ranges for Measured Variables

Measures	M (SD)	Range
BG_Overparenting	2.24 (.80)	1 - 5
BG_Parental Involvement	2.85 (.65)	1 - 5
O_Helicopter Parenting	3.11 (.85)	1 - 7
SC_OVERALL	3.87 (.83)	1 - 7
SC_Self Kindness	4.14 (1.09)	1 - 7
SC_Self Judgment	4.73 (1.02)	1 - 7
SC_Common Humanity	4.48 (1.06)	1 - 7
SC_Isolation	4.47 (1.18)	1 - 7
SC_Mindfulness	4.48 (.92)	1 - 7
SC_Overidentification	4.65 (1.16)	1 - 7

Correlation Matrix Showing Pearson's r for Overparenting and Self-Compassion Subscales

	OP	PI	HP	SC	SC_K	SC_J	SC_H	SC_I	SC_M	SC_O
BG_Overparenting (OP)		.22**	.60**	-.09	-.10	.08	-.05	.11	-.01	.08
BG_Parental Involvement (PI)	.22**		.44**	.10	.18*	.04	.11	-.08	.19*	.02
O_Helicopter Parenting (HP)	.60**	.44**		-.18*	-.06	.19*	-.07	.21**	-.02	.22**
SC_Overall (SC)	-.09	.10	-.18*		.80**	-.80**	.69**	-.80**	.74**	-.78**
SC_Kindness (SC_K)	-.10	.18*	-.06	.80**		-.60**	.60**	-.44**	.70**	-.38**
SC_Self Judgment (SC_J)	.08	.04	.19*	-.80**	-.60**		-.29**	-.66**	-.39**	-.70**
SC_Humanity (SC_H)	-.05	.11	-.07	-.69**	.60**	-.29**		-.38**	.64**	-.30**
SC_Isolation (SC_I)	.11	-.08	.21**	-.80**	-.44**	.66**	-.38**		-.42**	.72**
SC_Mindfulness (SC_M)	-.01	.19*	-.02	.74**	.70**	-.39**	.64**	-.42**		-.36**
SC_Overidentification (SC_O)	.08	.02	.22**	-.78**	-.38**	.70**	-.30**	.72**	-.36**	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Conclusions

Levels of Overparenting

- On average, participants reported low levels of overparenting, parental involvement, and helicopter parenting, as assessed by the surveys we used in the study. These findings are consistent with college students' reported levels of overparenting found by both Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan (2014) and Schiffirin et al. (2013).

Levels of Self-Compassion

- Participants reported a moderate level of overall self-compassion by reporting higher levels on the negative subscales of self-compassion (self judgment, isolation, and over identification) and slightly lower levels on the positive subscales of self-compassion (self kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness).

Correlations

- Helicopter parenting was positively correlated with the three negative subscales of self-compassion: self-judgment, overidentification and isolation.
- Helicopter parenting was negatively associated with overall self-compassion, although this was a weak correlation.

Future Directions

- Given the low levels of overparenting reported by participants in the study, future research should consider alternative methods of assessing overparenting. Future research should refer to the third person in survey items rather than first person (e.g. "I know of friends' parents who try to make all of their major decisions.")

References

- Bradley-Geist, J. C., & Olson-Buchanan, J.B. (2014). Helicopter parents: An examination of the correlates of over-parenting of college students. *Education & Training, 4*(56), 314-328. doi: 10.1108/ET-10-2012-0096.
- Neff, K. D. (2011). Self-compassion, self-esteem, and well-being. *Social and Personality Compass, 5*, 1-12. doi: 10.1111/j.1751-9004.2010.00330.x
- Neff, K. D. (2016). The Self-Compassion Scale is a valid and theoretically coherent measure of self-compassion. *Mindfulness, 7*(1), 264-274. doi:10.1007/s12671-015-0479-3.
- Odenweller, K. G., Booth-Butterfield, M., & Weber, K. (2014). Investigating helicopter parenting, family environments, and relational outcomes for millennials. *Communication Studies, 65*(4), 407-425.
- Schiffirin, H. H., Liss, M., Miles-Mclean, H., Geary, K. A., Erchull, M. J., & Tashner, T. (2013). Helping or hovering? The effects of helicopter parenting on college students' well-being. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 23*, 548-557. doi:10.1007/s10826-013-9716-3.
- Segrin, C., Wozziolo, A., Givertz, M., Bauer, A., & Murphy, M. T. (2012). The association between overparenting, parent-child communication, and entitlement and adaptive traits in adult children. *Family Relations, 61*, 237-252. doi: 0.1111/j.1741-3729.2011.00689.x

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP) for supporting this study, and the Learning and Technology Services (LTS) for printing this poster.