

## **Helicopter Parenting?: Parental Involvement In the Workplace**

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### **Abstract**

Many studies have investigated the effects of parental involvement on child development and academic performance at many ages, but little research addresses its impact on adult children's transition into the workplace. Using survey data from a random sample of college students at a small, private, liberal arts college in the Midwest as well as from a cohort of alumni from the same college, our research examines the prevalence of parental involvement in the workplace and its effects on the Millennial generation's transition into the workplace. We found a significant difference in how Baby Boomer, Generation X and Millennial workers perceive the positive outcomes of parental involvement in the workplace. Additionally, we found a significant relationship between parental involvement and participation in experiential learning opportunities among Millennial college students.

### **Introduction and Literature Review**

The Millennial generation, individuals born between 1980 and 2000, is entering the workplace and bringing along some unique generational characteristics. Generation scholar Ron Alsop (2007), identifies many areas in which Millennials continue to "shake up" the work environment. For instance, Alsop highlights the nature of Millennial workers as a generation that seeks a more casual work environment, expects constant performance feedback, seeks out socially responsible employers, has superior technological knowledge, expects a structured work environment, presumes quick and simple promotions, and has greater involvement from parents.

Our study examines the effects of parental involvement on Millennial children in the workplace. Helicopter parents share similar attributes to authoritarian parents who set clear and non-negotiable standards of achievement for their children, which results in lower levels of independence than children raised by permissive parents (Baumrind 1966). Helicopter parents also limit their child's autonomy by performing tasks on their child's behalf rather than allowing the child to carry out the task on his/her own, especially in education and workplace transition

(LeMoyné and Buchanan 2011). Below, we review Helicopter Parenting as it is presented in non-scholarly sources, followed by a review of empirical studies on generational trends of parental involvement, changing norms of contact between parents and children, and parental involvement in the workplace.

### *Helicopter Parenting in the Media*

Over the past decade, there has been a surge of popular media and non-scholarly publications on Helicopter Parenting. These sources suggest that as Millennials emerge from higher education and move into the workplace, their parents continue to be involved. For example, employers at Hewitt-Packard recall instances of parents contacting the company to discuss a child's salary, relocation package, and scholarship opportunities (Armour 2007). Parents also invade their Millennial children's lives by setting up interviews (Kantowitz et al. 2006) and calling employers to arrange time off from work for the holidays (Belkin 2007). This popular discourse paints a picture that hovering parents breed over-structured children with impeded independence and decision making skills, making them weak members of an office unit (Bail et al. 2009). Ultimately, these qualities suggest that Millennials lack the self-initiative and decisiveness of successful employees.

The corporate world is a major focus of this non-scholarly literature regarding Millennials in the workplace. Most of this work provides advice on managing Millennial employees. For example, these sources suggest that employers lay out each and every task, along with a timeline for task completion (Anonymous 2010). Skenazy, an anti-helicopter parenting activist, writes a blog encouraging parents to relinquish some of their control and structure to allow children to develop the independence that the Millennial generation seems to be lacking (Skenazy 2011). Atlas (2011) disagrees with Skenazy, supporting Helicopter Parents in his article on the "Super Person." He portrays the Millennial as a multi-lingual, straight-A student

with corporate and non-profit experience produced by dedicated, involved, and hovering parents (Atlas 2011).

### *Generational Trends*

The rise of the Millennials marks a generational shift in attitudes and behaviors within the child-parent relationship. Some values held by the Silent Generation (1925-1945) reemerge in the Millennials, such as a strong sense of morality, sociability, and emphasis on the home and family (Eisner 2005). However, the extent to which Millennials are tied to their parents is a generational anomaly. Howe and Strauss (2007), claim that today's young people have a closer and more involved relationship with parents than the youth of any other generation in living memory. Such parental participation was unheard of for earlier generations of young workers. Eisner (2001) contextualizes this trend laid out by Howe and Strauss (2007) claiming that Millennials are heavily influenced by some trends of the 1990s and 2000s, especially a renewed focus on family, structured lives, terrorism, patriotism, and parent advocacy. She argues that this retreat to the family unit is based on a precautionary attitude towards the post 9/11 world and unlike previous generations, Millennials want to connect with, rather than rebel against, their parents.

