

**FACTORS CONNECTING CHILDHOOD
OVERINDULGENCE AND ADULT LIFE
ASPIRATIONS**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: STUDY 6¹

BY

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Factors Connecting Childhood Overindulgence and Adult Life Aspirations

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Introduction

Overindulgence includes giving too much, over-nurturing, and too little structure (Clarke, Dawson, & Bredehoft, 2004). All three have been found to have negative effects on children lasting into adulthood (Bredehoft, Mennicke, Potter, & Clarke, 1998). For children, overindulgence can affect their personality development, self-concept, health, and relationship development (Bredehoft, Mennicke, Potter, & Clarke, 1998). In adulthood, childhood overindulgence is associated with problems in parenting (Bredehoft, 2006; Walcheski, Bredehoft, & Leach, 2007), self-concept, and dysfunctional thinking (Bredehoft & Leach, 2006) whereas the level of intrinsic goals versus extrinsic goals have been found to affect a person's learning, motivation, and personality (Kasser, 2002; Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Deci, 2006). In addition, research has found that intrinsic goals are associated with positive qualities such as self-acceptance, affiliation, community feeling, and physical health (Kasser, 2002; Kasser & Ryan, 1993). This study focuses on the relationship between childhood overindulgence and life aspirations (extrinsic and intrinsic goals). Extrinsic life aspirations include wealth, fame, and appearance. Intrinsic life aspirations include personal growth, relationships, and community.

Sample

The sample consisted of 369 participants (80.5% female, 19.5% male; ages 14-81; Mean age 38.25; Median age 22.00) from 37 states, Spain, France, Canada, Australia, Belgium, India, New Zealand, Slovenia, and the United Kingdom (see Appendix A). Participants were recruited and accessed the study through the web at www.overindulgence.info (56.9% from psychology classes at Concordia University – St. Paul, 30.1% from visitors to the webpage, and 13.1% from speaking engagements). Students received bonus points for their participation in the study.

Procedure

After participants read and agreed to the consent form they answered a questionnaire consisting of demographic data, and two self-report inventories: **Overindulged** (Bredehoft, Clarke, & Dawson, 2002; Bredehoft, 2007), and **The Aspiration Index** (Kasser & Ryan, 1993). Both inventories have established reliability and validity.

Measures

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Overindulged (Bredehoft, Clarke, & Dawson, 2002; Bredehoft, 2007) is a 14-item instrument designed to measure parental overindulgence from the point of view of the child (of any age). Respondents answer using a Likert scale of 1 (never or almost never) to 5 (always or almost always). **Overindulged** uses a weighted scoring system which produces an aggregate score and three subscale scores.

Total Overindulgence (aggregate score)

- **Too Much** (too many clothes, privileges, toys, activities, and entertainment);
- **Over-nurture** (doing things for the child, and over-loving); and
- **Soft structure** (no chores, too much freedom, allowed to dominate the family, not taught skills, no rules, rules were not enforced).

The Aspiration Index (Kasser & Ryan, 1993) measures people's high-level life goals. The 104 question scale assesses two broad aspirations: **extrinsic aspirations** (wealth, fame, and image) and **intrinsic aspirations** (meaningful relationships, personal growth, and community contributions). Participants rate each aspiration for importance, likelihood of attaining each, and the degree to which they have already attained each on a Likert scale from 1 to 7.

Extrinsic aspirations (aggregate score)

- *Wealth* (e.g., to be very wealthy, to have lots of expensive things, to be rich etc.)
- *Fame* (e.g., to have my name known by many people, to be admired by many people, to be famous etc.)
- *Image* (e.g., to be attractive, to look good, to wear the latest fashions etc.)

Intrinsic aspirations (aggregate score)

- *Meaningful relationships* (e.g., to have good faithful friends, to have intimate committed relationships, to have deep enduring friendships etc.)
- *Personal Growth* (e.g., to learn new things, to live a meaningful life, to accept myself etc.)
- *Community Contributions* (e.g., to work to improve society, to help others without receiving anything in return, to help others make their lives better etc.)

