

Overindulgence Research

Definition of Overindulgence

Overindulging children is giving them too much of what looks good, too soon, too long. It is giving them things or experiences that are not appropriate for their age or their interests and talents. It is the process of giving things to children to meet the adult's needs, not the child's needs.

Overindulgence is giving a disproportionate amount of family resources to one or more children in a way that appears to be meeting the children's needs but does not, so children experience scarcity in the midst of plenty. Overindulgence is doing or having so much of something that it does active harm or at least stagnates a person and deprives that person of achieving his or her full potential.

Overindulgence is a form of child neglect. It hinders children from doing their developmental tasks, and from learning necessary life lessons.

Study I Background, 1996-1997

Carried out by Bredehoft and Clarke. The definition of overindulgence and the survey questions were based on in-depth interviews with adults who identified themselves as having been overindulged as children. 730 adults responded to the written questionnaire and 124 identified themselves as overindulged.

How Were They Overindulged as Children?

Top ten areas (including ties)

- 53% Having things done for you/No consistent chores expected
- 41% Clothes
- 36% Privileges
- 35% Toys
- 32% Freedom/Allowed to dominate family
- 32% Not having to learn skills that were expected of other children
- 23% Parents over-loving/Not having to follow rules
- 22% Lessons
- 18% Entertainment
- 17% Holidays¹

¹Does not add up to 100% because subjects could select more than one choice

Results during adult life

Common complaints included pain from:

- not knowing what is **enough**
- **lacking skills** that everyone is expected to know
- **troubles** resulting from irresponsible behaviors, violations of other people's boundaries, and expectations of overblown entitlement and remaining the center of the universe

Study II College Students, 2001

Bredehoft, Clarke, and Dawson. 74 Concordia University St Paul students answered questions on 7 validated scales. The same variables as in Study I were found to be significantly related to overindulgence except

- with the addition of: in their families, togetherness is very important, and
- they didn't think they had too many lessons or holidays.

Study III Parenting Beliefs Related to Childhood Overindulgence, 2001

Bredehoft, Clarke, and Dawson. Of the 391 adults who responded to 4 validated scales on an internet survey, 348 were parents. The higher the rate of their childhood overindulgence reported, the higher their correlation with parenting items such as:

- My child usually gets his or her way. So why try?
- My life is chiefly controlled by my child.
- In order to have my plans work, I make sure they fit in with the desires of my child.
- Neither my child nor myself is responsible for his/her behavior.

Study IV Parenting Styles of the Overindulgent Parent, 2004

Walcheski, Bredehoft, and Leach. 311 adults responded to two validated scales on the internet. The more parents were overindulged as children, the more likely the parents were:

- to **not be** authoritative (less likely to use reasoning and induction),
- to **be** authoritarian (to use verbal/hostility, and corporal punishment), and
- to **be** permissive (lack of follow-through, ignore misbehavior, and lack parental self-confidence).

Study V Adult Relationships After Growing Up Overindulged, 2007

Bredehoft and Walcheski. 233 participants from thirty-one states and seven other countries were recruited for this study through www.overindulgence.info. Participant's ages ranged from 16-68 with a mean of 34.81, all currently in a relationship (dating, committed dating relationship, engaged, cohabitating, or married). This study focuses on the linkage between childhood overindulgence and adult relationships: relationship locus of control, relationship satisfaction, financial management, and conflict resolution styles. In addition to answering questions concerning these four topics, this study explores the "Relationship Overindulgence Triangle" - the tendency for overindulged children to be in an adult overindulgent relationship:

- Overindulges partner.
- Overindulged by partner.
- Overindulges children.

Overindulgence Research Projects

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Study VI Childhood Overindulgence and Life Goals, 2008

Bredehoft and Armao. 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). Participants responded to 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. The higher the rate of their childhood overindulgence reported, the more apt they were to be:

- not interested in the betterment of society;
- not willing to assist people in need;
- not willing to make the world a better place;
- not willing to help people improve their lives except in order to get something in return.

They tended toward **extrinsic aspirations**:

- *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.)

Participants who were infrequently overindulged as children tended toward **intrinsic aspirations**:

- *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.)

Study VII Reliability and Validity Findings for a Measure of Childhood Overindulgence, 2007

Bredehoft, Clarke & Dawson. Study VII 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.

To acquire the scale, contact David Bredehoft at bredehoft@csp.edu

For further information on the
Overindulgence Research Studies,
see
www.overindulgence.info

How Much Is Enough? Meeting 1 Handout #5b

Study VIII The Relationship Between Childhood Overindulgence and Adult Subjective Happiness, Materialistic Values, Gratitude, Instant Gratification, and Self-Control – A Preliminary Report, 2010

Slinger and Bredehoft. This study explored the following questions: Is childhood overindulgence (COI) related to subjective adult happiness? Further, is it related to materialistic values, gratitude, instant gratification, as well as self-control? The sample consisted of 273 adults (72.9% female, 27.1% male; ages 16-83, mean age 72.6) from thirty-two states and the countries of Canada, Mexico, Australia, and France. Participants entered the study by logging onto the study's web page at www.overindulgence.info. Participants answered 128 questions consisting of demographic data and seven psychological scales. Findings:

- There was no relationship between COI and global subjective happiness.
- Overindulged participants were more likely to hold materialistic values (success, centrality, and happiness).
- Over-Nurture and Too Much appear to be the biggest contributors to materialistic values.
- Overindulged participants were more likely to be an Instant Gratifier while those who were not overindulged were more likely to be a Patient Postponer.
- Over-Nurture and Too Much appear to be the biggest stumbling blocks in learning to delay gratification.
- Overindulged participants were more likely to be less grateful (for things, to others). Conversely, those not overindulged were more likely to be grateful (for things, to others).
- Soft Structure appears to be the biggest contributor to becoming less grateful (for things, to others).
- Overindulged participants were less likely to have self-control (for things, to others).
- Over-Nurture appears to be the biggest contributor to the lack of control, but all three types of overindulgence contribute to lack of self-control.

New See the website www.overindulgence.info for:
New **Study IX Father Personality and Parenting Styles (in process, 2009)**
Study X Transition To and Emerging Adulthood (in process, 2009)