



# Indulgent Parenting, Helicopter Parenting, and Well-being of Parents and Emerging Adults

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## Abstract

**Objectives** Research on indulgent parenting in childhood and adolescence and its association with helicopter parenting in emerging adulthood and the well-being of parents and emerging adult children is limited. In this study, we examined (1) the association between indulgent parenting in childhood and adolescence and helicopter parenting in emerging adulthood, (2) the association between indulgent parenting and parents' parenting stress and negative well-being, and (3) whether helicopter parenting mediated the association between indulgent parenting and emerging adults' psychological problems.

**Methods** The sample was composed of 449 college students with a subsample of 142 parent-student dyads.

**Results** Results from analyses on parents (Part I,  $N = 142$ ) and emerging adults (Part II,  $N = 449$ ) suggested that (1) indulgent parenting in childhood and adolescence was associated with helicopter parenting in emerging adulthood ( $b = .69$ ,  $p < .01$  in Part I;  $b = .58$ ,  $p < .01$  in Part II), (2) there was a positive association between indulgent parenting and parents' negative well-being ( $b = .26$ ,  $p < .01$  in Part I) and parenting stress ( $b = .29$ ,  $p < .01$  in Part I), and (3) helicopter parenting mediated the association between indulgent parenting and emerging adults' depressive and anxiety symptoms and emotional dysregulation (.15, 95% CI .03 to .43 in Part II).

**Conclusions** Implications for parenting and emerging adult health programs were discussed.

**Keywords** Emerging adulthood · Helicopter parenting · Indulgent parenting · Parenting stress · Well-being

In contemporary society, indulgent parenting as a unique form of parenting has shown a growing trend (Clarke et al. 2014). Extending the traditional definition of indulgent/permissive parenting practice (Baumrind, 1967; Maccoby and Martin, 1983), such parenting behavior reflects three dimensions in the current social context: material, relational, and behavioral indulgence (Clarke et al. 2014; Cui et al., 2016; Fletcher et al. 1999; Kindlon, 2001). *Material indulgence* reflects parents to provide excessive material goods for their children. *Relational indulgence* reflects parents to be overly protective and do things for their children that are developmentally inappropriate. *Behavioral*

*indulgence* reflects parents to hold few expectations for responsible behaviors from their children.

The practice and effect of indulgent parenting have mostly been examined among children and adolescents because they live their everyday lives at home with their parents (Coccia et al. 2012; Garcia and Garcia 2014). However, such parenting is unlikely to disappear or cease to affect children when they become emerging adults, take on adult responsibilities, and live independent lives. Instead, parents who have indulged their children in earlier years are likely to continue their behavior by trying to keep their involvement and protection through various means. In emerging adulthood, the parenting behavior that is characterized as overinvolved and overprotective is sometimes labeled as “helicopter parenting” (Padilla-Walker and Nelson, 2012). Indulgent parenting and helicopter parenting are related parenting concepts because both demonstrate high parental responsiveness. They are, however, also distinct in that indulgent parenting reflects a broader range of parental high responsiveness and low demandingness (i.e., material, relational, and behavioral indulgence) whereas helicopter parenting focuses mostly on the relational aspects

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of parental overinvolvement in emerging adult children's lives. Research is needed to establish the link between indulgent parenting during childhood and adolescence and helicopter parenting in emerging adulthood.

Studies of indulgent parenting have focused on the association between indulgent parenting and child outcomes (Clarke et al. 2014; Darling et al. 2015). An important research question left unanswered is the relation between indulgent parenting and parents' own well-being. When parents invest significant amounts of social and human capital to provide their children with abundant material goods, are involved in everything their children do, protect them from potential obstacles, and actively shield their children from consequences of misbehavior, such efforts could promote parenting stress and parents' psychological distress (Rehm et al. 2016). Therefore, it is critical to examine the association between indulgent parenting and problems in parents' well-being (e.g., parenting stress, depression, anxiety, and life dissatisfaction).

Finally, extending earlier studies on indulgent parenting, helicopter parenting, and child outcomes, more research is needed to link indulgent parenting and helicopter parenting and delineate the associations of past indulgent parenting, current helicopter parenting, and emerging adults' well-being. Prior parental indulgence could be related to helicopter parenting in emerging adulthood, which in turn, is related to emerging adults' negative well-being (e.g., depression, anxiety, emotional regulation; Kouros et al. 2017; LeMoyné and Buchanan, 2011; Schiffrin et al. 2014). Therefore, helicopter parenting could serve as a potential mechanism that accounts for the association between indulgent parenting in earlier years and emerging adults' well-being.

From a parenting framework (Baumrind, 1967; Maccoby and Martin, 1983), indulgent/permissive parenting is a type of parenting behavior that is high in responsiveness and low in behavioral expectations and demands. From a life course perspective (Elder and Giele, 2009), such parenting beliefs and behaviors are likely to continue both in practice and in effect. When children become emerging adults, leave their parents' home, and start independent living, parents who have indulged their children in childhood and adolescent years may continue this pattern of indulgence, especially relational indulgence, and demonstrate helicopter parenting. Media coverage has highlighted parents of college students who are overly involved (e.g., ABC News, 2007; 2009; The New York Times, 2010; Time, 2009; USA Today, 2012). The widespread nature of such helicopter parenting behavior is also confirmed by college administrators (Somers and Settle, 2010). However, no study has examined the link between indulgent parenting in earlier years and helicopter parenting of emerging adults.