### *Increasing Contact Between Parents and Children*

The Millennial generation maintains frequent contact with parents after the transition into higher education. Technology may be the biggest facilitator of this high degree of parent-child interaction. The Millennial generation is truly a tethered generation where "the cell phone has become the new high-tech umbilical chord" (Alsop 2008: 51). Shoup, Gonyea, and Kuh (2009) found that over half of all students report being in contact with a parent often or very often, and that over 80% of students remain in frequent contact with mothers through electronic mediums, affirming Alsop's assertion. Shoup, Gonyea and Kuh (2009) also found that parental contact

often serves a support function for college students with over three-quarters of respondents reporting frequently following the advice of a parent. Further, Sun et al. (2000) found that parental bonds change very little throughout college years. Once a standard for parental contact is established in one's early collegiate years, it is unlikely to decline.

One explanation for this increase in parental involvement is the logic of financial investment relating to the rising cost of higher education. Millennials' parents understand the college experience as a transaction and see their college-age children as investments (Henning 2007; Randall 2007). According to Somers, these parents expect administrators to readily produce progress reports to monitor their "investments," and parents feel free to voice any dissatisfaction with their developing "portfolio" (Randall 2007). Beyond interacting with administrators, parents are also highly involved with and interested in their children's academic progress, grades, finances, and career planning (Wolf, Sax, and Harper 2009; College Parents of America 2006).

However, children are not only financial but also emotional investments and parents intervene in the non-academic lives of their Millennial children for many reasons. Parents increasingly see their role as protector. Especially in light of recent events such as the Columbine shootings and September 11 terrorist attacks (Henning 2007; Randall 2007; Taylor 2006). For example, a College Parents of America survey found that 12% of parents show concern for the health and safety of their children and 8.2% show concern for the personal relationships of their college-age children (College Parents of America 2006).

Perhaps more important than the frequency of contact between parents and their Millennial-aged children is the ways in which they interact. Cullaty (2011) found that supportive parental relationships in which parents relinquish control, encourage greater responsibility, and treat their children as equals, instill a greater sense of autonomy in their children. Conversely, parents that remain insistent on maintaining parental control inhibit the development of autonomy in their children. Likewise, Buhl (2007) found that both overly intimate and overly

conflicting relationships with one's mother decreases the well-being of the child in the post-graduation transition into the workplace. This might be a gendered issue, as high intimacy in father-child relationships correlate with higher well-being after this transition (Buhl 2007). Cullaty (2011) and Buhl (2007) are in agreement with LeMoynes and Buchanan's (2011) definition of Helicopter Parents as authoritative parents that over structure and act on behalf of a child, thus impeding independence.

While parental support appears to be a positive factor for a Millennial's development, over-bearing parental intervention may lead to negative outcomes. Shoup, Gonyea, and Kuh (2009) found that high degrees of parental involvement in academic matters is associated with lower grades. However, this is the only negative association that this study found between parental involvement and a college-aged child's development. Cullaty (2011) likewise found evidence that students who have trouble maintaining boundaries with their parents have worse relationships. For example, students who are pressured to change a major often feel resentment towards their parents (Cullaty 2011). There is also some evidence that students might resist overbearing parental control in college by becoming more financially independent. Christie and Munro (2001) found that the majority of college students sought jobs or were willing to take out loans to gain a greater sense of financial independence during college.

#### *Parental Involvement in the Workplace*

Parental involvement also extends to the employer recruitment process on college campuses. This is not surprising considering the high degree of contact parents have with college-aged children. The Collegiate Employment Research Institute (CERI) investigated the extent of parental involvement during on-campus job recruitment (Gardner 2007). CERI found that 40% of parents collected information on company websites, 31% submitted resumes on behalf of their student, 26% promoted their student for a position, 12% made interview arrangements, and 4% attended their student's job interview (Gardner 2007). Our research

strives to further explore the Millennial generation's transition into the workplace and the possible role that parents play in the process.

