Breaking Boundaries and Leaving Bad Impressions: Toward Understanding Workplace Encounters with Helicopter Parents

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Using an inductive qualitative approach, this study examined perceptions of helicopter parents in the workplace. An analysis of 596 comments posted to online discussion boards revealed four major themes (1) attributions (i.e., someone is to blame including the helicopter parents, the adult children, and/or the company), (2) impression formation (e.g., adult children of helicopter parents are incompetent, unreliable, unable to work independently), (3) boundaries/separation (parents are over-stepping important boundary), and (4) the appropriateness of parental involvement in the workplace. Based on the qualitative analysis, a theoretical model and a set of propositions are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

With the entrance of the Millennial generation into the workforce, a new and unexpected entity from the non-work domain has appeared—their helicopter parents. For instance, the popular press includes numerous reports of parents showing up with their young adult children for job interviews, negotiating their starting salaries, and calling to inquire as to why their child was rejected as an applicant (Ellin, 2014; Lantz, 2013; Shellenbarger, 2006). Some managers have cited instances where parents have "called in sick" for their adult child or have phoned to complain about their adult child's performance review or failure to receive a promotion (Peluchette, Kovanic & Partridge, 2013; Tyler, 2007). Indeed, "helicopter parenting" has become a significant workplace issue as evidence shows 32 percent of employers have experienced some level of parental involvement in the recruitment and selection of recent college graduates (Gardner, 2007).

This phenomenon has prompted a lot of debate in the popular press about the appropriateness of such behavior, why it is happening, and who is to blame for the situation. Some have expressed outrage at parents for engaging in such behavior and at young adults for allowing themselves to be coddled by their parents (LeTrent, 2013). Others have taken a more positive stance, seeing this as a generational trend and urging businesses to adjust their workplace practices in ways that recognize the role of parents in young people's lives (Berman, 2013; Ludden, 2012). Employers have responded by either denying parental involvement or allowing parental involvement, but managing it (Shellenbarger, 2006; Tyler, 2007). Those organizations that deny parental involvement believe that it is inappropriate and would prefer not to deal with candidates' or employees' parents. For example, Ellin (2014) relayed an instance of an HR manager who had a young recruit show up with her mother for an interview. The mother extended her hand,

introduced herself, and proceeded to explain that her daughter was nervous and may forget to tell him things and she wanted to be sure the HR manager knew her daughter was a hard worker. The HR manager said he was shocked, "How could she not know that this was inappropriate?" The daughter did not get the job. As is often the case, when hiring managers are confronted with helicopter parents, the outcome is negative for the candidate/employee.

However, there are other firms which have chosen a more positive stance on parental involvement. Recognizing that today's young adults tend to have close relationships with their parents and that parents yield substantial influence over their adult children's decisions, these firms believe that, by embracing parents as part of the employment process, they will have a better chance at recruiting and retaining young employees (Lantz, 2013). Willyerd (2013) argues that organizations should view parents as their "secret weapon" when designing recruitment and retention strategies. Likewise, Marie Artim, a vice president for Talent Acquisition for Enterprise Holdings, a car rental company, sees parents as a key "influencer" and believes that, if parents are comfortable with the culture and opportunities of a firm, they will feel better about advising their adult child to join or stay with the organization (Ludden, 2012).

In line with this thinking, a number of firms have taken proactive steps to enhance parental involvement in the workplace by implementing a "Take Your Parents to Work" day. Companies such as Google, LinkedIn, Enterprise, Northwestern Mutual, Dow Chemical, and Merrill Lynch have all instituted these annual events, seeing it as a way of building employee pride, loyalty, fun, and commitment (Berman, 2013; Ludden, 2012). Other companies have taken measures to involve parents but have put some boundaries in place. For example, while Office Depot has a web page dedicated to parents, they also provide tips on how to be supportive without being invasive (Loftus, 2012). Similarly, Enterprise sends recruitment information to parents of candidates but does not allow parents to sit in on job interviews or submit application materials for their child. Instead, the parent receives a gentle but firm message that, while their support is appreciated, their adult child is better off showing the initiative themselves (Ludden, 2012).