In most studies on the association between indulgent parenting and child outcomes, little attention has been given to the association between this parenting practice and parents' own well-being. In general, compared to nonparents, parents report higher levels of distress, anxiety, and depression, and less happiness and satisfaction (e.g., Lavee et al. 1996). Theories on family and parenting stress (e.g., Abidin, 1992; Crnic and Low, 2002) suggest that parenting related stressors (e.g., daily hassles) could occur and accumulate that produce parenting stress and affect parents' well-being. Indulgent parenting, which demands a significant amount of time and resources from parents, could produce more parenting stress and exacerbate the negative effects of parenting on parents' well-being. In a qualitative study of parents' perspectives of their indulgent behavior of their adolescent children, Rehm et al. (2016) reported that some parents gave so much of their own time and resources to address their adolescent children's needs (e.g., planning and taking a role in their children's activities, spending a disproportionate amount of income to provide for their children) which created parenting-related stress.

Some other studies, however, suggested positive outcomes among parents. In a review by Nelson et al. (2014), they reported that parenting has been found to be associated with happiness, satisfaction, and positive affect in a few studies. This review, however, is based on parenthood in general and did not focus on indulgent parenting. In a study by Ashton-James et al. (2013), they suggested that child-centric parents reported more happiness and meaning from parenthood. The sample was drawn from parents in Canada whose median education were college graduates and whose children were younger. Further, child-centric parenting (i.e., placing their children at the center of their lives) is not the same as parental indulgence, because child-centric parents, though placing their children's needs first, could practice any type of parenting (e.g., high behavioral demands and expectations). Further, parents have been found to report higher parenthood satisfaction with younger children than adolescent children (Nomaguchi, 2012). Nevertheless, these studies suggested that the relation between parenting and parents' well-being is complex, and the literature is mixed (Nelson et al. 2014).

Regarding child outcomes, consistent with socialization theory (Bandura, 1977; Sears et al. 1957), some studies of indulgent/permissive parenting in childhood and adolescence suggested that indulgent parenting was associated with emotional problems among children and adolescents, such as anxiety and depression (Bayer et al. 2006; Gar and Hudson, 2008). Related research provided support on other outcomes among children and adolescents, such as unhealthy eating behaviors (Coccia et al. 2012), higher levels of delinquency and alcohol use (Bahr

and Hoffmann, 2010), and elevated aggressive-disruptive behavior (Chen et al. 2000). Fewer studies have examined the association between indulgent parenting and child well-being beyond childhood and adolescent years. In a study by Cui et al. (2016), parental indulgence in earlier years was associated with emotional problems (e.g., anxiety, depression) among emerging adults. In another study, Cui et al. (2018) examined profiles of indulgent parenting and found that high indulgence group was associated with college students' emotional problems. However, neither of these studies examined the role of helicopter parenting in linking the association between indulgent parenting and emerging adult children's negative well-being.

Indeed, helicopter parenting could be the more proximal parenting factor associated with emerging adults' negative well-being. LeMoyne and Buchanan (2011) found that helicopter parenting was positively associated with having medications for anxiety and depression among college students. Schiffrin et al. (2014) reported that helicopter parenting was positively associated with depression and negatively associated with satisfaction of basic psychological needs among college students. Kouros et al. (2017) reported that helicopter parenting was associated with lower levels of well-being for female college students. Several other studies also suggested that helicopter parenting was associated with lower self-regulatory abilities and self-worth but higher levels of risk behaviors and sense of entitlement among college students (e.g., Bradley-Geist and Olson-Buchanan, 2014; Nelson et al. 2015; Segrin et al. 2012; Segrin et al. 2013; van Ingen et al. 2015). A higher level of life satisfaction, however, was found in one study of college students (Coccia and Darling, 2017).

One issue with interpreting the results of these studies is that they used different timeframes when operationalizing helicopter parenting. Some studies measured current helicopter parenting (e.g., Schiffrin et al. 2014; Segrin et al. 2013), whereas others measured such parenting behavior since growing up (LeMoyne and Buchanan, 2011). The differences in timeframe could lead to different interpretations of the results (e.g., cumulative effects rather than effects of current helicopter parenting). Taken together, these findings suggest that helicopter parenting in emerging adulthood, which may continue from indulgent parenting in childhood and adolescent years, is associated with emerging adults' negative well-being.

In the present study, to advance the understanding of the relations among indulgent parenting, helicopter parenting, and negative well-being of parents and emerging adult children, two sets of analyses were conducted with the following goals. The first goal was to examine the association between indulgent parenting and helicopter

parenting, parents' parenting stress, and parents' negative well-being. Based on family stress and role stress theories and some studies (e.g., Rehm et al. 2016), Hypothesis 1 stated that indulgent parenting during childhood and adolescence would be positively related to helicopter parenting of emerging adults, parenting specific stress, and negative well-being (e.g., depressive and anxiety symptoms, and life dissatisfaction) of parents. The second goal was to examine the association among indulgent parenting, helicopter parenting, and emerging adults' negative well-being. Based on socialization theory and previous research, Hypothesis 2 stated that indulgent parenting during earlier years would be positively associated with psychological problems in emerging adulthood and that this association was mediated through current helicopter parenting. The overall sample consisted of 449 college students. The primary parents of the student participants were also invited. A total of 142 parents participated. With the bigger sample of emerging adults but the smaller sample of parents, to take full advantage of the sample, two sets of analyses were conducted. Part I of the study focused on testing Hypothesis 1, with the study sample including 142 college students and their parents. Both the parents and emerging-adult children reported on parents' indulgent parenting and helicopter parenting behavior. These reports were utilized to minimize measurement bias (Lorenz et al. 2007). Part II of the study focused on testing Hypothesis 2 and used the full sample of 449 college students. Thus Part II took advantage of the full sample of emerging adults and their reports of both mothers and fathers. In both analyses, several covariates were included. In Part I the covariates included parents' reports of their gender, race, ethnicity, marital status, socioeconomic status, and age. In Part II the covariates included emerging adults' reports of their gender, race, ethnicity, family socioeconomic status, and family structure. These factors have been demonstrated to be related to indulgent parenting, helicopter parenting, or emerging adults' well-being (e.g., Cui et al. 2016).