Results

Table 1
Correlations between Overindulgence and Life Aspirations Scores (N=369)

Life Aspirations	Total Overindulgence	Too Much	Over-Nurture	Soft Structure
Extrinsic Aggregate Score	.337****	.303****	.245****	.243****
Wealth Importance	.295****	.287****	.219****	.187****
Wealth Likelihood	.270****	.275****	.162***	.185****
Wealth Attainment	.046	.003	.013	.089
Fame Importance	.261****	.229****	.173***	.203****
Fame Likelihood	.242****	.218****	.170***	.176***
Fame Attainment	.117*	.072	.106*	.108*
Image Importance	.348****	.302****	.285****	.239****
Image Likelihood	.350****	.351****	.297****	.187****
Image Attainment	.282****	.262****	.241****	.175***
Intrinsic Aggregate Score	-.133**	-.051	-.081	-.176***
Personal Growth Importance	-.008	.012	-.015	-.024
Personal Growth Likelihood	-.049	.027	-.050	-.103*
Personal Growth Attainment	-.133**	-.115*	-.096	-.100
Relationship Importance	.074	.123*	.074	-.021
Relationship Likelihood	-.013	.066	-.028	-.109*
Relationship Attainment	-.125*	-.109*	-.102	-.086
Community Importance	-.138**	-.037	-.035	-.230****
Community Likelihood	-.159**	-.034	-.096	-.241****
Community Attainment	-.179****	-.145**	-.113*	-.155**

*<.05; **<.01; ***<.001; ****<.0001

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations, and t-Test Comparisons between Young and Old on Overindulgence and Life Aspirations Scores (N=369)

	<u>Young (Ages 14-22)</u> (N=186)		<u>Old (Ages 23-81)</u> (N=183)			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Total Overindulgence	114.13	21.52	97.74	27.19	-6.43	.0001
Too Much	52.77	10.72	41.40	12.53	-9.37	.0001
Over-Nurture	21.89	5.91	19.15	7.02	-4.06	.0001

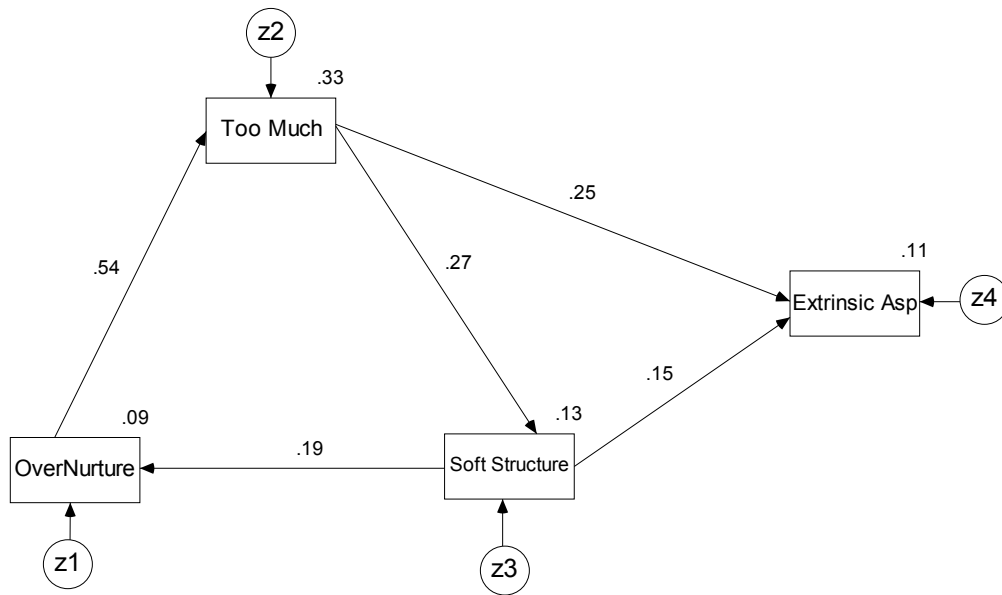
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Soft Structure	37.09	11.27	35.05	13.09	-1.60	.11
Extrinsic Aspirations	148.53	42.93	129.43	39.19	-4.45	.0001
Intrinsic Aspirations	252.51	26.57	255.60	34.23	.961	.02