While this anecdotal evidence provides some insight into how organizations are responding to the presence of helicopter parents in the workplace, to date there has been no academic research on this issue. The purpose of this paper is to help fill that void as well as guide future research. To that end, we designed a qualitative inductive study to explore possible connections between the helicopter parenting phenomenon and existing theory, and to increase understanding and guide future research by developing a theoretical model (Edmondson & McManus, 2007).

METHOD

The data for our study was collected from eleven online discussion boards (e.g., blogs.hbr.org; blogs.wsj.com; money.msn.com; online.wsj.com; cnn.com; huffingtonpost.com; npr.com) which were identified by using the search terms of "parents," "workplace," and "bring your parents to work day." Each of these discussion boards dealt with the extent to which companies were making accommodations for parents in the workplace, including implementing a "Take Your Parents to Work" day or allowing parents to participate in their child's job interview. All of the posts made on these eleven discussion boards (N=946) were included in the analysis. In situations where contributors made more than one post, their comments were combined and counted as one contribution, resulting in a total of 738 contributors.

Using a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to analyze the data, we read through all the comments to identify themes. In the early stages, the comments were coded as being either favorable or unfavorable. Upon further review, it was clear that many comments focused on the need for boundaries and separation while others focused on the negative impressions that were formed of the helicopter parent, their adult child or the company. Other comments focused on who was to blame. With these ideas in mind, we then searched the literature on work life balance and impression formation to identify existing theories that fit the data. We then went back to the data and identified four themes (1) attributions (i.e., someone is to blame), (2) impression formation, (3) boundaries/separation, and (4) the appropriateness of parental involvement in the workplace.

Next, both evaluators independently coded each of the contributor's comments (1 = addressed the theme, 0 = did not address the theme) and, when completed, compared their codes. Any differences in the codes used were discussed with a third evaluator until agreement was reached. Codes were then entered into an SPSS file for descriptive analysis (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 21 was utilized for analysis of study data). Only those comments that directly addressed parents in the workplace were included in our analysis. After eliminating 142 contributors whose comments were irrelevant (e.g., "LOL" or "Onion anyone?"), we arrived at our final sample (N = 596). Using names or photos, we determined that 208 contributors were male, 118 were female, and there were 270 whose gender was unknown. With regard to age, 50 contributors identified themselves as Millennials, 179 were older than Millennials, and there was no age information for the remaining 367.

RESULTS

The most prevalent theme among the contributor's comments was that someone was to blame for helicopter parents in the workplace (52%, N = 310). Some contributors blamed the parents for being too hovering (N = 129), some blamed Millennials for lack of maturity (N = 81), and others blamed both parents and Millennials (N = 82). Still others blamed the company for not taking a stronger stand (N = 26). Sample comments of each are included below.

> *Parent* "If you have to attend your adult child's job interview then YOU HAVE FAILED AS A PARENT!!!! The job of a parent is to raise the child to be a self-sufficient and independent adult. If your 20-something can't get a job, negotiate pay based on his/her needs, and navigate the day-to-day of the workplace then he/she doesn't deserve the title 'ADULT'."
> *Millennials* "I'm beyond shocked that even ONE person has done this. That 8% or ANY measurable number of people have done this leaves me (almost) speechless. . . . All hope is lost when an adult takes their parents to a job interview. . . . What is WRONG with these idiots? . . . These brats need to wake up and take some responsibility for their lives."
> *Both Parents and Millennials* "I think both generations (boomers and their millennial children) are to blame. Boomers for their refusal to acknowledge that your life should change when you get older and millennials for letting it happen. Boomers, your kids are grown and yes, that makes you OLD! Stop trying to desperately cling to being young by treating your offspring like perpetual 12 year olds."
> *Company* "Employers, if you can hear my plea... STOP... don't enable this kind of behavior from parents who feel they need to speak for their children. Throw their kids and parents out the door; tell the parent to tell their kids to grow a spine--or whatever else might need growing--and to take some gosh darn initiative for their own lives and decisions. This is insane!"

