

Study 6: Connections between Childhood Overindulgence and Adult Life

Aspirations - A Preliminary Report

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Abstract

Overindulgence includes giving too much, over-nurturing, and too little structure. All three have been found to have negative effects on children lasting into adulthood. For children, overindulgence can affect their personality development, self-concept, health, and relationship development. In adulthood, childhood overindulgence can lead to problems with parenting, self-concept, and dysfunctional thinking. The level of intrinsic goals versus extrinsic goals have been found to affect a person's learning, motivation, and personality. Other studies found that intrinsic goals include self-acceptance, affiliation, community feeling, and physical health. This study focuses on the relationship between childhood overindulgence and life aspirations (extrinsic and intrinsic goals). Extrinsic life goals include wealth, fame, and appearance. Intrinsic life goals include personal growth, relationships, and community.

Sample

The sample consisted of 272 participants (79.4% female, 20.6% male; ages 14-81; Mean age 31.07) from 36 states and ten additional countries outside of the United States. Participants accessed the study through the web at www.overindulgence.info (55.9% from psychology classes at Concordia University, 29.4% from webpage, 14.8% from speaking engagements).

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

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=272)

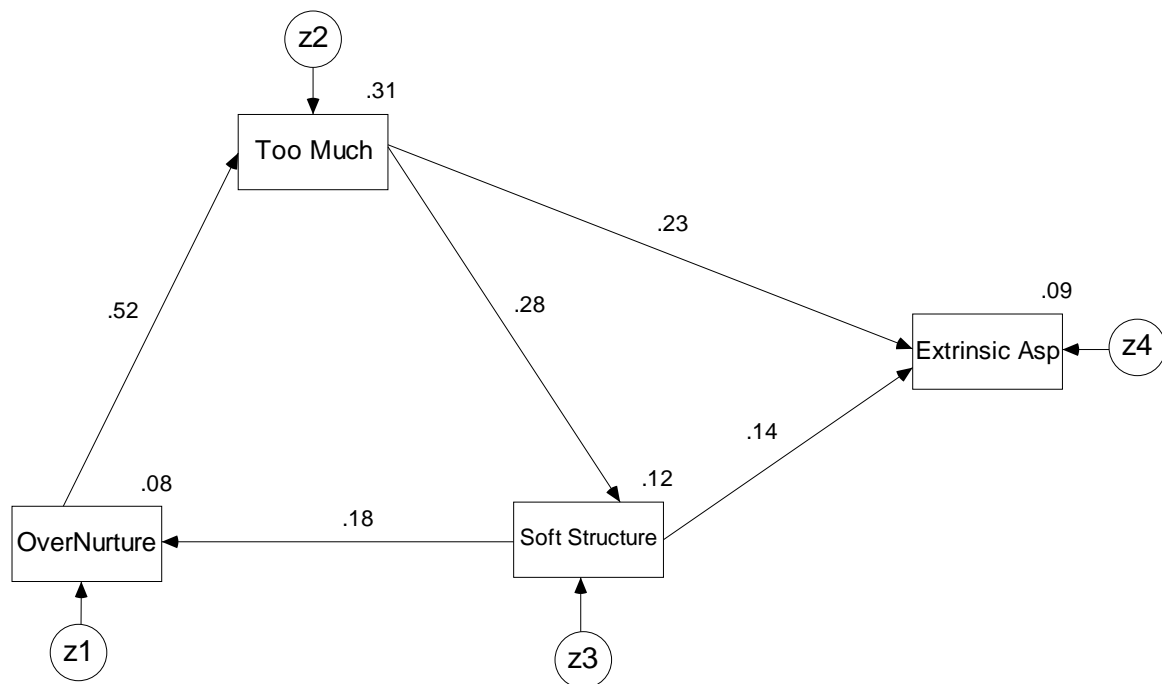
Life Aspirations	Total Overindulgence	Too Much	Over-Nurture	Soft Structure
Extrinsic Aggregate Score	.298****	.275****	.202***	.218****
Wealth Importance	.248****	.258****	.171**	.152*
Wealth Likelihood	.253****	.269****	.135*	.171**
Wealth Attainment	.052	.010	.019	.086
Fame Importance	.253****	.203***	.141*	.184**
Fame Likelihood	.209***	.203***	.134*	.147*
Fame Attainment	.076	.045	.077	.068
Image Importance	.315****	.259****	.253****	.232****
Image Likelihood	.308****	.318****	.258****	.160**
Image Attainment	.262****	.253****	.205***	.166**
Intrinsic Aggregate Score	.048	.057	.040	.011
Personal Growth Importance	.020	.019	-.006	.020
Personal Growth Likelihood	.101	.095	.047	.078
Personal Growth Attainment	-.094	-.070	-.072	-.077
Relationship Importance	.040	.068	.005	.006
Relationship Likelihood	-.029	.043	-.011	-.096
Relationship Attainment	-.104	-.098	-.108	-.053
Community Importance	-.184**	-.086	-.068	-.250****
Community Likelihood	-.177**	-.056	-.096	-.247****
Community Attainment	-.164**	-.133*	-.100	-.140*

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

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations, and t-Test Comparisons on Overindulgence and Life Aspirations Scores between Young and Old

	Young (Ages 14-22)		Old (Ages 23-81)		t	Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Total Overindulgence	111.64	21.05	99.41	29.10	-3.97	.0001
Too Much	51.06	10.39	41.43	13.04	-6.74	.0001
Over-Nurture	21.43	6.00	19.64	7.24	-2.22	.027
Soft Structure	36.85	11.61	36.19	14.08	-.428	.669
Extrinsic Aspirations	147.02	43.07	130.43	42.147	-3.20	.002
Intrinsic Aspirations	269.05	109.25	266.07	92.69	-.241	.809

Table 3
Path Analysis for Childhood Overindulgence Variables Leading to Extrinsic Aspirations in Adulthood



Discussion and Implications

- Parents need to be aware that overindulging encourages children to have life aspirations of wealth, fame, and image (materialistic values).
- Kasser (2002) “documents that people with 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 need to be aware that overindulging encourages children who are:
 - not interested in the betterment of society;
 - who are not willing to assist people in need;
 - who are not willing to make the world a better place;
 - who are not 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? Yes.
 - Young (ages 14-22) in our sample were significantly more overindulged compared to old (ages 23-81).
 - The amount of perceived family money growing up compared to other families makes a difference.
 - Those who grew up with more/a whole lot more money were overindulged the most (total, too much, over-nurture, and soft structure).
- Is overindulgence the process parents use to instill materialistic values in their children? Yes.
 - The path analysis suggests that overindulging children leads to “External” rather than an “Internal” life goals.
 - Too much is a major culprit. Too much causes both over nurture and soft structure types of overindulgence.
 - The combination of all three types of overindulgence in childhood leads to “External” life goals in adulthood.

References

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