



The Impact of Helicopter Parenting and Interparental Conflict on College Students' Romantic Relationships: The Mediating Role of Attachment-related Behaviors

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Introduction

- The term helicopter parenting (i.e., parents' over-involvement in the lives of their child) has been used to describe parents who exercise increased involvement and control over their child and is mostly regarded as developmentally inappropriate for emerging adults (Kouros et al., 2017; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012).
- Helicopter parenting has been associated with increased negative attachment-related behaviors, such as anxiety and avoidance, and decreased romantic relationship satisfaction in college students (Jiao et al., 2024; Miller et al., 2024).
- Adolescents who have reported higher rates of interparental conflict have also reported increased negative attachment-related behaviors as well as decreased relationship satisfaction with their romantic partner (Owen & Cox, 1997; Singh & Thomas, 2023).
- College students' reports of increased negative attachment-related behaviors have been associated with decreased relationship satisfaction (Gleeson & Fitzgerald, 2014).
- The current study examined the associations between helicopter parenting, interparental conflict, and parenting warmth on college students' relationship satisfaction.
 - An additional aim of the current study was to examine the extent to which attachment-related behaviors explain these associations.

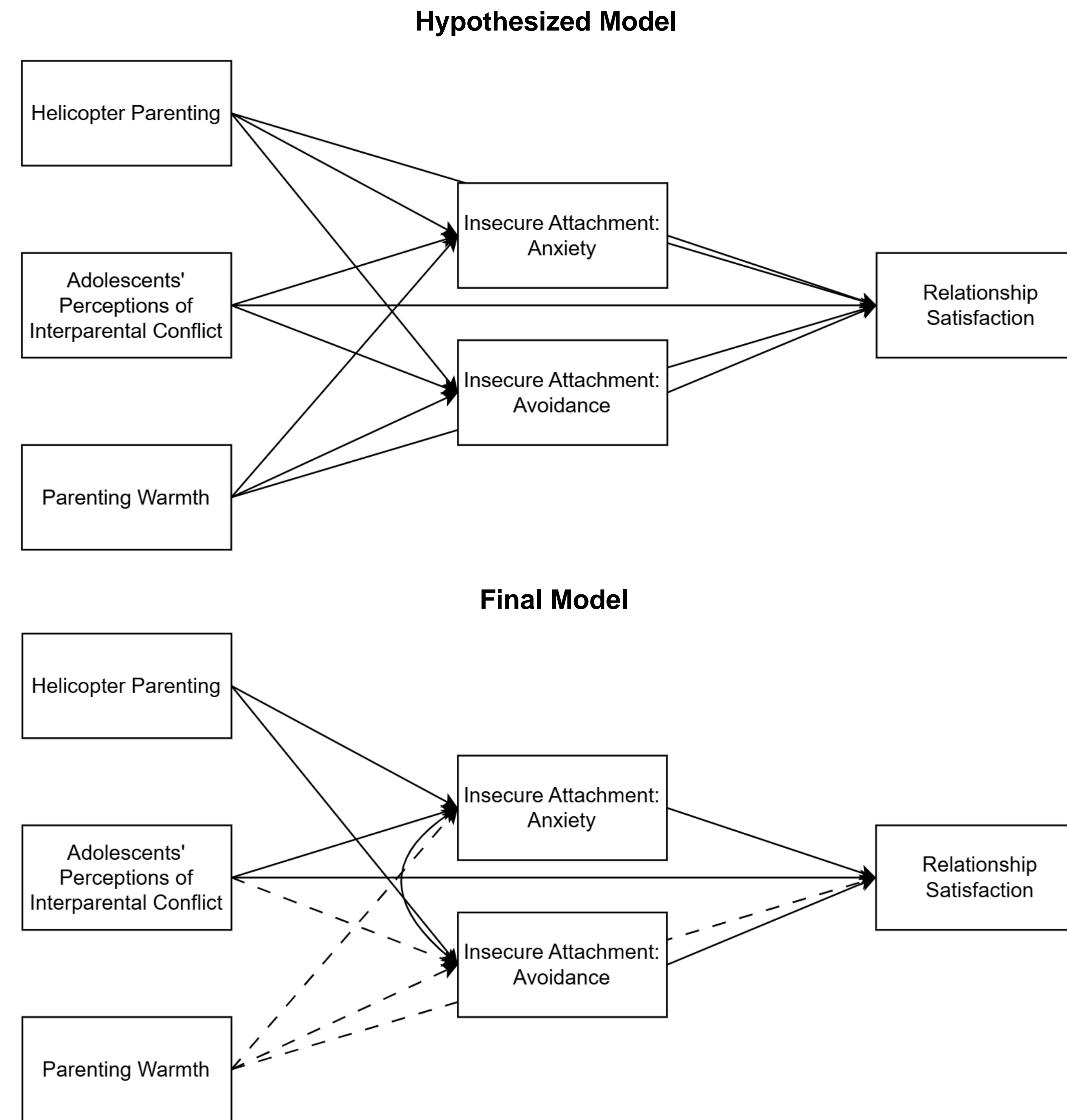
Method

- Participants included 413 undergraduate students.
- Students completed a battery of online surveys for approximately 45-60 minutes in exchange for partial course credit.
- Students completed a series of questionnaires assessing their parents' parenting behaviors (i.e., helicopter parenting and parenting warmth) and interparental conflict experiences, negative attachment-related behaviors (i.e., anxiety and avoidance), and relationship satisfaction.

Measures

- Consolidated Helicopter Parenting Scale (CHPS; Schiffrin et al., 2019)
- Children's Perception of the Interparental Conflict Scale (CPIC; Grych et al., 1992)
- Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI; Parker et al., 1979)
- Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR; Miller et al., 2024)
- Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI; Funk & Rogge, 2007)

Results



Note. Dotted arrows represent non-significant effects. Parenting warmth included in final model for statistical control.

Final Model Estimates

(X → M)	β (SE)	p
Helicopter Parenting → Attachment-related Anxiety	.33 (.05)	.000***
