

**EMPIRICAL CONNECTIONS BETWEEN PARENTAL  
OVERINDULGENCE PATTERNS, PARENTING STYLES,  
AND PARENT SENSE OF COMPETENCE**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: STUDY 9<sup>1</sup>**

BY

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<sup>1</sup> The author would like to acknowledge the conceptual contributions that Jean Illsley Clarke, Connie Dawson and Michael Walcheski made to this study.

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## **EMPIRICAL CONNECTIONS BETWEEN PARENTAL OVERINDULGENCE PATTERNS, PARENTING STYLES, AND PARENT SENSE OF COMPETENCE**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: STUDY 9**

#### **Purpose**

This study is the ninth in a series of studies on overindulgence (for more information concerning the Overindulgence Project see <http://www.overindulgence.info/AboutOurResearch.htm> . It builds on the findings of Bredehoft, Mennicke, Potter, & Clarke's (1998) benchmark study on overindulgence by examining the relationship among parental overindulgence patterns, parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive) and parent sense of competence (skills/knowledge; valuing/comfort).

Study IX is a replication of Study IV (Walcheski, Bredehoft & Leach, 2007). Study IX was conducted because of the 311 parents in Study IV, 89% were mothers and only 11% were fathers. Study IX was designed specifically to recruit fathers into the study. We then combined data from both Studies (IV and IX) for the analysis presented here (N = 609, 47.8% female, 52.2% Male).

This study explores the following questions with an equal balance of mothers and fathers: Is parental overindulgence related to specific parenting styles? And, is there a relationship between lack of parenting skills, parenting satisfaction, and parental overindulgence?

#### **Method and Data Collection**

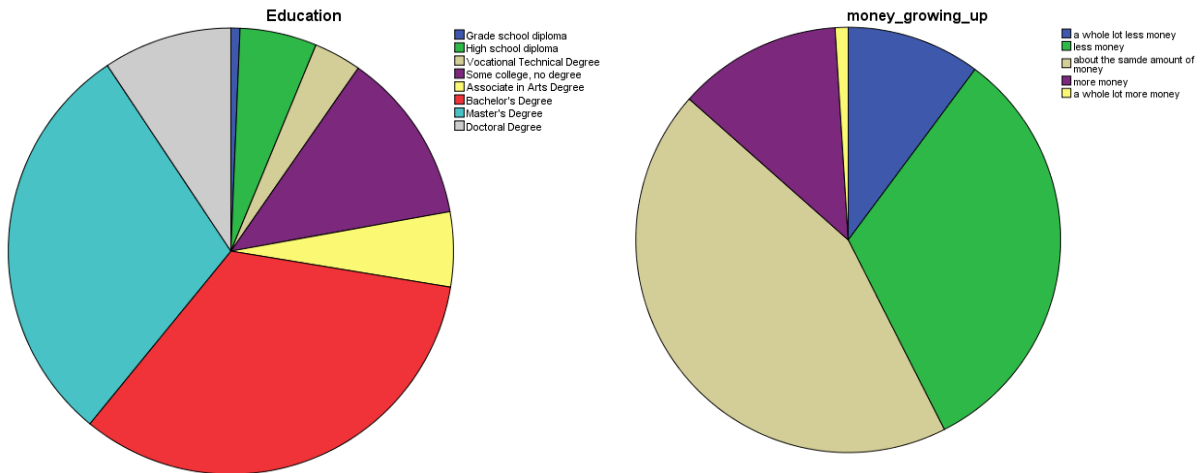
The combined samples consisted of 609 parents (47.8% female, 52.2% male; ages 20-79; Mean age 42.6) from 44 states and eight additional countries outside of the United States (Australia, Canada, France, Iceland, India, New Zealand, Qatar, and the United Kingdom). Participants entered the study by logging onto the study's web page (Bredehoft, Clarke, & Dawson, 2013). Students were given bonus points toward their Introduction to Psychology grade for recruiting fathers for the study. Once participants read and agreed to the consent form they answered a questionnaire consisting of demographic data, *OVERINDULGENCE: Parental Overindulgence Assessment Scale* (Bredehoft & Walcheski, 2005) a 30 item<sup>3</sup> author developed likert-style inventory, and a series of normed, validated psychological inventories: the *Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire PSDQ* (Robinson, Mandlco, Olsen, & Hart, 1995); and the *Parenting Sense of Competence Scale PSCS* (Gibaud-Wallston & Wandersman, 1978). Participants submitted their data electronically for analysis.

