

**BECOMING A PARENT AFTER GROWING UP
OVERINDULGED¹**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: STUDY 3²

BY DAVID J. BREDEHOFT, PH. D.³

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³ David J. Bredehoft is Professor of Psychology and Family Studies and chairs the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Concordia University, St. Paul, MN 55104-5494. bredehoft@csp.edu.

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Purpose

The overindulgence project began in 1996 with the mission of studying the relationship between childhood overindulgence and subsequent adult problems and parenting practices (for more information concerning the Overindulgence Project see http://www.overindulgence.info/Research_Folder/Research.htm). This study is the third in a series of studies on overindulgence which builds on the findings of two previous studies on overindulgence: Bredehoft, Mennicke, Potter, & Clarke (1998) and Bredehoft & Leach (2006). This study explores the relationship between childhood overindulgence and parenting beliefs: self-esteem, dysfunctional attitudes, and locus of control. Further, it empirically tests the hypothesis of three types of overindulgence: Material Overindulgence (Too Many Things), Structural Overindulgence (Lack of Rules, Soft Structure), and Relational Overindulgence (Over-Nurture).

Method and Data Collection

The sample consisted of 348 participants⁴ (89% female, 11% male; ages 26-95) from 39 states and 12 additional countries. Participants logged onto the study's web page (Clarke, Dawson & Bredehoft, 2006). Once participants read and agreed to the consent form they answered a questionnaire consisting of demographic data, the 14-item author developed likert-style inventory *OVERINDULGED* (Bredehoft, Clarke, & Dawson, 2002), and a series of normed, validated psychological inventories: *Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales*, FACES (Olson, Portner, & Lavee, 1986); *Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale*, RSES (Rosenberg, 1979), *Dysfunctional Attitude Scale*, DAS (Weissman & Beck, 1979; Weissman, 1980); and the *Parental Locus of Control Scale*, PLOC (Campis, Lyman, & Prentice-Dunn, 1986). Participants submitted their data electronically for analysis.

⁴ The total sample numbered 391. This analysis was conducted with a sub-sample of 348 after non-parents were removed.

Results

The more Parents were overindulged as children (See Table 1):

- the greater family adaptability in their family of procreation;
- the lower self-esteem; and
- the greater frequency of dysfunctional attitudes.

Parents who were overindulged as children (See Table 2):

- hold ineffective parenting beliefs overall;
- think their child controls their lives;
- believe they are ineffective parents;
- believe they have little control over their children
- believe in fate or chance when it comes to parenting; and
- as predicted, do not believe they are responsible for their children’s behavior.

This study provides evidence that the items in *OVERINDULGED* used to measure childhood overindulgence:

- can be utilized as a scale because the items have a high degree of internal consistency (See Table 3);
- load into three factors, providing empirical evidence for three types of overindulgence: (1) Material Overindulgence (Too Many Things); (2) Structural Overindulgence (Soft Structure); and (3) Relational Overindulgence (Over-Nurture) (See Table 4).

TABLE 1
Overindulged as a Child Correlated with Scale Sum Scores

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---------------------------------|----------|---------|---------|---------|---|
| 1. <i>OVERINDULGED</i> () | - | | | | |
| 2. Family Adaptability | .129* | - | | | |
| 3. Family Cohesion | -.095 | .193*** | - | | |
| 4. Rosenberg Self-Esteem | -.101* | .102* | .277*** | - | |
| 5. Dysfunctional Attitude Scale | -.227*** | .070 | .184*** | .611*** | - |

n = 391. Note: *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001, () = Bredehoft, D. J., Clarke, J. I., & Dawson, C. (2002). *OVERINDULGED*. Indicators of overindulgence scale information available from the primary author.

TABLE 2
Overindulged as a Child Correlated with Parental Locus of Control Scores

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---|
| 1. <i>OVERINDULGED</i> (±) | - | | | | | | |
| 2. PLOC Sum Score | .244*** | - | | | | | |
| 3. Parental Efficacy | .206*** | .681** | - | | | | |
| 4. Parental Responsibility | .008 | .547*** | .266*** | - | | | |
| 5. Child Control of Parent's Life | .295*** | .623*** | .428*** | .079 | - | | |
| 6. Parent Belief in Fate | .200*** | .658*** | .355*** | .114* | .372*** | - | |
| 7. Parent Control of Child's Behavior | .144** | .769*** | .377*** | .289*** | .352*** | .324*** | - |

n = 348. Note: *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001, (±) = Bredehoft, D. J., Clarke, J. I., & Dawson, C. (2002). *OVERINDULGED*. Indicators of overindulgence scale information available from the primary author.