The second most prevalent theme was the impact helicopter parents had on impression formation (23.8%, N = 142), more specifically the impression that having one's parents in the workplace would make on others. These comments were also coded by whether the contributor's point of view was that of an employer (47.89%, N = 68), an employee (19.72%, N=28), or some other third party (32.39%, N = 46; e.g., a parent or unknown identity). Sample comments include the following:

> *Employee Perspective* "As much as I love my parents, I can't think of anything that would undermine my credibility at work more than bringing in my Mommy & Daddy to show them my desk, as if it were Parent/Teacher night at school. I can appreciate that some parents really want to see where their kids work, but give me a break – unless it's

the set of some feature film or some other mega cool unusual job, your kid is working at a desk with a phone, a stapler and some pens."

Employer Perspective "I have conducted several interviews of prospective employees in various job settings, and I would never entertain the idea of speaking with someone's parent. I think the entire idea is ludicrous. How could these "kids" possibly earn the respect and admiration of their peers and supervisors if they depend on mommy to negotiate their salary and vacation hours?"

Other Perspective "I would think an interviewer would think the job candidate who brings their parents to the job interview can't think on their own and needs to have their hand held constantly."

The third most prevalent theme focused on the need for boundaries or separation (17.95%, N = 107), indicating a concern for independence, distance or space, as well as comments related to interference and "cutting the cord". Each of the following illustrates the theme of boundaries or separation.

"It's because these freaked-out parents have created codependency and seem to have done away with boundaries. I would have been MORTIFIED to have my parents sitting there in a job interview! it would have been insulting to me."

"Healthy parents encourage separation and independence as appropriate and they also know they have to let their children fail - some of the most powerful learning comes from picking oneself up from failure/pain and learning that one has the resources to cope."

"If parents are this involved before a job offer is put forth, I can only imagine the headaches they will create later - and that doesn't even begin to address what boundaries are crossed when the adult-child is working in an industry where confidentiality is a must."

The remaining theme was related to contributors' perceptions regarding the appropriateness of parental involvement in the workplace. We found most (84.9%, N = 506) were opposed to parents in the workplace, only 37 (6.2%) were supportive and, some contributors included both negative and positive comments (1.7%, N = 10). Others indicated it would depend on the company suggesting that organizational culture may impact perceptions of the appropriateness of parental involvement (5.5%, N = 33). The following are examples of contributor comments.

"My mom has asked nonstop since June about visiting the office. I don't know why she's so excited about it, but I just don't think it would be appropriate. But if the company said it was, then I'd definitely bring her in to see the place!"

"We include children and spouses at company social events; surely including parents is just as reasonable. Employee family relationships, at all generational levels, matter to morale. Supporting and including them is part of good employment practice. That said, parents have no more place in HR matters than spouses or children. Being background advisors in salary negotiations or workplace concerns in fine, but sitting directly at the table is not. I still recall one father who notified me that his college-student son (my employee, and a legal adult) would be quitting his job due to personal health issues. I had to gently inform the fellow that I could not communicate with him regarding employment matters of another adult, even a relative, and that he could not legally terminate his son's employment -- the son would need to do so directly :) I'm sure it can be hard to let go, but 18 is 18, for crying out loud. If they can vote, be subject to adult criminal codes, pay taxes, and be called to military service, then they're grownups, and it's their job, not yours :)"

Of those who were supportive, only seven were supportive of parents being present during their adult child's interview. For example, one contributor stated, "I think it's a good idea. After all, I know my son's abilities and have a lot of life experience. I hope it becomes a more prevalent trend." The others were supportive of a "Take your parents to work day." For example, one wrote, "I've brought my parents to work just for a little tour. I don't see this is heli-parenting at all (I'm also 35). They were genuinely curious about where I spent my days. Neither of them are professionals, so it was fun to show them my fancy office with a view. I think it's nice." Similarly, another contributor wrote, "My company has a once-a-year "Family Day" where you can bring in immediate relatives to show them around. I think it's great." Within the 47 supportive comments (including those which were both positive and negative) we identified three additional subthemes. Most contributors (51%, N = 24) thought allowing parents in the workplace was a nice thing to do for the parent, some saw it as providing some benefit for the employee (31.9%, N = 15), and the remainder saw it as a benefit to the company (14.9%, N = 7). Sample comments for each of these are included below.