## Part I on Parents

### Method

#### Participants

Participants were undergraduate students recruited from two large southern universities. IRB approval was obtained. Students were recruited from introductory college courses, which met university liberal studies requirements and served as college core courses. Of the 712 students enrolled in these courses, 449 (63%) participated in the online

survey. The average age of the participants was 20.71. Among the student participants, their primary parents were also invited to participate. Of the 449 parents, 142 responded and completed the survey on their parenting and well-being. This study in Part I used the sample of 142 parent-student dyads.

Among the 142 student participants, 90% were female, 87% were White, 24% were Hispanic, and 73% were from two-biological parent families. Among their parents, 86% were mothers, 86% were White, and 22% were Hispanic. Over 90% of the parents were in their 40s and 50s, and half reported having a bachelor's degree and beyond. Comparisons between students whose parents responded and students whose parents did not respond suggested no differences in terms of child report of parenting behaviors (indulgent parenting, helicopter parenting) and demographics (gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, family structure).

### Procedures

Students in the targeted classes were invited to participate in an online survey for extra credit. Participants were asked to complete a battery of questionnaires, which included an assessment of their parents' indulgent parenting behaviors in the past, current helicopter parenting, their own well-being, and demographics. In addition to the student survey, email invitations were also sent to the participants' primary parents through the email address the student participants provided. Parents who completed the survey received a \$10 e-gift card.

### Measures

**Indulgent parenting** Indulgent parenting in childhood and adolescence was assessed using both child and parent reports that incorporated a 30-item measure with subscales of material, relational, and behavioral indulgence (Cui et al. 2016; also see Bredehoft and Walcheski, 2008). Student participants reported the indulgent behaviors of their mother and father with whom they lived most of the time *in their childhood and adolescent years*. Parents were also asked about their indulgent behaviors using the same items. Depending on whether the student's mother or father participated in the survey, the child's report of that parent was used. The measure included 10 items in each subscales of *material indulgence* (e.g., "my mother/father gave me all the clothes I wanted,"  $\alpha = .91$  for child report,  $\alpha = .88$  for parent report), *relational indulgence* (e.g., "my mother/father tried to solve problems for me before I even experienced them,"  $\alpha = .81$  for child report,  $\alpha = .82$  for parent report), and *behavioral indulgence* (e.g., "my mother/father

let me get away without doing work she/he told me to do,"  $\alpha = .82$  for child report,  $\alpha = .84$  for parent report). Each item ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree* with several items reverse coded. Scores for the items were summed within each subscale to create three indicators of a latent construct. Within each indicator, the child and parent reports were summed with a higher score indicating a higher level of parental indulgence.

**Helicopter parenting** Helicopter parenting in emerging adulthood was also assessed by both parent and child reports using a 9-item helicopter parenting scale (Schiffirin et al. 2014). The items were reported by the students about the parent who participated (e.g., "my mother/father regularly wants me to call or text her/him to let her/him know where I am") and the parents report of their own behavior since the emerging adult child started college. Responses ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. The items within child report ( $\alpha = .84$ ) and parent report ( $\alpha = .85$ ) were summed to create two indicators of a latent construct.

**Parenting stress** Parenting stress was measured by parent reports on a modified parenting stress index (PSI; Abidin, 1995). Nine items were appropriate for college-age offspring. Sample items included "I feel trapped by my responsibilities as a parent" and "I find myself giving up more of my life to meet my child's needs than I ever expected." The responses ranged from 1 = *strongly agree* to 5 = *strongly disagree*. Items were reverse coded so that a higher score indicated a higher level of stress. The items were split based on factor analyses to create two indicators of a latent construct ( $\alpha = .85$  for a role-focused stress indicator with 5 items, and  $\alpha = .86$  for a relation-focused stress indicator with 4 items).

**Parents' negative well-being** Parents' reports were used in assessing their negative well-being. *Depressive symptoms* were assessed by the 10-item CES-D (Radloff, 1977). Participants were asked to indicate how often they had certain feelings during the past week. Sample items included "I felt that everything I did was an effort" and "I felt fearful." Response categories for these items ranged from 1 = *rarely or none of the times (less than one day)* to 4 = *most or all the time (5-7 days)*. Two items were reverse coded and the items were summed together ( $\alpha = .80$ ). *Anxiety symptoms* were assessed by the 10-item Beck Anxiety Inventory (Beck et al. 1988), asking participants how much they were bothered by the symptoms during the past month. Sample items included "unable to relax" and "fear of losing control." Response categories ranged from 0 = *not at all* to 3 = *severely – it bothered me a lot*. The