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<sup>3</sup> The original version of the *Parental Overindulgence Assessment Tool* was a 21 item true/false, yes/no assessment tool developed by Jean Illsley Clarke, Connie Dawson, and David J. Bredehoft (Clarke, Dawson, and Bredehoft, 2004, p. 293-294). For this version of the instrument, fifteen items were added by Bredehoft and Walcheski bringing it to a total of 36 items and changing them to a likert-style response set (never or almost never; seldom; sometimes, sometimes not; frequently; always or almost always). The scale was renamed: *OVERINDULGENCE: Parental Overindulgence Assessment Scale*. The 36 items were reduced to the 30-item version used in this study by using factor analysis with a Cronbach's Alpha of .85.

**Education**

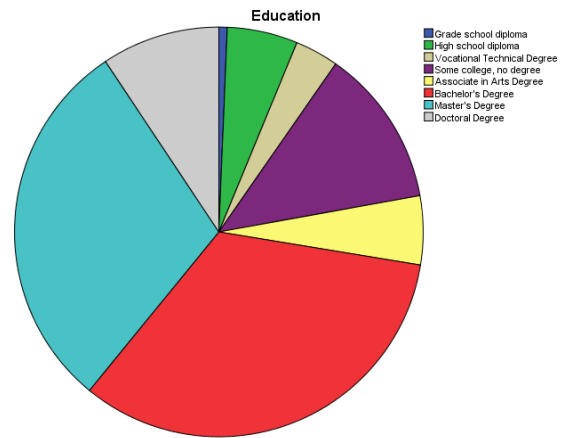
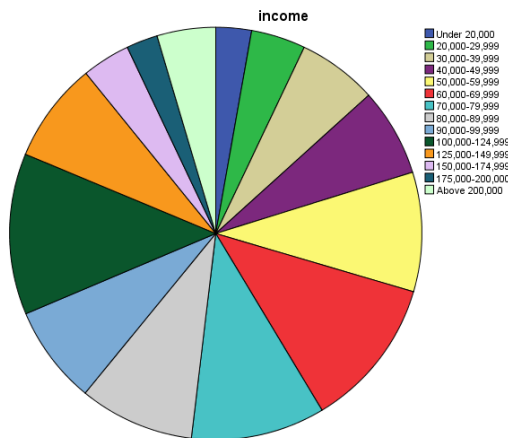
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Grade school diploma	4	.7	.7	.7
	High school diploma	34	5.6	5.6	6.2
	Vocational Technical Degree	21	3.4	3.4	9.7
	Some college, no degree	76	12.5	12.5	22.2
	Associate in Arts Degree	33	5.4	5.4	27.6
	Bachelor's Degree	203	33.3	33.3	60.9
	Master's Degree	181	29.7	29.7	90.6
	Doctoral Degree	57	9.4	9.4	100.0
	Total	609	100.0	100.0	



**money\_growing\_up**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	a whole lot less money	62	10.2	10.2	10.2
	less money	197	32.3	32.3	42.5
	about the samde amount of money	268	44.0	44.0	86.5
	more money	76	12.5	12.5	99.0
	a whole lot more money	6	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	609	100.0	100.0	

		income			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Under 20,000	17	2.8	2.8	2.8
	20,000-29,999	26	4.3	4.3	7.1
	30,000-39,999	38	6.2	6.2	13.3
	40,000-49,999	42	6.9	6.9	20.2
	50,000-59,999	57	9.4	9.4	29.6
	60,000-69,999	72	11.8	11.8	41.4
	70,000-79,999	64	10.5	10.5	51.9
	80,000-89,999	55	9.0	9.0	60.9
	90,000-99,999	47	7.7	7.7	68.6
	100,000-124,999	77	12.6	12.6	81.3
	125,000-149,999	48	7.9	7.9	89.2
	150,000-174,999	23	3.8	3.8	92.9
	175,000-200,000	15	2.5	2.5	95.4
	Above 200,000	28	4.6	4.6	100.0
Total		609	100.0	100.0	