Table 3
ANOVA
Money Growing up by Overindulgence and Life Aspiration Scores

	More & Whole Lot More Money (N=75)		About the Same Amount of Money (N=171)		Less & Whole Lot Less Money (N=123)		df		F	Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Between	Within		
Total Overindulgence	117.95	27.33	106.26	24.44	98.37	24.03	2	366	14.40	.0001
Too Much	53.59	12.81	48.26	12.07	41.63	12.08	2	366	23.62	.0001
Over-Nurture	22.83	6.73	20.49	6.47	19.19	6.44	2	366	7.284	.001
Soft Structure	38.83	13.87	35.25	11.31	35.54	12.27	2	366	2.420	.090
Extrinsic Aspirations (aggregate score)	146.99	48.75	134.83	36.68	139.91	44.46	2	364	2.222	.110
Intrinsic Aspirations (aggregate score)	258.92	26.89	249.42	32.98	257.60	28.63	2	362	3.736	.025

Figure 1
 Path Analysis for Childhood Overindulgence Variables
 Leading to Extrinsic Aspirations in Adulthood



CMIN

Model	NPAR	CMIN	DF	P	CMIN/DF
Default model	13	1.614	1	.204	1.614
Saturated model	14	.000	0		
Independence model	4	256.481	10	.000	25.648

Fitting the model to the data produced positive results. The Chi-square value is low ($\chi^2=1.614$) compared to the Independence model ($\chi^2=25.648$) and it is not statistically significant ($p>0.05$) which indicates the lack of difference between the data and the model. This means that the theory fits the data well.

Baseline Comparisons

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Model	NFI	RFI	IFI	TLI	CFI
	Delta1	rho1	Delta2	rho2	
Default model	.994	.937	.998	.975	.998
Saturated model	1.000		1.000		1.000
Independence model	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

The fit indices also demonstrate a good fit of the model to the data. Hu & Bentler (1999) suggest that the appropriate cut-off point for fit indices is .95 or above. The CFI (comparative fit index) and the TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index) are high (CFI=.998, TLI=.975), which indicates a perfect fit between the theory and the data.

RMSEA

Model	RMSEA	LO 90	HI 90	PCLOSE
Default model	.041	.000	.152	.391
Independence model	.259	.232	.287	.000

The good fit of the model to the data is also supported by the sufficient value of RMSEA (Root Means Square Error) = .041. Browne & Cudeck (1993) indicate that the appropriate measure for a close fit is RMSEA < .05, which is met by the results.

AIC

Model	AIC	BCC	BIC	CAIC
Default model	27.614	27.972		
Saturated model	28.000	28.386		
Independence model	264.481	264.591		

The AIC Default model (27.614) is significantly lower compared to the independence model (264.481), which is a nearly ten times minimization. Models with smaller AIC measure are preferable (Akaike, 1974), and in this case the index also shows a good fit.

HOELTER

Model	HOELTER	HOELTER
	.05	.01
Default model	877	1514
Independence model	27	34

The final indicator of a strong fit between the model and the data is the large value of the critical N (CN_{.05}=877 and CN_{.001}=1514). The acceptable value of the critical N is above 200 (Hoelter, 1983), which is met in the analysis.

Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
ExtrinsicTotal	<---	WTooMuch	.805	.172	4.670	***	
ExtrinsicTotal	<---	WSoftStructure	.531	.182	2.911	.004	
WTooMuch	<---	WOverNurture	1.057	.086	12.318	***	
WSoftStructure	<---	WTooMuch	.259	.054	4.782	***	
WOverNurture	<---	WSoftStructure	.104	.032	3.212	.001	

Examination of the path values in the model shows that all of the paths are significant at $p < .05$. This suggests the presence of meaningful relationships between all the elements of the model. It is necessary to note that the strongest relationship is between the factors Too Much and Over Nurture ($b=1.057$, $C.R.=12.318$). The variance estimation below allows for more detailed understanding of the explanatory contribution of each factor to the model.

Squared Multiple Correlations: (Group number 1 - Default model)

	Estimate
WOverNurture	.090
WSoftStructure	.126
WTooMuch	.331
ExtrinsicTotal	.113

The Squared Multiple Correlations are the percentage explained by each factor in the model. **Too Much** is the strongest predictor with 33% of the variance. One third of future problematic behavior (**Extrinsic Aspirations**) can be explained by this factor alone.