The present literature on Helicopter Parenting and parental involvement has provided a useful background for our study on the nature of parental involvement among Millennials in the workplace. Although we have attempted to cover a wide range of empirical and non-scholarly literature on the topic, we had neither the time, nor resources, to reach saturation. Through our findings, we have identified certain gaps in the literature. These gaps include: the differing perceptions of generations towards Helicopter Parenting, the impact of parental involvement on students' post-graduate expectations, and how parental involvement might positively impact Millennials at work. In our research, we aimed to address these gaps in the literature.

### **Methods**

This study is based on quantitative data gathered through a survey questionnaire of three target populations: Baby Boomer and Generation X alumni, Millennial alumni, and current junior and senior college students, all from the same liberal arts institution in the American Midwest. Our data were collected as part of a larger study of the Millennial generation in the workplace conducted in the fall of 2011. Specifically, our study examined the impact of parental involvement as the Millennial Generation transitions into the workplace. Initially, we conducted a focus group with eight junior and senior students. We also talked with Generation Xers and Baby Boomers who work with or hire Millennials. The focus group and conversations with Generation Xers and Baby Boomers helped us conceptualize possible variables for our surveys. We then developed three surveys, one for each targeted population. Utilizing questionnaire research was fitting for our study because it allowed us to reach large populations and ask about opinions and attitudes at a low cost (Nardi 2006).

We designed our surveys to address five hypotheses:

1. Different generations observe different degrees of parental involvement in the workplace.
2. Parental involvement aids the Millennial employee's transition into a new workplace.
3. Different generations will perceive different positive outcomes of parental involvement in the workplace.
4. Greater student participation in experiential learning is associated with greater student-reported parental involvement.
5. Greater student participation in experiential learning is associated with greater expectations for future parental involvement.

The independent and dependent variables, respectively, of our hypotheses are as follows: (1) generation and frequency of observing parents in the workplace, (2) frequency of observing parents in the workplace and perceived positive outcomes of parental involvement in the workplace, (3) generation and perceived positive outcomes of parental involvement in the workplace, (4) degree of parental involvement for current junior and senior college students and involvement in experiential learning opportunities, (5) expectations for future parental involvement and involvement in experiential learning opportunities.

Our survey of junior and senior students measured the type and frequency of self-reported parental involvement that the student *currently* experiences in addition to the students' expectations of parental involvement in their future careers. To measure student's expectations, we created a five-item Likert-scale index about specific ways parents may be involved in their future careers. For example, we asked students to indicate their level of agreement with statements like: "My parent(s)/guardian(s) will help me financially until I find a job" and "My parent(s)/guardian(s) will visit me at my workplace." To measure the frequency of parental involvement, we used an ordinal measure of how often the student was in contact with his/her

parent in the past month. Additionally, we created a checklist of the types of parental involvement the student experienced during their years at the college.

Our survey of Millennial-aged alumni addressed the type and frequency of parental involvement in the workplace but it also focused on the respondents' attitudes about the outcomes of parental involvement. In this survey, we used an ordinal measure of how frequently the respondent observed parents, including his/her own, in the workplace. We also created a checklist measuring the respondent's personal experience with types of parental involvement in the workplace. In order to measure the effects of parental involvement that the Millennial alumni have experienced directly, we created a five-item Likert-scale index about specific outcomes of parental involvement at work. For example, we asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement with statements like, "Allowing parents into the workplace for social visits makes me feel more comfortable" as well as reverse-worded items like, "If parents are allowed into the workplace, I will have trouble thinking for myself."

The survey of Generation X and Baby Boomer alumni measured the type and frequency of parental involvement in the workplace and also measured the possible outcomes of parental involvement at work. We used an ordinal measure of how frequently employers observed employee's parents in the workplace. We also created a checklist measuring the types of visits employees' parents made to the workplace, such as tours or company-sponsored events. To examine the effects of parental involvement, we created a five-item Likert-scale index about specific outcomes of parental involvement at work. This index asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement with statements like, "Welcoming parents in the workplace helps newly hired Millennial employees adjust during the transition to the workplace" and reverse-worded items like, "Welcoming parents in the workplace makes Millennial employees less productive." Alsop (2008) described how companies strive to involve parents at work as a way to attract and retain new employees. Therefore, we also created a checklist of ways the respondents' company or organization might reach out to employees' parents, such as encouraging parental

tours or devoting a portion of their website to informing parents about the company or organization.