**Table 1** Descriptive information on study variables for part I on parents ( $N = 142$ )

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	Min.	Max.
Indulgent parenting (child and parent report)				
Material indulgence	52.14	12.87	20	85
Relational indulgence	45.47	10.56	22	74
Behavioral indulgence	38.70	9.35	20	69
Helicopter parenting (child and parent report)				
Parent report	29.27	10.62	9	57
Child report	20.10	6.80	9	39
Parents' negative well-being				
Parenting stress				
Role focused	9.24	3.78	5	19
Relation focused	7.05	3.18	4	18
Depressive symptoms	14.58	4.33	10	32
Anxiety symptoms	13.35	3.87	10	30
Life dissatisfaction	13.04	5.75	5	30
Demographics				
Parents		Emerging adults		
Gender (Female)	86.3%	Gender (Female)	90.1%	
Race (White)	85.6%	Race (White)	86.6%	
Ethnicity (Hispanic)	22.3%	Ethnicity (Hispanic)	24.3%	
Education		Family Income		
Less than high school	1.4%	Below 30k	5.9%	
High school	17.3%	30–50k	11.1%	
2-year school	23.0%	50–100k	43.0%	
Bachelor's degree	36.7%	Above 100k	40.0%	
Post-bachelor's degree	21.6%	Family structure		
Age		(Two biological parent)	73.2%	
40 or below	2.9%			
41–50	41.7%			
51–60	50.4%			
61 and above	5.0%			
Marital status (Married)	75.4%			

items were summed together ( $\alpha = .87$ ). *Life dissatisfaction* was measured by the 5-item life satisfaction scale (Diener et al. 1985). Sample items included “I am satisfied with my life” and “the conditions of my life are excellent.” The responses ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. Items were reverse coded then summed to create a composite score of life dissatisfaction ( $\alpha = .91$ ).

**Covariates** The *gender* of the parent was coded as 1 = *male* and 2 = *female*. *Race* was dichotomized as 1 = *White* and 0 = *other* because of the small number of participants who were in other racial categories. *Ethnicity* was coded as 1 = *Hispanic* and 0 = *non-Hispanic*. *Age* was assessed by 1 = *40 or below*, 2 = *41–50*, 3 = *51–60*, and 4 = *61 and above*. *Education* was assessed by five categories from less than high school to post bachelor's degree. *Parents' marital status* was dichotomized as 1 = *married* and 0 = *other*.

## Results

Table 1 provides the means and standard deviations of the variables. It also provides the demographics for both parents

and emerging adults. To have a more intuitive sense of the state of indulgent parenting, we rescaled the measure from sum scores to mean scores on the original 1–5 scale. Results (not shown) suggested that the mean scores were mostly between 2 and 3 (e.g.,  $M = 2.61$ ,  $SD = .65$  for material indulgence), suggesting low to moderate degree of indulgent parenting but with sufficient variations. Similar patterns were found in helicopter parenting. Table 2 provides the correlations among the variables. First, the correlations among the three indicators of indulgent parenting ranged from .50 to .54 ( $p < .01$  for all), suggesting moderate associations among them. Second, the correlations between the three indicators of indulgent parenting and child and parent reports of helicopter parenting were all significant except for one (.15 between behavioral indulgence and child report of helicopter parenting). More importantly, the correlations between the indicators of indulgent parenting and parents' negative well-being and stress were mostly significant (e.g.,  $r = .27$ ,  $p < .01$ , between material indulgence and parent depressive symptoms). Even though material and behavioral indulgence seemed to have a stronger association with parents' outcome than relational indulgence, comparisons of correlations between the indicators of parental indulgence and parents' negative well-being and stress yielded z scores ranging from 0.20 ( $p = .42$ ) to 1.48 ( $p = .07$ ), suggesting no significant differences (Lenhard and Lenhard, 2014).

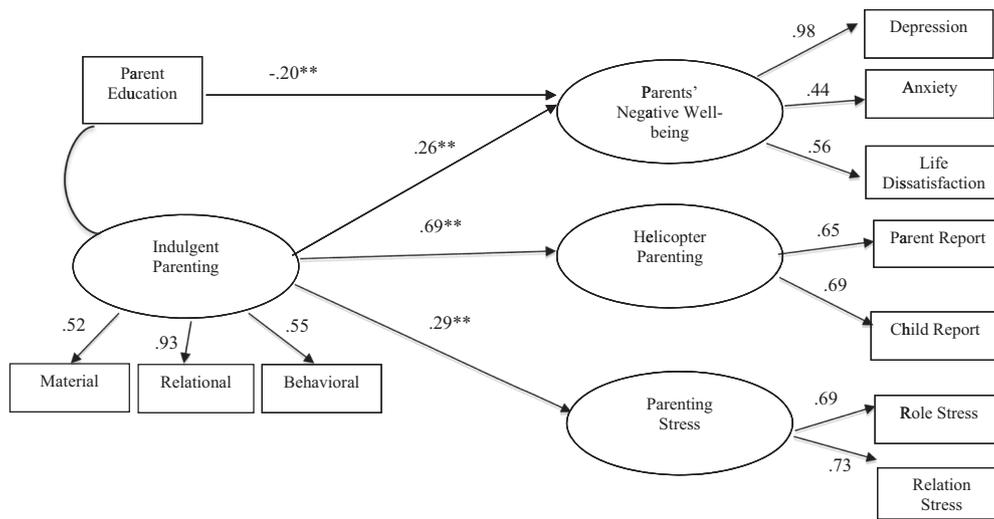
To test Hypothesis 1 concerning parenting and parental outcomes, structural equation modeling (SEM) was used (Kline, 2015) with Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML). FIML computes maximum likelihood estimates and standard errors from data with missing values and provides less biased estimation than listwise deletion (Schafer, 1997). In preliminary analyses, all covariates were included in the model (i.e., parent report of gender, race, ethnicity, education, age, and marital status) and their effects on outcomes were tested. To maintain parsimony, only the covariates that had significant paths were remained in the final model. The only covariate that had a significant path was parents' education.