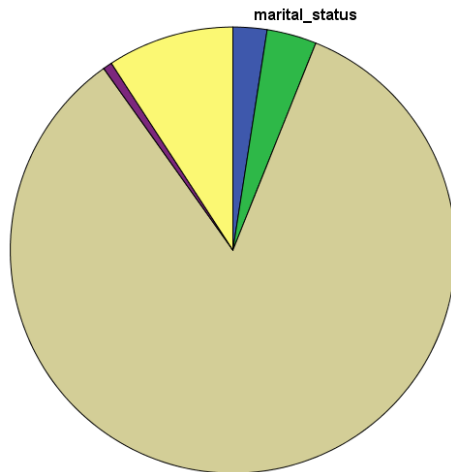


**Education**

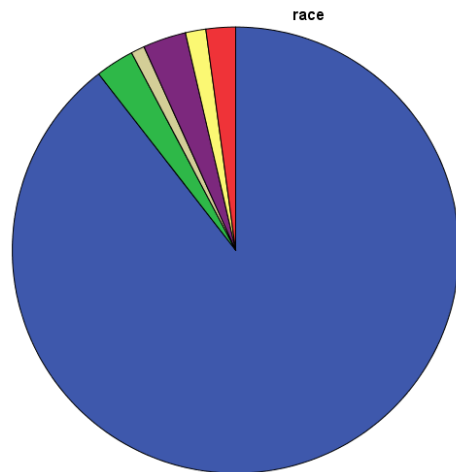
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Grade school diploma	4	.7	.7	.7
	High school diploma	34	5.6	5.6	6.2
	Vocational Technical Degree	21	3.4	3.4	9.7
	Some college, no degree	76	12.5	12.5	22.2
	Associate in Arts Degree	33	5.4	5.4	27.6
	Bachelor's Degree	203	33.3	33.3	60.9
	Master's Degree	181	29.7	29.7	90.6
	Doctoral Degree	57	9.4	9.4	100.0
	Total	609	100.0	100.0	

**marital\_status**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never married	15	2.5	2.5	2.5
	Living together with partner	22	3.6	3.6	6.1
	Married	512	84.1	84.1	90.1
	Widowed	4	.7	.7	90.8
	Divorced	56	9.2	9.2	100.0
	Total	609	100.0	100.0	



- Never married
- Living together with partner
- Married
- Widowed
- Divorced



- White (Caucasian)
- Black (African American)
- American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- Hispanic (Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American)
- Other

		race			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	White (Caucasian)	545	89.5	89.5	89.5
	Black (African American)	17	2.8	2.8	92.3
	American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut	6	1.0	1.0	93.3
	Asian or Pacific Islander	19	3.1	3.1	96.4
	Hispanic (Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American)	9	1.5	1.5	97.9
	Other	13	2.1	2.1	100.0
	Total	609	100.0	100.0	

## Results

As predicted, the more parents overindulge their children (See Table 1):

- the more likely they were to be **authoritarian**,  $r = .121$ ,  $p < .003$  (to use verbal/hostility, and corporal punishment), and
- the more likely they were to be **permissive**,  $r = .559$ ;  $p < .0001$  (lack of follow-through, ignore misbehavior, and lack parental self-confidence) and
- they were less likely to be **authoritative**,  $r = -.066$  (less likely to use reasoning and induction).

As predicted, parents who overindulge their children: (See Table 2):

- were more likely to lack a global sense of competence about their parenting,  $r = .233$ ;  $p < .0001$
- were more likely to lack a sense of parenting satisfaction (instead they felt frustration, anxiety, and poor motivation) with parenting,  $r = .330$ ;  $p < .0001$ , and
- did not have a sense of parental efficacy (feelings of competence, capable of problem solving, and familiarity with parenting),  $r = .065$ ;  $p < .111$ .