> *Nice thing to do for the parent* "Finding one time across the months to bring your parents in to work seems worth the effort. I think that we sometimes forget how different in many instances our worlds are from that of our parents. Letting the folks (and even siblings) have a quick tour of the workplace helps round out their sense of our lives."
> *Benefit for the employee* "As a Millennial, I am very close with my parents and it has nothing to do with hand holding and "needing" their help - I "want" their advice and guidance because we have a good relationship and I trust them. I like sharing things with them, like my new job, because it would be safe to bet they have insight beyond my own grasp of the subject. In a nutshell, that's pretty common among Millennials and the sooner Gen X stops dismissing us the better off everyone will be in the workplace."
> *Benefit for the company* "At XYZ Inc. they have a mutual selection process. They go through great lengths to give people realistic expectations about pros and cons of the career and company and difficulties they will face. It takes a lot of time and money to train people from the ground up. I would imagine bringing the parents in and letting them know what it takes for their kid to succeed would be a good thing, since if they know their kid is a slacker, the parent would probably talk them out of it. That is win-win for all involved."

The remaining contributors (N = 43, 7.2%) were either neutral or their position was unclear. For example, one contributor wrote, "The intent of this write-up seems to be focused on getting old people fired up and shaming young ones." Another wrote, "I take [this] with a grain of salt. It seems more like HR folks getting their name out than much of a real event."

THEORETICAL MODEL AND PROPOSITIONS

The results of our qualitative analysis suggest that impression formation theory, attribution theory and boundary theory may be useful in explaining observer's reactions to helicopter parents in the workplace. Context also appears relevant and given the substantial research evidence demonstrating the importance of organizational culture on the use and effectiveness of family-friendly practices (e.g., Burke, 2006; Clark, 2001; Kossek, Colquitt & Noe, 2001; Kossek & Lautsch, 2012; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2006; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999; Veiga, Baldridge, & Eddleston, 2004), we also include organizational culture in our theoretical model. See Figure 1. In the following discussion, we review the relevant impression formation, attribution, boundary management, and organizational culture literatures.

Impression Formation

Research on impression formation demonstrates that individuals make global dispositional inferences about others based on observations of their current behavior and that these overall impressions are influenced by primacy effects and causal attributions (Asch,1946; Barrick, Swider & Stewart, 2010;

DeCoster & Claypool, 2004; Harvey, Madison, Markinko, Crook & Crook, 2014; Herriot, 1981; Weiner, 1985). In other words, first impressions tend to persist over time and the impressions which are formed are influenced by whether current behavior is attributed to the person (internal attribution) or situation (external attribution). Additionally, extremely negative behavior is considered more predictive of personality traits than less extreme behavior (Skowronski & Carlston, 1989) and behavior that deviates from expectations is more likely to be attributed to the individual's dispositions than when he or she behaves as expected (Herriot, 1981).

Consistent with the impression formation literature, bringing a parent to an interview is considered an extreme deviation from existing social norms. Thus, when interviewers automatically reject candidates who do so, they are most likely attributing such behavior to the candidate's negative personality traits (i.e., the candidate lacks maturity, competency, and initiative). For example, JoAnn Corley, an employee training and development consultant, argues that young adults need to be allowed to navigate for themselves as they enter the world of work. She states, "Sometimes young adults are not allowed to develop professional muscles because their parents are doing it for them. We want empowered professionals, not dependent and entitled employees" (Binford, 2012).

Even when parents are not present in the interview or workplace, but are constantly referenced, negative impressions are often formed. A recruiter cites an example of a candidate who was very bright, confident, and well-educated but who made constant references to her parents during the job interview. For the recruiter, it was a "turn-off" and made him question her maturity (Erwin, 2008). Employers also appear to be concerned that employees' parental involvement may negatively impact the impressions formed by clients or customers and reflect badly on the company. For example, one manager expressed concern about witnessing a presentation to new clients by a new hire who used the phrase "my dad thinks" as it pertained to the project being discussed (LeTrent, 2013).