Figure 1 shows the results from the final SEM with the final sample ( $N = 142$ ). The Chi-square was 38.45 with 34 degrees of freedom. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was .99. RMSEA was .03, and p close (Pc) was .75. These fit indices all suggested a good fit of the model to the data (Kline, 2015). Indulgent parenting was positively and significantly related to helicopter parenting ( $b = .69$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Further, indulgent parenting was also significantly related to parenting stress ( $b = .29$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and parents' negative well-being ( $b = .26$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Only parents' education was significantly and negatively associated with parents' negative well-being ( $b = -.20$ ,  $p < .01$ ), suggesting that higher education was associated with lower levels of well-being

**Table 2** Correlations among study variables for part I on parents

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Material indulgence	1.00									
2. Relational indulgence	.50**	1.00								
3. Behavioral indulgence	.54**	.53**	1.00							
4. Helicopter parenting parent report	.21*	.41**	.24**	1.00						
5. Helicopter parenting child report	.21*	.45**	.15	.46**	1.00					
6. Parent depressive symptoms	.27**	.25**	.26**	.20*	.10	1.00				
7. Parent anxiety	.18*	.10	.08	.03	.10	.56**	1.00			
8. Parent life dissatisfaction	.20*	.04	.19*	.08	.08	.55**	.27**	1.00		
9. Parent role stress	.12	.03	.16*	.17*	.09	.42**	.19*	.50**	1.00	
10. Parent relation stress	.20*	.17*	.24**	.13	.07	.44**	.39**	.30**	.52**	1.00

Note:  $N = 142$ . \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$



**Fig. 1** Model for part I on parents

problems among parents. Given that majority of the sample included mothers and daughters, a mother-daughter subset of sample ( $N = 108$ ) was tested (not shown) and the results revealed similar findings ( $b = .73$  from indulgent parenting to helicopter parenting,  $b = .43$  from indulgent parenting to parenting stress, and  $b = .32$  from indulgent parenting to parents' negative well-being,  $p < .01$  for all).

**Discussion**

Results from this part of the study suggested that indulgent parenting in childhood and adolescence was significantly and positively associated with helicopter parenting in emerging adulthood, parents' parenting stress, and parents' negative well-being. Previous studies have examined indulgent parenting and helicopter parenting separately (e.g., Cui et al. 2016; Schiffrin et al. 2014), and have not examined the link between the two. Findings from this study

supported the hypothesis that indulgent parenting in earlier years was associated with helicopter parenting when children become emerging adults. In particular, as the factor loading suggested, relational indulgence—as defined as parents' being overly involved and overly protective (Clarke et al. 2014), could be the driving force of the linkage between indulgent parenting and helicopter parenting.

Results from this study also suggested that indulgent parenting was associated with parents' own well-being problems. Even though some studies suggested an association between parenthood and parents' positive well-being (e.g., Ashton-James et al. 2013; also see review by Nelson et al. 2014), findings from this study are consistent with other studies suggesting that parenting was associated with parents' negative well-being (e.g., Lavee et al. 1996). Indeed, the potential negative effects of parenting on parents' well-being could be especially salient for indulgent parenting when parents invest tremendous amount of time,

energy and resources on their children, therefore leading to their own negative well-being. Further, during adolescence—a stage when children seek autonomy and independence and renegotiate parent-child relationship (Smetana, 1995), indulgent parenting could be age inappropriate and generate conflicts between parents and adolescent children, leading to parents' well-being problems. Few studies have examined the association between indulgent parenting and problems in parents' well-being except for a qualitative study by Rehm et al. (2016). Findings from this study provided quantitative support to demonstrate that indulgent parenting was associated with higher parenting stress, depressive and anxiety symptoms, and life dissatisfaction.

The present study also improved on prior methods used in this area by using both parent and child reports. Relying on a single reporter could inflate the associations among constructs and is subject to measurement bias (e.g., memory, emotional state; Lorenz et al. 1991). In this study, indulgent parenting and helicopter parenting were measured by both parent and child reports. Descriptive statistics suggested that parents and children may differ in their perspectives. Such an approach reduced shared method biases among constructs while taking advantage of perspectives from both parents and children. It is worth noting, however, that even with reports from multiple sources, both parent and child reports were subject to social desirability, which could affect the association between reported indulgent parenting and parents' well-being. In addition, this part of the study had several limitations, such as using a small sample and collecting data from only the primary parents. Therefore, the results only reflected that associations among primary parents and did not consider the potential different parenting roles and experiences of both parents. Finally, future research should further explore the mechanisms between indulgent parenting in childhood and adolescence and parenting behavior and parents' well-being in emerging adulthood. With a larger sample of emerging adults, we now turn to emerging adults' outcomes and test the associations among indulgent parenting during childhood and adolescence, current helicopter parenting, and emerging adults' negative well-being.

## Part II on Emerging Adults

### Method

#### Participants

Only student reports were included in this study. Therefore, the sample size was the full sample of 449 students. Among the 449 student participants, 89% were female, 84% were

White, 32% were Hispanic, and 66% were from two-biological parent families.

#### Procedures

The procedures were the same as in Part I of the study. Only the student survey was used in this part of the study.

