

**INFLUENCE OF CHILDHOOD OVERINDULGENCE ON YOUNG
ADULT DISPOSITIONS¹
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY²: STUDY 2³**

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and

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¹ Selected results from this paper were presented at the Minnesota Council on Family Relations Annual Meeting, December, 2001, Hopkins, MN and at the National Council on Family Relations Annual Meeting, November, 2004, Orlando, FL.

² This study was submitted for publication to the Journal of College Student Development in 2004. As a result of reviewers indicating the study had too few participants, the study was reopened. The study will remain open and collect data until 300 subjects have participated, upon which time the data will be reanalyzed and this report will be updated to reflect the new data.

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Until recently, scientific research on overindulgence was limited. The Overindulgence Project (Clarke, Dawson, & Bredehoft, 2006) focused on studying childhood overindulgence and subsequent problems in adulthood (for more information concerning the Overindulgence Project see http://www.overindulgence.info/Research_Folder/Research.htm).

This study expands on Bredehoft, Mennicke, Potter & Clarke's (1998) study on overindulgence by investigating the influence of childhood overindulgence on young adult dispositions. Dispositions studied include self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-righteousness, dysfunctional attitudes, life distress, family adaptability and family cohesion.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to build on the overindulgence research that began with "Perceptions Attributed by Adults to Parental Overindulgence During Childhood" (Bredehoft, Mennicke, Potter, & Clarke; 1998). This second overindulgence study focused on the link between childhood overindulgence and young adult dispositions. More specifically, it investigated overindulgence and its relationship to specific types of family systems based on the Circumplex Model (Olson, Portner, & Lavee, 1986) and with the following dispositions: self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-righteousness, dysfunctional attitudes and life distress in post-adolescence and young adulthood.

Method and Data Collection

The sample consisted of 74 participants (43 female, 31 male, ages 18-25) from a small private Midwestern university. Participants were recruited from psychology courses and were offered bonus points for their participation in the study.

Participants were instructed to bring their laptop computers, provided by the university, to one of seven lab periods to participate in the study. Research assistants gave verbal and written instructions on how to log onto the school's network and where to find the web page for the study.

Participants answered a web based questionnaire consisting of 147 questions beginning with demographic items followed by questions from the following inventories: the *Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales* (Olson, Portner, & Lavee, 1986), the *Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale* (Rosenberg, 1979), the *Dysfunctional Attitude Scale* (Weissman & Beck, 1978), the *Life Distress Inventory* (Yoshioka & Shibusawa, 2002),

the *Self-Efficacy Scale* (Sherer, Maddux, Mercandante, Prentice-Dunn & Rogers, 1982), the *Self-Righteousness Scale* (Falbo & Belk, 1985), the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985), and *OVERINDULGED*, 14 author developed likert-style questions on overindulgence (Bredehoft, Clarke, & Dawson, 2002). With the exception of *OVERINDULGED*, the author developed scale, all scales had established reliability and validity. After completion subject data were submitted electronically for analysis.

Results

The more young adults identified being overindulged as children (See Table 1):

- the less effective they saw themselves;
- the more self-righteous they believed themselves to be; and
- they held more dysfunctional attitudes.

Childhood overindulgence also correlated significantly with (See Table 2):

- lack of chores;
- too many toys;
- too many clothes;
- too much freedom;
- parents being over-loving and providing too much attention;
- lack of rules;
- not enforcing rules; and
- parents providing too much entertainment.

No statistical significance was found between overindulgence and (See Tables 1, 2 and 3):

- socioeconomic status;
- self-esteem;
- satisfaction with life;
- life distress; and
- family adaptability and family cohesion (type of family system).