TABLE 3
Overindulged as a Child Correlated with *OVERINDULGED* ± Individual Items

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
|-------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|--------|---------|----|
| Overindulged as child ‡ | - | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Did things for me | .430*** | - | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Chores | .322*** | .381*** | - | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Clothes | .443*** | .264*** | .201*** | - | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5. Privileges | .443*** | .270*** | .253*** | .572*** | - | | | | | | | | | |
| 6. Toys | .544*** | .298*** | .211*** | .513*** | .448*** | - | | | | | | | | |
| 7. Freedom | .370*** | .210*** | .254*** | .250*** | .496*** | .253*** | - | | | | | | | |
| 8. Dominate the family | .469*** | .261*** | .299*** | .281*** | .363*** | .254*** | .367*** | - | | | | | | |
| 9. Skills | .151** | .117* | .291*** | .047 | -.004 | .080 | .243*** | .122* | - | | | | | |
| 10. Parents over-loving | .488*** | .374*** | .137* | .181** | .162** | .250*** | .206*** | .275*** | .088 | - | | | | |
| 11. Rules | .254*** | .148** | .487*** | .139** | .306*** | .149** | .506*** | .300*** | .360*** | .082 | - | | | |
| 12. Enforce rules | .259*** | .174** | .422*** | .121* | .279*** | .164** | .505*** | .313*** | .333*** | .096 | .857*** | - | | |
| 13. Activities, sports, camps | .273*** | .169** | .015 | .260*** | .227*** | .362*** | .058 | .084 | -.071 | .130* | -.146** | -.135* | - | |
| 14. Entertained me | .469*** | .222*** | .088 | .387*** | .315*** | .405*** | .166** | .179** | .084 | .333*** | .045 | .028 | .465*** | - |

Note: n = 348. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001, 2-tailed; ‡ Overindulged as a child = single item; ± Bredehoft, D. J., Clarke, J. I., & Dawson, C. (2002). *OVERINDULGED*. Indicators of overindulgence scale information available from the primary author.

TABLE 4
Factor Loadings for *OVERINDULGED*[±]

| Factor | <i>OVERINDULGED</i> Items [±] | Factor Loading |
|---|--|----------------|
| Factor 1 Material Overindulgence (Too Many Things) | Clothes | .746 |
| | Toys | .718 |
| | Privileges | .767 |
| | Entertained me | .638 |
| | Activities, lessons, sports and camps | .593 |
| Factor 2 Structural Overindulgence (Soft Structure) | Rules | .901 |
| | Enforced rules | .874 |
| | Chores | .588 |
| | Freedom | .637 |
| | Dominate the family | .389 |
| | Skills | .499 |
| Factor 3 Relational Overindulgence (Over-Nurture) | Parents over-loving | .745 |
| | Did things for me | .707 |

Note: n= 390. Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization. Rotation convergence in 5 iterations. [±] Bredehoft, D. J., Clarke, J. I., & Dawson, C. (2002). *OVERINDULGED*. Indicators of overindulgence scale information available from the primary author.

Limitations

Several limitations for this study exist. First, the sample is largely made up of mothers (females) (89%) and the results therefore should be cautiously applied to fathers (males). Second, participants were recruited through the Overindulgence Project's webpage www.overindulgence.info. There may be a selection bias related to individuals who visit this page seeking information about overindulgence.

Conclusions

1. This study suggests that childhood overindulgence becomes an influencing factor when children grow up and later become parents themselves.
2. This study demonstrates a connection between childhood overindulgence and parental attitudes: (a) greater family adaptability in family of procreation, (b) lower self-esteem, (c) greater frequency of dysfunctional thoughts which have been linked to mental health problems such as depression (Weissman & Beck, 1978; Weissman, 1980) and problematic interpersonal behaviors (Whisman & Friedman, 1998).
3. Further, overindulged children appear to grow up to become “ineffective parents” believing that:
 - their child controls their lives not visa versa;
 - as parents they have little control over their children;
 - it is fate or chance that causes parents to have “good children”;
 - they are not responsible for their child’s behavior.
4. Finally, this study provides empirical evidence for three types of overindulgence: (1) Material Overindulgence (Too Many Things); (2) Structural Overindulgence (Soft Structure); and (3) Relational Overindulgence (Over- Nurture).

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