We gathered our sample through simple random sampling of the three distinct target populations. All three populations were derived from the student and alumni networks of the host institution, including current junior and senior students; Generation X and Baby Boomer alumni that graduated between the years 1964 and 2000; and Millennial alumni that graduated between the years 2001 and 2011. To increase generalizability and response rate, we only included full time students who were on campus during the fall semester and excluded participants of our focus groups. Among alumni, we excluded the following occupation categories from the population before sampling: students, armed services, homemaker, retired, volunteer, unemployed, and disabled.

A computerized program randomly selected our survey populations from a list of Millennial, Generation X, and Baby Boomer alumni from the institution's alumni relations department and from a list of current students. We aimed to achieve a sample that represented approximately 25% of each targeted population because our population falls between the categories of small (<1,000) and moderate (~10,000) populations, which require 30% and 10% sampling ratios respectively (Neuman 2007). Therefore, 647 current students, 858 Generation X and Baby Boomer alumni, and 536 Millennial alumni received a cover letter via e-mail inviting them to complete our survey. This e-mail contained a username and password to access the online survey. Each survey was administered using Form Creator, the college's software for creating and administering online questionnaires. Additionally, the cover letter e-mail contained important information on the purpose of our research, voluntary nature of participation, and information concerning informed consent for the study.

We received a total of 122 Generation X and Baby Boomer alumni responses (response rate = 14.2%). The sample from this response was 41.8% male and 58.2% female. More specifically, this sample consisted of 72.5% Baby Boomer respondents and 27.5% Generation X

respondents. We received a total of 104 Millennial alumni responses (response rate = 19.4%). The sample from this response was 20.4% male and 79.6% female. Finally, we received a total of 266 junior and senior college student responses (response rate = 41.1%). The sample from this response was 33% male, 66.7% female, 0.4% other. More specifically, this sample consisted of 45.2% junior respondents and 54.8% senior respondents.

When constructing our surveys, we took several precautions to ensure validity. Because validity indicates accuracy, we used multiple strategies to ensure that our questions truly measured our concepts (Nardi 2006). First, we created specific and clear definitions for our concepts. For example, our concept of student expectations for future parental involvement included dimensions regarding job searching, assistance at work, and parental visits. Second, we achieved face and content validity, which involve consulting qualified individuals on whether our measures matched our conceptual definitions, by having our professor and peer researchers review each of our surveys (Nardi 2006). Additionally, we checked each aspect of our conceptual definitions with each survey question (Nardi 2006). For example, our index of student expectations of future parental involvement addresses seven specific examples of parental involvement. Each of these examples refers to one of the dimensions of our conceptual definition parental involvement above. For example, the statements “My parent(s)/guardian(s) will help me get a job interview” and “If I am unemployed, my parent(s)/guardian(s) will help me financially until I find a job” correspond to a student’s expectation for parental help during a job search.

Reliability, an indicator of a measure’s stability and consistency, is distinct from but equally important as validity (Nardi 2006). Unfortunately, unless one uses extensive pilot testing, reliability is only confirmed after data collection is complete. However, we implemented several strategies to improve reliability in advance. First, we strove to use the most precise indicators for each measure. For instance, one of our measures is a checklist of specific ways a parent may have intervened in his/her child’s work life including items like “My parent(s)/guardian(s) has

submitted a resume on my behalf” and “My parent(s)/guardian(s) has attended an interview with me.” Additionally, we used the highest level of measurement possible for each measure. For example, each survey contains an index of at least five items meaning each contains an interval/ratio measure of parental involvement. Further, these indices include several indicators of our concept, which also improves reliability.

To prevent any potential harm to our respondents, we followed the Institutional Review Board’s (IRB) ethical requirements. We received type I approval from our IRB because our purpose was to advance our own and the college community’s knowledge and understanding without any factors, like including vulnerable subjects, greater than minimal risk, or identifying information (St. Olaf College 2011). We were specifically concerned with providing informed consent and ensuring the privacy of all survey participants. Informed consent requires researchers to be explicit about how the study is conducted and what potential impact the study may have on the participant (Nardi 2006). To meet the requirement of informed consent, each participant received a cover letter via e-mail. This cover letter explained that this research was part of a quantitative research methods course for sociology/anthropology majors. Most importantly, however, this letter explicitly stated what constitutes consent, the act of logging onto the survey site, but also that participation was voluntary and that the respondent may skip any question or end the survey at any time.