#### Measures

**Indulgent parenting** Indulgent parenting in childhood and adolescence was assessed as described in Part I. Student participants were asked to report the indulgent behaviors of their mother and father separately. The measure included three subscales: *material indulgence* ( $\alpha = .90$  for report of mother,  $\alpha = .92$  for report of father), *relational indulgence* ( $\alpha = .82$  for mother,  $\alpha = .80$  for father), and *behavioral indulgence* ( $\alpha = .84$  for mother,  $\alpha = .80$  for father). Scores for the items were summed within each subscale and across mothers and fathers to create three indicators of a latent construct.

**Helicopter parenting** To increase validity of the construct of helicopter parenting and to provide a conceptual replication of the indulgent-helicopter parenting link in Part I, helicopter parenting in emerging adulthood was assessed using a different measure of helicopter parenting (Bradley-Geist and Olson-Buchanan, 2014). The scale included five items, asking student participants about their perspectives of their mothers' and fathers' helicopter parenting since they started college (e.g., "I think my mother/father is too overly involved in my life," "I feel like my mother/father has interfered in my life when I wish she/he wouldn't have"). Responses ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. The items were summed for report of mother ( $\alpha = .86$ ) and father ( $\alpha = .89$ ) as two indicators of helicopter parenting.

**Emerging adults' negative well-being** *Depressive symptoms* were assessed by the 10-item CES-D (Radloff, 1977) as in Part I. The items were summed together ( $\alpha = .80$ ) as the first indicator of the latent construct of negative psychological well-being. *Anxiety symptoms* were assessed by the 10-item Beck Anxiety Inventory (Beck et al. 1988), as in Part I. The items were summed ( $\alpha = .88$ ) as the second indicator. *Emotional dysregulation* was measured by the short version of the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS-18; Victor and Klonsky, 2016). Sample items included "when I'm upset, I became out of control" and "when I'm upset, I have difficulty concentrating." Responses ranged from 0 = *almost never* (0–10%) to 5 = *almost always* (91–100%). Several items were reverse coded and the items were summed ( $\alpha = .89$ ) as the third indicator.

**Covariates** The *gender* of emerging adults was coded as 1 = *male* and 2 = *female*. *Race* was dichotomized as 1 = *White* and 0 = *other*. *Ethnicity* was coded as 1 = *Hispanic* and 0 = *non-Hispanic*. *Family income* was assessed by 1 = *below 30k*, 2 = *30k-below 50k*, 3 = *50k-below 100k*, and 4 = *100k and above*. *Family structure* was dichotomized as 1 = *two-biological parent family* and 0 = *other*.

## Results

Table 3 provides the percentages or means and standard deviations of the variables of interests. It also provides the demographics for the emerging adults. As in Part I, we rescaled the indulgent and helicopter parenting measures from sum scores to mean scores, and the patterns remained the same, indicating low to moderate indulgent and helicopter parenting with variations. Table 4 provides correlations among study variables. The correlations suggested that the indicators of indulgent parenting correlated moderately (.43 to .62,  $p < .01$  for all) and significantly correlated with maternal and paternal helicopter parenting in general. Further, the correlations between helicopter parenting and emerging adults' negative well-being were mostly significant. Even though relational indulgence seemed to have a stronger correlation with emerging adults' well-being than material and behavioral well-being, and paternal helicopter parenting seemed to have a stronger association with emerging adults' well-being than material helicopter parenting, comparisons of correlations suggested no significant differences ( $z$  scores ranging from 0.29,  $p = .39$  to 1.19,  $p = .12$ ). To test Hypothesis 2, SEM was used. Covariates were handled in the same way as in Part I. The only covariate with a significant path was income.

Figure 2 shows the results from the final SEM with the final sample ( $N = 449$ ). The Chi-square was 65.21 with 23 degrees of freedom. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was .96. RMSEA was .06, and  $p$  close ( $P_c$ ) was .10. These fit indices all suggested a reasonable fit of the model to the data (Kline, 2015). Indulgent parenting was positively and significantly related to helicopter parenting ( $b = .58$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Helicopter parenting was significantly related to emerging adults' negative well-being ( $b = .25$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The direct path from indulgent parenting to emerging adults' negative well-being was not significant ( $b = .00$ , ns). The mediating effects were tested by using bootstrapping based on 2,000 resamples. The results suggested that the mediating effect from indulgent parenting to negative well-being through helicopter parenting was significant (.15, 95% CI .03 to .43; Dearing and Hamilton, 2006; Fritz and MacKinnon, 2007). Seven percent of the variance in emerging adults' negative well-being was explained by the mediation. Only family income was significantly and negatively associated with emerging adults' negative well-being ( $b = -.13$ ,

**Table 3** Descriptive information on study variables for part II on emerging adults ( $N = 449$ )

Variables	<i>M</i> or %	<i>S.D.</i>	Min.	Max.
Indulgent parenting (child report of mother and father)				
Material indulgence	53.38	17.60	10	100
Relational indulgence	43.34	12.59	10	85
Behavioral indulgence	39.88	11.85	11	71
Helicopter parenting (child report of mother and father)				
Child report of mother	10.40	4.07	5	25
Child report of father	9.27	4.14	5	25
Emerging adults' negative well-being				
Depressive symptoms	19.63	5.12	10	38
Anxiety symptoms	8.69	6.19	0	30
Emotional dysregulation	39.33	11.87	18	84
Demographics				
Gender (Female)	89.0%			
Race (White)	83.9%			
Ethnicity (Hispanic)	31.9%			
Family income				
Below 30k	13.9%			
30–below 50k	17.3%			
50–below 100k	34.9%			
100k and above	33.9%			
Family structure				
(Two biological parent)	66.2%			

$p < .05$ ), suggesting that higher income was associated with lower levels of well-being problems among emerging adults. In addition, a subset of female college students ( $N = 398$ ) was tested (not shown) and the results revealed similar findings ( $b = .56$  from indulgence to helicopter parenting,  $b = .26$  from helicopter parenting to child outcome, and  $b = .00$  for direct path from indulgence to child outcome).