Recent evidence in the academic literature shows that reference to non-work roles in the workplace can negatively impact others' perceptions of one's professionalism (Uhlmann, Heaphy, Ashford, Zhu, & Sanchez-Burks, 2013). For example, these researchers found that candidates who indicated that discussing non-work roles (e.g., family) would be part of how they would build rapport with potential clients were more negatively evaluated by job recruiters compared to those who did not. They also found that study participants who viewed a higher proportion of non-work artifacts (e.g., family photos) in an employee's work area evaluated that employee as lower in professionalism than those who viewed more work related artifacts (e.g., stapler, calculator, wall clock). Their findings also showed that minimizing non-work artifacts appears to be a culturally bound norm of the United States. That is, the norm in U.S. corporations is that minimizing reference to one's non-work world through both visible artifacts (pictures) or conversation is tied to more positive impressions and perceptions of professionalism.

Observer's Boundary Management Preference

Traditionally, organizations have enacted a fairly well defined boundary between the work and non-work domains such that employees' non-work life was their own concern. Employees were expected to fulfill their job responsibilities and leave all aspects of their non-work life at the workplace door. As described by Kanter (1977), employers took a position of "separation" where work and non-work were seen as two separate worlds. Over the past several decades, the boundary between work and non-work has been increasingly shifted by changes in job stability, communication technology, and family patterns (Barley, Meyerson, & Grodal, 2011; Deal, Altman, & Rogelberg, 2010; Kalleberg, 2009; Kossek, Ruderman, Braddy, & Hannum, 2012). As a result, many organizations introduced a range of "progressive" workplace practices to help employees manage the boundary between these two domains. These are described by Kanter (1977) as an "integration" approach where employers treat work and non-work as affecting one another, attempting to reduce the gap between the two and resulting in a more permeable boundary (Hall & Richter, 1988). Some of these organizational practices, such as on-site day-care centers and gyms, allowed aspects of employees' non-work lives to enter the workplace, whereas others (such as telecommuting) allowed work to enter employees' non-work domains (Hecht & Allen, 2009). Today, organizations tend to be positioned at some point on the continuum between separation and

integration, depending upon the extent to which they want to include employees' non-work identities with their work identities or keep them separate.