Our second ethical concern was ensuring the privacy of all survey participants. Most notably, we guaranteed the privacy of survey respondents by ensuring anonymity. We never received any participants names because all communication between researcher and respondent was via email aliases created by the college’s Director of Institutional Research. This meant there was no way for us to connect the respondent’s identifying information to his/her responses. In addition to the two major ethical concerns of informed consent and privacy, we took other steps to keep our research ethically sound. For example, to uphold the first ethical principle of the Belmont report, respect for persons, we excluded any individuals of

diminished autonomy, most notably individuals under the age of 18 (St. Olaf College 2011). Additionally, we upheld the principle of beneficence, which means to do no harm and maximize benefits, by avoiding any invasive or sensitive questions (St. Olaf College 2011). Finally, we achieved the third principle of the Belmont report, justice, by making the results of our research accessible to all participants via a public poster presentation (St. Olaf College 2011).

## **Results**

In each of our surveys, we focused on gathering three types of data: the frequency of observing parents in the workplace or the frequency of contact between parents and college students, the types of parental involvement observed, and the perceived outcomes of parental involvement. With regard to our student survey, 85.4% of junior and senior students reported being in contact with their parents once per week or more. Students most often noted that their parents helped them decide what kind of work to do (64.2%), taught them to be respectful in the workplace (46.8%), and helped them complete a job application (28.3%). The least common types of parental involvement students noted included parents contacting professors (0.4%), contacting a boss (1.1%), and attending an interview (1.5%) on their behalf.

With regard to our survey of Millennial alumni, 81.7% reported never observing parents in the workplace in the past month. Overall, Millennial alumni reported low levels of parental involvement. For example, the majority of Millennials reported that their parents never submitted a resume (100%), called their workplace (99%), or attended an interview (98.1%) on their behalf. Finally, 71.6% of Millennial alumni agreed that their parents would help them financially until they found a job.

Lastly, with regard to our survey of Generation X and Baby Boomer alumni, 80.5% reported never observing parents in the workplace in the past month. Overall, Generation X and Baby Boomer alumni reported little parental presence in the workplace. For example, 97.5% noted that parents did not make work-related visits, defined as a type of visit when a parent

directly intervenes in their child's work tasks or involves themselves in the career advancement of their child (e.g. helping on an assignment, attending an interview, negotiating raises, etc.). Additionally, few Generation X and Baby Boomer alumni reported that their company or organization reached out to parents with only 5.7% indicating that their company devotes a portion of their website to informing parents and 4.1% indicating that their company invites parents to company-sponsored events.

*Hypothesis 1: Different generations observe different degrees of parental involvement in the workplace*

We compared how frequently respondents from each generation observed parents in the workplace in the last month using a one-way ANOVA. There was no significant difference between generations ( $F = 0.198, p > 0.05$ ). Millennial, Generation X, and Baby Boomer respondents did not differ significantly in how frequently they observed parents in the workplace in the last month.

*Hypothesis 2: Parental involvement aids the Millennial employee's transition into a new workplace*

We compared the frequency that alumni reported observing parents in the workplace in the last month with the index of perceived positive outcomes of parental involvement by calculating Spearman's rho for both Millennial and Generation X/Baby Boomer respondents. This index had possible scores from 5 to 20. The index for Millennial alumni was normally distributed with a mean score of 12.93. The index for Generation X and Baby Boomer alumni was also normally distributed but with a mean score of 10.92. There was a statistically significant relationship between these two variables for both Millennial respondents (Spearman's rho = 0.281,  $p < 0.01$ ) (Table 1) and Generation X/Baby Boomer respondents (Spearman's rho = 0.202,  $p < 0.05$ ) (Table 2). This analysis indicates that the frequency with

which parents are observed in the workplace is positively, yet weakly, associated with greater perceptions of positive outcomes of parental involvement in the workplace.