TABLE 1.
Overindulged as a Child Correlated with Scale Sum Scores

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Overindulged [‡]	-						
2. RSE	.089	-					
3. SES	-.237*	.423***	-				
4. SRS	-.248*	.120	.339**	-			
5. SWLS	-.107	.695***	.494***	.157	-		
6. DAS	.233*	-.530***	-.528***	-.410***	-.520***	-	
7. LDI	-.170	.429***	.382**	.170	.602***	-.390**	-

Note: N = 74, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001, 2-tailed; ‡ Overindulged = single item, RSE=Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale, SES=Self-efficacy Scale, Score, SRS= Self-Righteousness, SWLS=Satisfaction with Life Scale, DAS=Dysfunctional Attitude Scale, and LDI=Life Distress Inventory

TABLE 2.
Overindulged as a Child Correlated with *Overindulged[‡]*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Overindulged [‡]	-													
2. Did things for me	.207	-												
3. Chores	.403***	.352**	-											
4. Clothes	.261*	.360**	.276*	-										
5. Privileges	.182	.213	.345**	.378**	-									
6. Toys	.325**	.345	.250*	.607***	.399***	-								
7. Freedom	.325**	-.030	.322**	.189	.560***	.183	-							
8. Dominate Family	.215	.075	.098	.316**	.330*	.205	.384**	-						
9. Skills	.079	.190	.394**	.079	.063	.022	.071	.106	-					
10. Parents over-loving	.467***	.083	.148	.089	.165	.059	.158	.264*	-.069	-				
11. Rules	.334***	-.028	.466***	.145	.267*	.130	.470***	.214	.095	.239*	-			
12. Enforced Rules	.417***	-.094	.355**	.088	.216	.178	.418***	.320**	-.068	.284*	.615***	-		
13. Activities	-.162	.114	-.002	-.005	.120	-.006	-.224	-.214	-.184	.024	-.194	-.346**	-	
14. Entertained me	.274*	.201	.119	.154	.321**	.324**	.166	.145	-.026	.071	-.055	-.034	.336**	-

Note: N = 74, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001, 2-tailed; ‡ Overindulged = single item; ⚭ Bredehoft, D. J., Clarke, J. I., & Dawson, C. (2002). *OVERINDULGED*. Indicators of overindulgence scale information available from the lead author.

TABLE 3.
Frequency of Overindulgence Scores by Family System Type (FACES)

		Cohesion			
		Chaotically Disengaged	Chaotically Separated	Chaotically Connected	Chaotically Enmeshed
Adaptability	Chaotically Disengaged	UHOI = 1	LOI = 1 ULOI = 1	UHOI = 3 HOI = 1 LOI = 1 ULOI = 2	UHOI = 2 LOI = 1 ULOI = 1
	Flexibly Disengaged	UHOI = 4 HOI = 2 LOI = 2 ULOI = 2	HOI = 4 LOI = 1	UHOI = 2 HOI = 6 LOI = 2 ULOI = 1	UHOI = 1 HOI = 1
	Structurally Disengaged	UHOI = 3 HOI = 2 LOI = 3 ULOI = 1	UHOI = 2 ULOI = 2	HOI = 2 LOI = 1 ULOI = 2	LOI = 2 ULOI = 2
	Rigidly Disengaged	UHOI = 2 HOI = 1	HOI = 1 ULOI = 1	UHOI = 1 LOI = 2 ULOI = 1	LOI = 1

Key		Score	Quartile
Ultra High Overindulgence	(UHOI)	37-55	4
High Overindulgence	(HOI)	34-36	3
Low Overindulgence	(LO)	31-33	2
Ultra Low Overindulgence	(ULOI)	21-30	1

	Balanced
	Mid-range
	Unbalanced

Limitations

Several limitations for this study exist. First is sample size. With a sample size of seventy-four any conclusions should be interpreted cautiously. Second, the sample consisted of individuals at one small private Midwestern university.

Conclusions

1. This study identifies overindulgence as a problem issue within the young adult population.
2. It raises awareness of what overindulgence is, and that it exists in this population (in all types of family systems and from all socioeconomic levels).
3. This study demonstrates the link between childhood overindulgence and young adults who view themselves as: (a) less effective, and (b) having an inflated sense of self-righteousness. As a result, these young adults have a sense of entitlement with little or no ability to delay gratification.
4. Additionally, the young adults in our study who were overindulged as children held a greater number 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).
5. Because overindulgence is significantly associated with the lack of doing chores, having too many clothes and toys, having too much freedom, parents over-loving them and giving them too much attention, not having or enforcing the rules, and making sure they were entertained; it seems likely that these young adults will put extra pressure and demands on college personnel and employers.
6. Finally, they may not have many of the necessary life skills to be effective as adults (time management, effective decision making, the ability to delay gratification etc.) in their work and relationships.

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