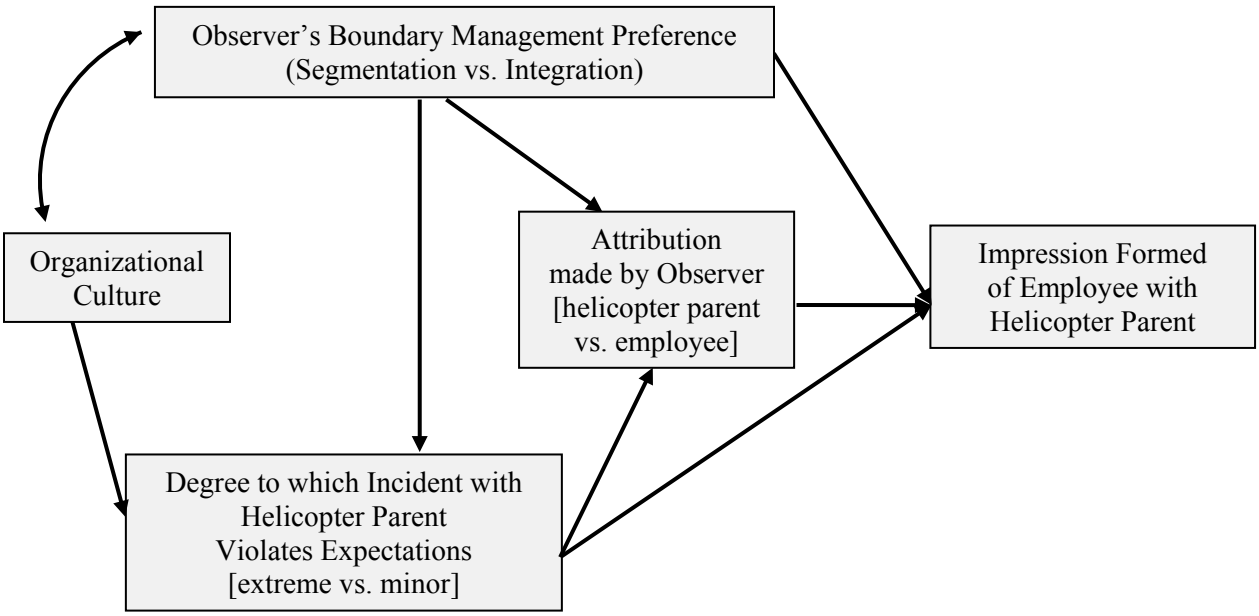
Likewise, employees have preferences for the extent to which they want to integrate or segment their work and non-work worlds. Initial research on boundary theory focused on how individuals defined their work and non-work roles and managed the transitions between them (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996). These researchers found that individuals differed in the degree to which they segmented or integrated their work and home roles. For the extreme segmenter, the boundary between work and non-work is distinct and impenetrable with everything belonging to one domain or the other. In contrast, for the extreme integrator, there is "one giant category of social existence", such that "all space and time is multipurpose" (Nipert-Eng, 1996, p. 586). Rothbard, Phillips, and Dumas (2005) extended this research and found that the extent to which individuals integrate or segment these two domains is based on individual preference, with some desiring greater integration to reduce the tensions involved in transitioning between them (Meyerson & Scully, 1995) and others preferring to segment the two domains so that they can provide better focus on particular roles (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Hewlin, 2003). Additional research suggests the existence of a third boundary management preference, alternators, those who alternate between segmenting and integrating (Kossek & Lautsch, 2012). For example, an employee may work at home one day a week integrating work, domestic errands, personal time, exercising, and socializing with friends. The remainder of the week the employee works at the office and separates work and non-work roles.

Regarding helicopter parents in the workplace, those who prefer segmentation may find parental involvement awkward and uncomfortable, negatively affecting their satisfaction and commitment to the organization. In support, research by Rothbard, et al., (2005) showed that employees who want more segmentation were less satisfied and committed to their organization when they were provided greater access to integrating policies, such as an on-site day care, but were more committed when provided with more segmenting policies such as flex-time. Integrators, on the other hand, may find parental involvement improves their feelings of work/life balance and, therefore experience higher levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Evidence indicates that boundary setting in the workplace is heavily influenced by sensitivity to impressions being formed by others, whether they are superiors, co-workers, or clients (Ammons, 2013; Trefalt, 2013). For example, Trefault (2013) found that many of the attorneys she studied attempted to create a more positive impression on others in their workplace by intentionally talking about their non-work activities not as something they wanted to do but as something they had to do and by sometimes giving into work requests that impinged on family activities. Others simply hid their non-work obligations or did not talk about them at all. Additionally, given the ubiquity of projection or the false consensus bias whereby observers tend to overestimate the extent to which others share their own beliefs, values and preferences (Mullen, Atkins, Champion, Edwards, Hardy, Story & Vanderklok, 1985), it is likely that segmenters will react more negatively than integrators to an encounter with helicopter parents in the workplace. Therefore, we predict:

> *Proposition 1: Segmenters will be more likely than integrators to form negative impressions (e.g., incompetent, undependable, unprofessional, lacks initiative, dependent) of the employee or applicant (i.e., child of the helicopter parent).*

FIGURE 1
THEORETICAL MODEL



Organizational Culture

Research examining the success of family-friendly policies and programs (e.g., on-site day care, flexible working hours) indicates that organizational culture is a major determinant of the success of these programs (Allen & Russell, 1999; Thompson et al., 1999). For example, some employees fail to use family-friendly options because they fear they will be perceived by other organizational members as less devoted to their careers and, as a result, their career success will suffer (Perlow, 1995). Additional research shows that no matter how many and what kinds of family-friendly programs are available to employees, organizational culture is an important determinant of not only whether employees will use the benefits, but also their attitudes toward the organization (e.g., organizational attachment, work-family conflict, intention to leave the organization) (Thompson et al., 1999).