Table 1: Hypothesis 2 Spearman’s rho correlation for Millennial alumni.

			Index of Perceived Positive Outcomes of Parental Involvement
Spearman’s rho	Frequency of Observing Parents in the Workplace	Correlation Coefficient	0.281**
		Significance (1-tailed)	0.002
		N	101

Table 2: Hypothesis 2 Spearman’s rho correlation for Generation X and Baby Boomer alumni.

			Index of Perceived Positive Outcomes of Parental Involvement
Spearman’s rho	Frequency of Observing Parents in the Workplace	Correlation Coefficient	0.202*
		Significance (1-tailed)	0.031
		N	87

*Hypothesis 3: Different generations will perceive different outcomes of parental involvement in the workplace*

We used a one-way ANOVA to compare the mean scores from the index of perceived positive outcomes of parental involvement of each generation. This index had possible scores from 5 to 20 and it was normally distributed with a mean of 12 (Figure 1). There was a significant difference between generations ( $F = 17.602, p < 0.001$ ). We used Tukey’s HSD to determine the nature of the differences between different generations (Table 3).

This analysis revealed that Millennial alumni reported more positive outcomes of parental involvement than

both Generation X and Baby Boomer alumni. However, Generation X and Baby Boomer alumni did not report significantly different outcomes of parental involvement.

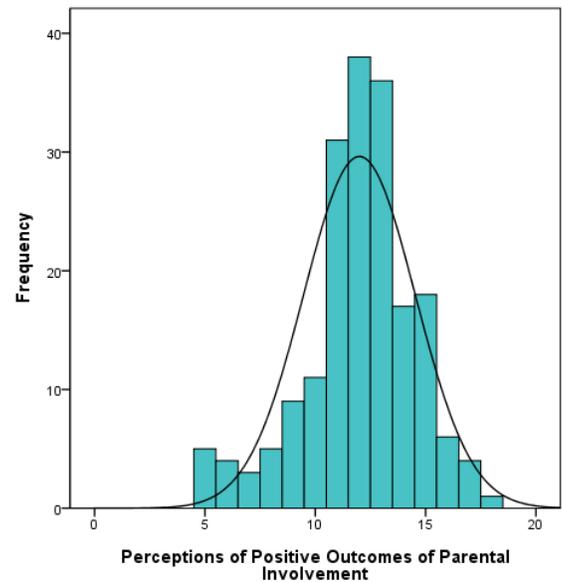


Figure 1: Histogram of Index of Positive Outcomes of Parental Involvement (Mean = 12, SD = 2.531, N = 188).

Table 3: One-way ANOVA results for hypothesis 3.

Generation 1	Generation 2	Significance	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Baby Boomer	Generation X	0.804	-0.93	1.61
Generation X	Millennial	0.000	-3.43	-1.07
Millennial	Baby Boomer	0.000	1.00	2.82

*Hypothesis 4: Greater student participation in experiential learning is associated with greater student-reported parental involvement*

We calculated a Spearman’s rho to compare junior and senior student’s participation in experiential learning and their reported degree of parental involvement. The student responses for degree of parental involvement were not normally distributed with a mean of 15.07 and the responses for participation in experiential learning were normally distributed and had a mean of 15.23. There was a statistically significant relationship

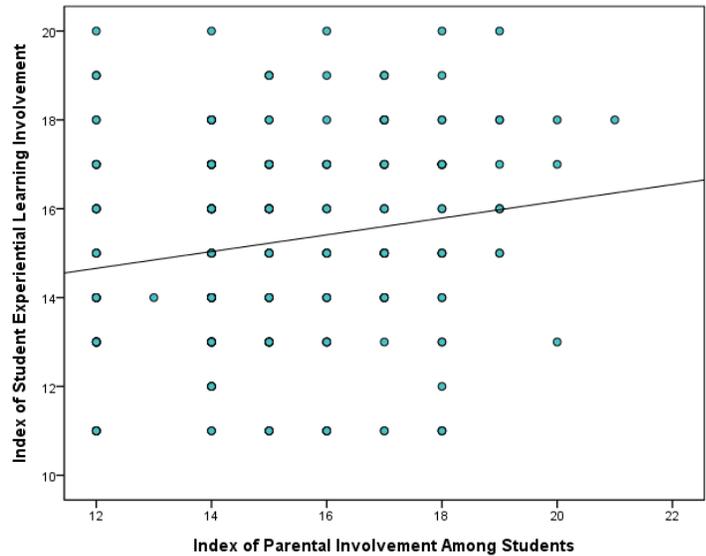


Figure 2: Scatter Plot of Index of Parental Involvement Among Students and Index of Experiential Learning Involvement ( $R^2 = 0.031$ ).