Limitations

Several limitations for this study exist.

- The sample is largely made up of women (females, 80.5%; males, 19.5%) and the results therefore should be cautiously applied to men.
- Participants were recruited through classes at Concordia University (56.9%) and the Overindulgence Project’s webpage at www.overindulgence.info (30.1%). There may be a selection bias uniquely related to individuals who attend classes

and visit this web page seeking information about overindulgence and then choose to participate in research related to overindulgence.

Discussion and Implications

- Parents need to be aware that overindulging encourages children to have **External Life Aspirations** of wealth, fame, and image (materialistic values) (see Table 1 and Figure 1)
- Specifically **Too Much** leads to **External Life Aspirations** (see Figure 1).
- Kasser (2002) “documents that people with **External Life Aspirations** (strong materialistic values and desires) report more symptoms of anxiety, are at greater risk for depression, and experience more frequent somatic irritations than those who are less materialistic” (p. x).
- Parents should be aware that overindulging (see Table 1 and Figure 4) encourages children **not** to become:
 - interested in the betterment of society;
 - willing to assist people in need;
 - willing to make the world a better place; and
 - willing to help people improve their lives except in order to get something in return.
- Are children today more overindulged than children in the past (see Table 2)? Yes.
 - Young (ages 14-22) in our sample were significantly more overindulged compared to old (ages 23-81).
- Do children who grow up in homes with a lot more money experience overindulgence more often (see Table 2)? Yes.
 - The amount of perceived family money growing up compared to other families makes a difference regarding overindulgence.
 - Those who grew up with more/a whole lot more money were overindulged the most (total, too much and over-nurture, but not soft structure).
- Is overindulgence the process parents use to instill materialistic values in their children (see Figure 1)? Yes.
 - Path analysis suggests that overindulging children leads to “**External**” rather than an “**Internal**” life goals.
 - **Too much** is the major culprit accounting for 33% of the variance. **Too much** leads to **Soft-structure**. **Soft structure** leads to **Over-nurture**.

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- The combination of all three types of overindulgence in childhood leads to “**External**” life goals in adulthood.

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Appendix A

State/Country of Participants

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid AK	2	.5	.5	.5
AR	2	.5	.5	1.1
Australia	2	.5	.5	1.6
AZ	4	1.1	1.1	2.7
Belgium	1	.3	.3	3.0
CA	7	1.9	1.9	4.9
Canada	4	1.1	1.1	6.0
CO	4	1.1	1.1	7.0
FL	3	.8	.8	7.9
France	1	.3	.3	8.1
GA	2	.5	.5	8.7
IA	4	1.1	1.1	9.8
ID	1	.3	.3	10.0
IL	7	1.9	1.9	11.9
IN	3	.8	.8	12.7
India	1	.3	.3	13.0
KS	1	.3	.3	13.3
KY	2	.5	.5	13.8
LA	2	.5	.5	14.4
MD	5	1.4	1.4	15.7
MI	4	1.1	1.1	16.8

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MN	189	51.2	51.2	68.0
MO	2	.5	.5	68.6
NC	2	.5	.5	69.1
NE	1	.3	.3	69.4
New Zealand	2	.5	.5	69.9
NH	1	.3	.3	70.2
NJ	6	1.6	1.6	71.8
NM	1	.3	.3	72.1
NT	1	.3	.3	72.4
NV	1	.3	.3	72.6
NY	5	1.4	1.4	74.0
OH	6	1.6	1.6	75.6
OK	3	.8	.8	76.4
OR	2	.5	.5	77.0
PA	7	1.9	1.9	78.9
Slovenia	1	.3	.3	79.1
Spain	1	.3	.3	79.4
TN	6	1.6	1.6	81.0
TX	5	1.4	1.4	82.4
United Kingdom	5	1.4	1.4	83.7
USA	12	3.3	3.3	87.0
UT	3	.8	.8	87.8
VA	3	.8	.8	88.6
WA	18	4.9	4.9	93.5
WI	23	6.2	6.2	99.7
WV	1	.3	.3	100.0
Total	369	100.0	100.0	