## Discussion

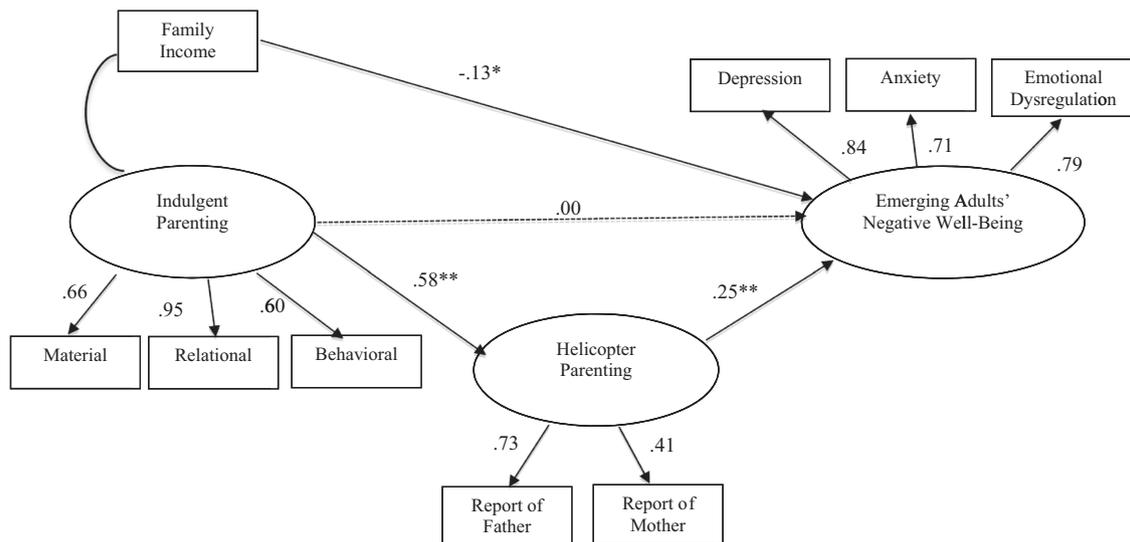
Results from SEM suggested that indulgent parenting in childhood and adolescence was significantly and positively associated with helicopter parenting in emerging adulthood, and helicopter parenting was significantly associated with emerging adults' negative well-being. With a larger sample and a different measure of helicopter parenting, Part II provided a conceptual and empirical replication of the results obtained in Part I on the association between indulgent parenting and helicopter parenting. The findings added further support to the idea that helicopter parenting in emerging adulthood was associated with indulgent parenting in earlier years.

More importantly, Part II of the analyses supported findings from previous studies (e.g., Kouros et al. 2017;

**Table 4** Correlations among study variables for part II on emerging adults

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Material indulgence	1.00							
2. Relational indulgence	.62**	1.00						
3. Behavioral indulgence	.43**	.56**	1.00					
4. Paternal helicopter parenting	.15*	.39**	.25**	1.00				
5. Maternal helicopter parenting	.06	.24**	.13**	.32**	1.00			
6. Child depressive symptoms	.02	.10*	.03	.15**	.13**	1.00		
7. Child anxiety	.01	.09	.02	.14**	.07	.60**	1.00	
8. Child emotional dysregulation	.06	.12**	.08	.17**	.09	.66**	.56**	1.00

Note:  $N = 449$ . \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

**Fig. 2** Model for part II on emerging adults

LeMoyne and Buchanan, 2011; Schiffrin et al. 2014) that helicopter parenting was associated with emerging adults' negative well-being including higher anxiety and depressive symptoms and emotional regulatory problems. The finding of a significant mediating effect extended previous studies by demonstrating that helicopter parenting served as a link between past experience of indulgence and psychological problems in emerging adulthood.

This study took advantage of the larger sample of college students and their reports on both mothers and fathers. Having reports on both mothers and fathers provided a more comprehensive picture of the parenting practice and its effects (Cui et al. 2016). However, this study also had its own limitations, particularly the use of single-informant report (i.e., self-report), which could inflate the associations tested (Lorenz et al. 1991).

## General Discussion

The purpose of this research was to examine indulgent parenting in childhood and adolescence, its link to

helicopter parenting in emerging adulthood, and the associations of parenting practices with the negative well-being of both parents and emerging adult children. Regarding the parenting behavior from indulgent parenting in childhood and adolescence to helicopter parenting in emerging adulthood, findings from both Part I and Part II provided support for this association. In Part I, matching pairs of 142 parents and emerging adult children were included and both reported on their perspective of parenting. In Part II, 449 emerging adults reported parenting of both mothers and fathers. Such variations in reporters (parent vs. child report) and the referent of the report (report of mother or father) supported the results through different methods. Further, Schiffrin et al.'s (2014) measure of helicopter parenting was used in Part I, which focused on specific indulgent behavior (e.g., monitor who emerging adults spend time with, track schoolwork, etc.). Bradley-Geist and Olson-Buchanan's (2014) measure of helicopter parenting was used in Part II, which focused on emerging adult children's perception of the negative parenting behavior (e.g., feel like parents smother them with attention). Using different measures to

replicate the findings may increase confidence in the association reported between indulgent parenting and helicopter parenting.