(Spearman’s rho = 0.177,  $p < 0.01$ ) (Table 4). This analysis indicates that students who report participation in experiential learning opportunities are more likely to report greater parental involvement (Figure 2). However, this correlation is weak indicating that many other factors contribute to a student’s involvement in experiential learning.

Table 4: Spearman’s rho correlation for Hypothesis 4

		Index of Parental Involvement Among St. Olaf Students	
Spearman’s rho	Index of Student Experiential Learning Involvement	Correlation Coefficient	0.177**
		Significance (1-tailed)	0.002
		N	266

*Hypothesis 5: Greater student participation in experiential learning is associated with greater expectations for future parental involvement*

We compared junior and senior student's participation in experiential learning to their score on the index of expected future parental involvement by calculating Spearman's rho. This index of expectations was normally distributed with a mean of 15.53. There was no significant relationship (Spearman's rho = 0.061,  $p > 0.05$ ). This indicates that students who report involvement in experiential learning opportunities do not expect greater future parental involvement than students who report less involvement with experiential learning.

### **Discussion**

Our study sought to understand the phenomenon of Helicopter Parenting by examining the effects of parental presence in the workplace as well as the effects of parental involvement in their children's lives in college. Our findings suggest that parental involvement may facilitate a smoother transition into the workplace among Millennials. However, it might also become a source of contention with older generations of coworkers. Additionally, among Millennial students, there is a positive relationship between current reported parental involvement and rates of participation in experiential learning opportunities. However, the present degree of participation in experiential learning that a student reports does not relate significantly to their expectation of parental support after graduation.

#### *Generations In the workplace:*

Our results show little prevalence of parental involvement in the workplace. The majority of all alumni reported never observing parents in the workplace in the past month. Additionally, the majority of Millennial alumni report little parental intervention throughout the job search process. This contradicts the CERI study, which described parents as being highly involved during the recruitment process (Gardener 2007).

Findings from hypothesis one show that there is no relationship between generation and reported observations of parental involvement. This establishes that our subsequent findings in hypotheses two and three are based on similar experiences with parental involvement in the workplace across generations.

Our findings from hypothesis three suggest that Millennials are more optimistic than older generations about the effects of parental involvement in the workplace. Millennials perceive that a parental presence makes the workplace more comfortable, encourages productivity, and contributes to their “soft” skills such as respectful communication in the workplace. Baby Boomers and Generation Xers, however, report that they feel parents create a less comfortable environment and distract from Millennials’ work. The difference in reported attitudes suggests either that there is a dearth of communication between Millennials and older generations on the topic of parents in the workplace, or that older generations believe Millennials do not fully understand how parents negatively affect their work lives. Comments made in the open-ended response section of our survey reflect this difference in perception across generation. For instance, one Generation X respondent exclaimed “This whole concept [of parental involvement in the workplace] is pejorative to any employees!” Alternatively, a Millennial worker respondent said “I think its great for parents to see where their child is working and even help him or her find a job as well as support the child during the job search.” Though there was disagreement within generations, these two examples represent the predominant opinion of each generation.

Hypothesis two further complicates this question by suggesting that, among all generations, positive perceptions of the effect of parents in the workplace are related with the frequency that workers report observing parents in the workplace. This relationship holds true for both Millennial and Baby Boomer/Generation X employees, but is stronger among Millennial workers. While all generations identify a positive association between observing parents in the workplace and the positive outcomes of parental involvement, hypothesis three indicates that

generations perceive different outcomes of parental involvement. This might be a result of generations perceiving the abstract concept of parental involvement differently. Without direct experience of parents in the workplace, employees may envision Helicopter Parenting as it is portrayed in non-scholarly literature. For example, Armour (2007) and Belkin (2007) suggest that parents interfere in the workplace by negotiating salaries and requesting time off for their children.