This study's findings were consistent with previous research (Bredehoft et al., 1998; Walcheski, Bredehoft & Leach, 2007) in that we found a significant relationship between a parent being overindulged as a child and parents overindulging their own children (Total,  $r = .179$ ,  $p < .0001$ ; Too Much,  $r = .154$ ,  $p < .0001$ ; Over-nurture,  $r = .125$ ,  $p < .002$ ; Soft Structure,  $r = .101$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

Bredehoft et al. (1998) reported that the majority of overindulgence was employed by both parents (43%), followed closely by mothers (42%), then fathers (11%), grandmothers (4%), and grandfathers (1%).

- Contrary to the findings of Bredehoft et al. (1998), this study found fathers to be more overindulgent than mothers (see table 3).

- Compared to mothers, fathers were more overindulgent than mothers overall (total overindulgence) as well as on sub-scale scores of too much, and soft structure.
- Younger parents (See Table 4) were significantly more overindulgent than older parents.
- Younger fathers (See Table 5) were significantly more overindulgent than older fathers.
- Younger mothers were significantly more overindulgent than their older counterparts.
- We found no significant difference between high and low income parents on overindulgence (Table 6).
- We found no differences between fathers and mothers on parenting satisfaction, parent efficacy, or total parent sense of competence.

**TABLE 1**  
**Pearson's correlations between OVERINDULGENCE and Parenting Styles Dimensions**  
**Questionnaire (PSDQ) Aggregate and Sub-scale Scores**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. OVERINDULGENCE:												
POAS	-											
<b>AUTHORITATIVE</b>												
2. Warmth/ Involvement	-.066	-										
3. Reasoning/ Induction	-.205****	.450****	-									
4. Democratic/ Participation	.063	.367****	.514****	-								
5. Good natured/ Easygoing	-.063	.462****	.444****	.435****	-							
<b>AUTHORITARIAN</b>												
6. Verbal/Hostility	.121**											
7. Corporal Punishment	.134***	-.218****	-.164****	-.185****	-.467****	-						
8. Non-reasoning Punitive strategies	.022	-.233****	-.165****	-.317****	-.346****	.421****	-					
9. Directiveness	.167****	-.353****	-.363****	-.324****	-.443****	.436****	.453****	-				
<b>PERMISSIVE</b>												
10. Lack of follow- through	.044	-.222****	-.068	-.224****	-.340****	.416****	.407****	.425****	-			
11. Ignoring Misbehavior	.559****											
12. Lack of Parental Self-Confidence	.569****	-.155****	-.360****	-.070	-.249****	.430****	.176****	.366****	.180****	-		
	.311****	-.013	-.205****	.114*	.021	.114*	-.077	.072	-.123**	.412****	-	
	.569****	-.155****	-.360****	-.070	-.249****	.430****	.176****	.366****	.180****	.412****	.609****	-

n = 609. Note: \*p < .005, \*\*p < .003, \*\*\* p < .001, \*\*\*\* p < .0001

**TABLE 2**  
**Pearson's correlations between OVERINDULGENCE (POAS) and Parenting Sense of Competence Scale (PSOC) Aggregate and Sub-scale Scores**

	1	2	3	4
1. OVERINDULGENCE: POAS	-			
2. Lack of Parenting Efficacy	.065	-		
3. Lack of Parenting Satisfaction	.330****	.462****	-	
4. PSOC Total	.233****	.845****	.865****	-

n = 609. Note: \*p < .005, \*\*p < .003, \*\*\* p < .001, \*\*\*\* p < .0001

**TABLE 3**  
**ANOVA**  
**The Comparison of Fathers' to Mothers' Overindulgence (POAS) Scores (N = 609)**

	<u>Fathers</u> N=318	<u>Mothers</u> N=291	df	F	Sig.
Total OVERINDULGENCE	79.90	77.05	1	10.125	.002
Too Much	21.98	20.44	1	23.502	.000
Over Nurture	26.15	25.57	1	3.430	.064
Soft Structure	13.33	12.88	1	3.997	.047