Interparental Conflict Perceptions → Attachment-related Anxiety	.17 (.05)	.001***
Parenting Warmth → Attachment-related Anxiety	.08 (.05)	.119
Helicopter Parenting → Attachment-related Avoidance	.19 (.05)	.000***
Interparental Conflict Perceptions → Attachment-related Avoidance	.03 (.05)	.531
Parenting Warmth → Attachment-related Avoidance	-.05 (.06)	.407
(M → Y)		
Attachment-related Anxiety → Relationship Satisfaction	-.19 (.05)	.000***
Attachment-related Avoidance → Relationship Satisfaction	-.49 (.04)	.000***
(X → Y)		
Helicopter Parenting → Relationship Satisfaction	.02 (.05)	.692
Interparental Conflict Perceptions → Relationship Satisfaction	-.09 (.05)	.050*
Parenting Warmth → Relationship Satisfaction	-.06 (.05)	.206

Note: X → M = association between independent variable and mediator. M → Y = association between mediator and dependent variable. X → Y = association between independent variable and dependent variable. * p ≤ .05; *** p ≤ .001.

Discussion

- Results indicated that adolescents' perceptions of interparental conflict predicted decreased relationship satisfaction with their partner.
 - Findings support previous research indicating that interparental conflict is associated with poor relationship quality in emerging adults (Parade et al., 2012; Singh & Thomas, 2023).
- Attachment-related behaviors (i.e., anxiety and avoidance) were associated with decreased relationship satisfaction.
- Helicopter parenting increases attachment-related behaviors which, in turn, decrease relationship satisfaction.
- Adolescents' perceptions of interparental conflict increase attachment-related anxiety which, in turn, decrease relationship satisfaction.
- Parenting warmth was not associated with attachment-related behaviors or adolescents' relationship satisfaction.
- Findings of the current study suggest that interparental conflict and helicopter parenting differentially impact relationship satisfaction in adolescents.
- Future research should examine similar associations across time as the cross-sectional design of the current study is a limitation.
 - In addition, future research should examine additional parenting behaviors (i.e., parenting control, present conflict between parents) to determine whether they act as additional predictors of attachment-related behaviors or adolescents' relationship satisfaction.
- Clinicians working with adolescents with helicopter parents or interparental conflict experiences should tailor interventions to account for their indirect differential impact on adolescents' relationship satisfaction.

References

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