Similarly, research evidence shows that individuals who adopt a boundary management style not supported by the organizational culture may be stigmatized and receive lower pay and fewer promotions (Kossek et al., 2001). Another qualitative study examining boundary management among attorneys showed that some felt they had to hide their non-work obligations or activities from their coworkers (Trefault, 2013). Given these findings, it is also likely that organizational culture (beliefs and values governing expected and appropriate behavior in the workplace) will affect observer's opinions regarding the appropriateness of parents in the workplace.

Two innovative companies, well known for their unique organizational cultures, are leading the way in terms of parental involvement in the workplace, namely Google and LinkedIn (Berman, 2013; Ludden, 2012). Google employees are given many perks (e.g., free food 24/7 cooked by a company chef, access to company daycare facilities, exercise gyms and other amenities) intended to help create a fun and creative atmosphere, fostering both company loyalty and innovation (Edelman & Eisenmann, 2010). According to their website, one of Google's ten major beliefs is "you can be serious without a suit" acknowledging that "work should be challenging, and the challenge should be fun." ("Ten Things we Know to be True", 2015). Likewise, at LinkedIn, the culture embraces humor, encourages employees to take themselves less seriously, and fosters a collaborative and open environment, while at the same time, valuing integrity, being results-oriented, and committed to making a positive and lasting impact on the world (Soule,

Golomb, & Schifrin, 2013). It is likely that those who work for companies with relaxed work environments, such as Google or LinkedIn, will have more favorable reactions to helicopter parents and their adult children than those who work in more rigid and conservative work environments. Therefore, it is predicted:

> *Proposition 2: An encounter with helicopter parents in the workplace is less likely to violate observer expectations when the organization has a supportive work-family culture as opposed to an unsupportive culture.*

The attraction-selection-attrition model (Schneider, 1987; Schneider, Goldstein & Smith, 1995) proposes that organizational cultures are established and solidified through the attraction-selection-attribution process whereby individuals are attracted to organizations whose members share similar values, interests and other attributes. Organizations, in turn, select those who are similar to existing members, and overtime, through attrition, those who do not fit in, leave. One aspect of organizational culture that is likely to attract or deter individuals is whether work arrangements can be customized to accommodate employee's needs and preferences or whether a standardized approach prevails such that work demands take precedence and employees are expected to adapt to the organization's preferred way of managing boundaries (Kossek & Lautsch, 2012). Thus, organizations that allow or encourage flexibility and permeability in employees' work and non-work roles will most likely attract and retain individuals who tend to be integrators or, perhaps alternators. In contrast, those organizations which expect employees to put work first and leave everything from their non-work domain at the company door will most likely attract segmenters and deter integrators. Therefore we predict:

> *Proposition 3: The more supportive the organization's work-family culture, the more likely its' members are to prefer integration over segmentation.*

Degree to which Incident with the Helicopter Parent Violates Expectations

As described earlier, workplace encounters with helicopter parents vary widely with some being rather mild, such as a recruit who refers to his/her parents when answering an interview question (e.g., "My dad thinks …"), and others being extreme, such as a recruit whose parent shows up in the workplace to complain about his/her adult child's poor performance evaluation or failure to get a promotion. Consistent with the impression formation literature on extreme behaviors (Herriot, 1981; Skowronski & Carlston, 1989), it is likely that the more extreme the encounter or incident is, the more likely it is to violate the expectations of managers and coworkers and also result in negative impressions being formed of the adult child. Also, personal preferences are likely to be consistent with an individual's expectations about the way things should be. Thus, given that segmenters prefer to keep their work and non-work lives separate, it is likely that they also believe that work and non-work *should* be kept separate. It follows that:

> *Proposition 4: The more extreme the encounter with the helicopter parent, the more negative the impressions (e.g., incompetent, undependable, unprofessional, lacks initiative, dependent) formed of the employee or applicant (i.e., child of the helicopter parent).*