**TABLE 4**  
**ANOVA**  
**Comparison of Young Parents to Old Parents Overindulgence (POAS) Scores (N = 609)**

	<u>Old</u> <u>Parents</u> N=314	<u>Young</u> <u>Parents</u> N=295	df	F	Sig.
Total OVERINDULGENCE	77.33	79.82	1	7.731	.006
Too Much	21.98	20.44	1	.040	.843
Over Nurture	26.15	25.57	1	.174	.667
Soft Structure	13.33	12.88	1	1.434	.232

Note: Young Parents (age 20-41), Old Parents (age 42-79)



**TABLE 5**  
**ANOVA**  
**Comparison of Young and Old Fathers and Young and Old Mothers Overindulgence (POAS) Scores**

	<u>Old</u> <u>Fathers</u> N=202	<u>Young</u> <u>Fathers</u> N=116	df	F	Sig.
<u>Total OVERINDULGENCE</u>	78.35	82.59	1	10.402	.001
	<u>Old</u> <u>Mothers</u>	<u>Young</u> <u>Mothers</u>			
<u>Total OVERINDULGENCE</u>	75.49	78.02	1	4.022	.046

Note: Young Parents (age 20-41), Old Parents (age 42-79)

**TABLE 6**  
**ANOVA**  
**Comparison of High Income Parents to Low Income Parents Overindulgence (POAS) Scores (N = 609)**

	<u>Lower</u> <u>Income</u> <u>Parents</u> N=180	<u>Middle</u> <u>Income</u> <u>Parents</u> N=238	<u>Higher</u> <u>Income</u> <u>Parents</u> N=191	df	F	Sig.
Total OVERINDULGENCE	79.34	77.53	79.03	2	2.641	.195
Too Much	21.15	21.03	21.59	2	1.118	.327
Over Nurture	26.14	25.61	25.95	2	1.048	.351
Soft Structure	13.29	13.09	12.98	2	.580	.560

Note: Lower Income Parents (Under \$20,000-\$59,999), Middle Income Parents (\$60,000-\$99,999), Higher Income Parents (\$100,000-above \$200,000)

### Limitations

Several limitations for this study exist.

- Participants were recruited through the Overindulgence Project's webpage [www.overindulgence.info](http://www.overindulgence.info). There may be a selection bias uniquely related to individuals who visit this web page seeking information about overindulgence and then choose to participate in research related to overindulgence.

- Most fathers were recruited by their son or daughter to participate. Students who recruited fathers received points toward their grade in the class. There may be a selection bias uniquely related to fathers who volunteer to assist their children in this manner.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

1. Bredehoft, Mennicke, Potter & Clarke (1998) made a logical argument that Baumrind's "permissive parent" was not the same as an "overindulgent parent" by suggesting that not all overindulgent parents are permissive. This study provides empirical evidence supporting this assertion by demonstrating that overindulgent parents can be both permissive and authoritarian, or both.
2. Parents who overindulge their children lack a global sense of competence, efficacy, and satisfaction with parenting. The more these parents overindulge, the more they become frustrated, anxious, and poorly motivated as parents. They tend to feel more incompetent, incapable of problem solving and unfamiliar with parenting.
3. Parents who were overindulged as children will more likely grow up to become overindulgent parents and continue the cycle of overindulgence.
4. Contrary to previous findings fathers overindulge their children more than mothers (total overindulgence) and by giving them Too Much.
5. Younger parents today are more apt to overindulge children compared to older parents. Today's younger parents need help to resist the pressure of overindulging their children.
6. Family professionals should be attentive to normative and non-normative life transitions and stressors because parents are more susceptible to overindulge during these periods across the family life cycle (Walsh, 2003).
7. Using a variety of sources, family professionals should provide to parents information and alternatives to corporal punishment.
8. Family professionals should teach parents to:
  - give expectations regarding behavior before their child engages in an activity;
  - give reasons why rules should be obeyed;
  - help their child to understand the impact of behavior;
  - talk and reason with their child when misbehavior occurs; and
  - emphasize the reasons for rules.

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