It is worth noting that even though findings suggested close associations between indulgent parenting in childhood and adolescent years and helicopter parenting in emerging adulthood, the correlations and path coefficients also revealed some differences. This may suggest some differences in the concepts of indulgent parenting and helicopter parenting. Indeed, indulgent parenting reflects a multi-dimensional parenting concept that may evaluate a broader range of behavior (i.e., material, relational, and behavioral indulgence; Cui et al. 2016). Helicopter parenting, on the other hand, focuses on the relational aspects (e.g., overinvolvement and overprotectiveness; Padilla-Walker and Nelson, 2012). While some helicopter parents may hold low behavioral expectations of their children and shielding them from behavioral consequences, others may have high behavioral demands and expectations. Therefore, indulgent parenting in earlier years and helicopter parenting in emerging adulthood could be related yet different. It would be interesting for future studies to explore what type of indulgent parents become helicopter parents, under what conditions, and what other factors contributed to becoming helicopter parents.

Taken together, findings from both Part I and Part II provided support for the associations among indulgent parenting, helicopter parenting, and negative well-being of both parents and emerging adults. Parental indulgence was positively related to parenting stress and parents' negative well-being in Part I. Parenting stress has been shown to correlate highly with parental depression (Goodman and Tulley, 2008). These findings are consistent with the parenting stress perspective (e.g., Abidin, 1992; Crnic and Low, 2002). In Part II, parental indulgence was associated with helicopter parenting, which in turn, was related to higher levels of symptoms of depression and anxiety and emotional dysregulation among emerging adults. These findings were consistent with the theoretical perspectives of socialization (Bandura, 1977; Sears et al. 1957). Several studies have suggested that children who grow up with overinvolved parents were more likely to exhibit neurotic tendencies and lack effective coping skills (Odenweller et al. 2014; Schiffrin et al. 2014). In particular to emerging adults, consistent with self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000), past indulgent parenting and current helicopter parenting may discourage their growth and achievements in psychological needs and abilities, which undermine their well-being. Such potential mechanisms linking indulgent and helicopter parenting to emerging adult children's negative well-being should be further explored (Cui et al. 2018). Taken together, the findings from the current studies emphasized the need for a family systems perspective, in

which the well-being of each individual is critical to various aspects of the family system including marital relationships, parent-child relationships, and child development (Rehm et al. 2016).

Even though both studies used the same overall sample source, each took advantage of some unique features of the overall sample (e.g., different subsample, different measures). However, this study should be also viewed in the light of several general limitations. The sample comprised undergraduate students from two universities, the majority of whom were white female students. The majority of parents participated in Part I were mothers. Because of the small numbers of male students (and fathers) in the sample, the null findings on child gender as a covariate should be interpreted with caution. Further, the inability to test child gender differences in the key associations calls for future studies to examine the potential role of gender of emerging adult children and parents as they may play a role in the association between parenting and college students' mental health outcomes (Kouros et al. 2017). Also, because of the difficulty in getting parents to participate, our sample included 449 college students but only 142 primary parents, which limited the ability to explore the potential differences between parent's and emerging adult child's perspectives. Indeed, even though we took advantage of multiple informants and combined parent and child reports across the three dimensions of indulgent parenting in Part I, parent and child could have different perspectives. Due to the limited sample size, this study could not further look into the potential different perspectives and their implications. Future studies with larger samples and reports from both parents and children are needed to capture the potential differences. Finally, the study was cross-sectional in design with indulgent parenting reported retrospectively. Therefore, the direction of associations needs to be interpreted with caution. It is possible that helicopter parents were more inclined to recall their earlier parenting practices as being more indulgent. It is also possible that parents whose children were more anxious and depressed practiced more intensive parenting. More studies with longitudinal designs and multi-informant methods are needed to provide support for the direction and mechanism of the associations.

Taken together, the findings of this research contribute to the current literature by demonstrating the associations among indulgent parenting, helicopter parenting, parents' and emerging adults' negative well-being. The message that indulgent parenting is linked to helicopter parenting in emerging adulthood and is harmful for both parents and their children should be conveyed through family life education, parenting, and university student support programs to promote not just the children's well-being, but the parents' well-being, which can strengthen family functioning and the well-being of each family member. For example,

empirical evidence from this study could be implemented in new or existing parenting programs to clarify the misconceptions of indulgent and helicopter parenting (as the ultimate parental affection and devotion), describe the connection and signs of indulgent and helicopter parenting behavior, discuss the negative associations with well-being, and teach skills to handle indulgent and helicopter parenting-related situations. The successful delivery of such programs has the potential to enhance parenting skills, improve parent-child communication, decrease parenting stress, and well-being problems.

**Author Contributions** M.C.: designed and executed the study, performed data analyses, and wrote the paper. C.A.D.: collaborated with the design of the study and editing of the final manuscript. C.C.: assisted with manuscript editing. F.D.F.: assisted with manuscript editing. R.W.M.: assisted with data collection and editing of the final manuscript.

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## Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Conflict of Interest** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

**Ethical Approval** All procedures performed in this study involving human subjects were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Florida State University and Florida International University.

**Informed Consent** Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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