It is important to note, though, that our findings from hypotheses two and three, while statistically significant, are not very *strong*. That is, the positive effects of parental involvement may only have a small influence in the workplace. This contrasts with the representations of Helicopter Parenting put forth in the non-scholarly sources indicated in our literature review. Our findings seem to reflect those of Buhl (2007) who describes that parental *support* can contribute to a child's well-being in transitioning from higher education into the workforce, but that *overbearing parental attachment* negatively affects this transition. That is, parental involvement can play a *positive* though *limited* role in a child's transition to the workplace.

#### *Millennial Students:*

Our results from hypothesis four suggest that there is a positive, though *weak*, relationship between parental involvement and engagement in the college's center for experiential learning. Our measure of experiential learning includes items such as participation in undergraduate research, completion of an academic or non-academic internship, and participation in informational interviewing. This index can be taken as an indication of a student's focus on post-graduate opportunities. The relationship between parental involvement and experiential learning is interesting because it suggests that higher parental involvement may have an impact on a student's level of preparation for the workplace. However, future research will have to assess the direction of this relationship. For instance, parents might be encouraging their children to participate in experiential learning, or alternatively, career

counselors may be encouraging students to communicate with their parents. Additionally, in the open-ended response, Millennial students shared how they think of their parents as resources in their future career goals. For example, one student responded by saying “Due to the importance of networking, I think it would be dumb not to use my parents as a resource!”

This relationship is particularly interesting in light of hypothesis five, which describes that there is no relationship between a student’s engagement in experiential learning opportunities and their expectations for future parental involvement. Comments in our open-ended response section indicate that some students feel networking among parents plays an important role in future career attainment. As such, we expected that students with current internships and research experience might also obtain these positions with the help of a parent. However, the lack of relationship between current experiential learning and expectations for future parental involvement call this into question. This aligns with Cullaty’s (2011) finding that students with supportive rather than controlling parents develop greater autonomy in higher education. This independence may carry into the workplace. For example, parents may support their student’s participation in experiential learning, but these experiences subsequently teach a student how to be more independent after graduation. Additionally, experiences like internships may teach that high levels of parental involvement are not tolerated in a professional setting.

### **Conclusion**

We examined the prevalence and outcomes of parental involvement in the workplace across three generational groups: Millennials, Generation Xers, and Baby Boomers. We found support for our hypothesis that different generations would perceive different outcomes of parental involvement in the workplace. Millennial respondents reported more positive outcomes of parental involvement in the workplace than both Generation Xers and Baby Boomers. However, there was no significant difference between the outcomes of parental involvement reported by Generation Xers and Baby Boomers. We also examined the prevalence and

expectations for future parental involvement that Millennial college students experience at a small liberal arts institution. We found support for our hypothesis that students who reported greater degrees of parental involvement would report greater involvement in experiential learning opportunities.

Our study is limited by the homogeneity of our sample population that is not representative of wider racial/ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic demographics. Low response rates and disproportionate gender responses also limit our generalizability. To avoid these limitations, we suggest sampling a larger and more diverse population such as a state university as opposed to a small liberal arts institution. To ensure equal gender responses, further studies might use a stratified random sample to establish quotas for males and females.

We suggest future research examine the effect of non-scholarly, popular culture literature on perceptions of helicopter parenting. There is a wealth of these sources and they emphasize the consequences of parental involvement by describing how helicopter parents breed over-structured children with impeded independence and poor decision making skills (Wolf, Sax, and Harper 2009). Perhaps these descriptions influence different generations' perceptions of the outcomes of parental involvement. Additionally, we suggest a longitudinal study on students' attitudes and experiences with parental involvement as they transition from college to the workplace. For instance, we suggest surveying the same group of students when they are juniors or seniors in college, 6 months after graduation, and 3 years after graduation. Finally, we suggest that any future study include both quantitative and qualitative research methods to better understand the prevalence and outcomes of Helicopter Parenting.

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