> *Proposition 5: An encounter with helicopter parents in the workplace is more likely to violate the expectations of segmenters than integrators.*

Attribution Made

As noted by Harvey et al., (2014), the most commonly studied attributional dimension is locus of causality. Internal attributions (e.g., effort or ability) reflect characteristics of the person, whereas external attributions (e.g., task difficult or luck) reflect aspects of the situation. With regard to workplace encounters with helicopter parents, observers may attribute blame to some inadequacy on the part of the

adult child of the helicopter parent (internal attribution), or observers may attribute blame to the situation in which the adult child is constrained, that is, being a victim of an over-controlling helicopter parent (external attribution). Given evidence showing that the locus of an attribution influences performance ratings (Harvey et al., 2014), it is likely that the impression formed by coworkers or managers of the employee will depend on whether blame is attributed to the helicopter parent or the adult child. Additionally, it is likely that both boundary management preference and the nature of the incident with the helicopter parent (mild versus extreme) will affect the attribution made. Therefore, it is predicted:

Proposition 6: The impression formed of the employee or applicant will be more negative when blame is attributed to the adult child as opposed to the helicopter parent.

Proposition 7: Segmenters will be more likely than integrators to attribute blame to the employee (adult child) as opposed to the helicopter parent.

Proposition 8: The more extreme the incident with the helicopter parent, the more likely the observer is to attribute blame to the helicopter parent.

DISCUSSION

Despite the recent attention in the popular press given to the attempts of some companies to accommodate the intrusion of helicopter parents in the workplace (Lantz, 2013; Shellenbarger, 2006), our analysis of online newspaper discussion boards shows there are generally negative impressions about such accommodation practices. While contributors to online discussion boards may not be representative of the general population, testing existing theory was not our intent. Instead, our intent was to build theory and provide direction for future research. Specifically, we propose organizational members' impressions of employees with highly involved helicopter parents will be influenced by the organizational members' boundary management preference, the organizational culture, the degree to which the incident involving the helicopter parent violates the organizational members' expectations, and the attributions made.

In addition to investigating impression formation, future research is needed to determine the impact that involving parents in the workplace is having on employees. For example, how does having a "Take Your Parents to Work" day affect employees? Does it make them feel more satisfied with their jobs and more committed to the workplace? Or, does it make them feel uncomfortable, embarrassed or incompetent when having their parents present? Also, how far should companies go in accepting employees who have highly involved helicopter parents, or should the workplace be a parent-free zone? Recent research suggests that the adult children of helicopter parents may lack work-related competencies. For example, a study of 438 undergraduates showed a negative association between helicopter parenting and school engagement (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012). Another study showed helicopter parenting was associated with Millennials' neurotic tendencies, dependency on others, and ineffective coping skills (Odenweller, Booth-Butterfield, & Weber, 2014). Similarly, Bradley-Geist and Olson-Buchanan (2014) found over-parenting was associated with lower self-efficacy in undergraduates, as well as maladaptive responses to workplace scenarios. Specifically, students who reported higher levels of over-parenting were more likely to endorse solutions that relied on others, rather than taking responsibility oneself. Thus, it appears that young adults with over-controlling parents may be less proactive and take a less personally invested approach to important adult tasks such as pursuing an education, finding a job, or demonstrating independence or initiative in the workplace once they are hired. Future research is needed to examine the impact of helicopter parenting on their adult child's job performance and career success.

Clearly, as a new non-work entity in the workplace, helicopter parents are wreaking havoc and blurring the line between work and non-work. Companies that opt to utilize "parent friendly" policies are prompting a redefinition of the boundary between these two domains. Our study suggests there may be

risks to these policies. The careers of young adults may be negatively impacted by others' perceptions of incompetence and immaturity. We suggest that organizations proceed with extreme caution in their efforts to involve parents in the workplace. At a minimum, we recommend that companies establish boundaries or limits to such involvement and that these be consistent with the organizational culture. Although this study has raised more questions than answers, we hope that it prompts future studies about helicopter parenting and its impact on the workplace.

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