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ORIGINAL PAPER

Parental Indulgence: Profiles and Relations to College Students' Emotional and Behavioral Problems

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Abstract
Research on indulgent parenting and its relation to college students is both limited and inconsistent. Further, all the studies have used a variable-centered approach. To fill the gap in the current literature, the aims of this study were to explore profiles of parental indulgence and their associations with college students' emotional and behavioral problems. The sample in this study consisted of college students from two universities. Participants were asked to take an online survey about their perceptions of their parents' indulgent parenting practice and their own well-being. Results from latent profile analyses suggested distinct profiles of parental indulgence for mothers and fathers. Further, these profiles demonstrated differential associations with college students' anxiety and depressive symptoms, emotional dysregulation, and alcohol use. Implications were also noted.

Keywords College students · Emotional and behavioral problems · Indulgent parenting

Parenting perspectives and practices have changed throughout history. Indulgent parenting, which is typically defined as a form of parenting wherein parents are highly responsive to their children while also placing few demands on them (Baumrind 1967), has emerged as a trend in the 21st century (Clarke et al. 2014). It is conceived as having three primary dimensions: material, relational, and behavioral indulgence (Clarke et al. 2014; Fletcher et al. 1999; Kindlon 2001). *Material indulgence* reflects parents' overgiving of material goods to their children. *Relational indulgence* reflects parents being overly protective and doing things for their children that their children should be doing for themselves. *Behavioral indulgence* reflects holding few expectations for responsible behavior.

Although theory and research increasingly embrace dimensional models of parenting (Grolnick and Pomerantz 2009), little attention has been paid to the potential different profiles of indulgent parenting across multiple dimensions. For instance, one parent may be moderately high on both material and relational indulgence, whereas another parent may provide a high level of material indulgence but a low level of relational indulgence. The potential differences of the above two parents' practices may not be demonstrated by either a composite score or a latent construct of parental indulgence in a variable-centered approach. Indeed, with a multi-faceted conceptualization of parental indulgence, different profiles of indulgent practices might be more meaningful than average levels of overall parental indulgence in that most parents, with varying parenting beliefs and resources, may exhibit different foci in their indulgence (e.g., some parents may practice material indulgence more whereas others practice relational indulgence more, Clarke et al. 2014). Such a person-centered approach could complement the current variable-centered literature by going beyond mean levels to examine potential different profiles.

The implication of different profiles of parental indulgence for child development has not been investigated. However, using the traditional variable-centered approach, some studies have examined the association between indulgent parenting and child development (Rehm et al. 2016). But the findings are not always consistent. One major reason for the mixed findings could be due to overlooked profiles of parental indulgence. Indulgent parents who are high on relational indulgence may have a different

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relationship to their children's well-being as compared to those who are high on behavioral indulgence. Consequently, it is critical to untangle the effects of various profiles of parental indulgence on children.

Further, the reason to focus on college students stems from most of the research on indulgent parenting examining the association between indulgent parenting and children and adolescents. Indulgent parenting research rarely examines these parenting relationships into young adulthood (Cui et al. 2016), although there is an ongoing discussion in higher education about the ramifications of highly involved, indulgent parents of college students (e.g., Vinson 2013). When parents satisfy their children's every request and solve problems for them, it may not be surprising that their children may experience immediate satisfaction, which may also contribute to the inconsistent findings. Indeed, the negative effect of indulgent parenting may be more salient when children become young adults, start living independently, and take responsibility for their lives and education (Eccles and Gootman 2002).

Indulgent parenting is traditionally defined as high parental responsiveness and low parental demandingness (Baumrind 1967; Maccoby and Martin 1983). As noted, parental indulgence in current social context includes three dimensions: giving children too many material goods (material indulgence), being overly protective and doing things for children that they should be doing for themselves (relational indulgence), and holding few expectations for responsible behavior (behavioral indulgence) (Clarke et al. 2014). Similarly, Kindlon (2001) also described indulgent parenting as parents being generous with material possessions; providing too much help; and allowing too much behavioral freedom. The same three dimensions have also been purported by other researchers (e.g., Fletcher et al., Parker 1983).

Although it is promising to see theory and research embracing a multi-dimensional model of parenting (Grolnick and Pomerantz 2009), it is also important to recognize variations in patterns of indulgence practice across different dimensions. Theoretically, the multi-dimensional conceptualization suggests that there are related but distinct dimensions of indulgent parenting. Parents indulge their children for many reasons—more family resources with fewer children in contemporary families; working parents feeling guilty; parents in distressed marriages wishing to gain advantage with their spouses; divorced parents wanting to compensate their children for separation and divorce; parents' own childhood history; and the influence of consumerism, media, and community (Clarke et al. 2014). Different reasons, beliefs, and experiences might lead to the emergence of different beliefs and behaviors of parental indulgence. Some parents (e.g., with greater financial resources, influenced more by media and consumerism) may demonstrate indulgent parenting mostly through providing their children with material possessions and money (Pugh 2009). Some parents (e.g., experienced hardship in their own childhood, peer pressure to be a supermom/superparent) may want to make sure that their children have a happy childhood and therefore indulge their children mainly by doing things for them that they should be doing for themselves and by being overly protective (Cui 2014). Some parents (e.g., own tough childhood experience) may hate to see their child suffer from the consequences of their behavior and therefore give their children behavioral freedom and shield them from the consequences.

Past studies have reported moderate correlations among the three dimensions of paremtal indulgence and suggested that different levels of practice exist across these dimensions (Bredehoft and Walcheski 2008; Cui et al. 2016). Indeed, different patterns of parental indulgence could be informative because they might reveal answers to the current state of parental indulgence, such as "who practices parental indulgence?" "do parents practice indulgence the same way?" and "do parents favor (practice more) a particular aspect of indulgence as compared to other aspects ?" Different profiles could emerge. Further, because mothers and fathers may practice indulgence differently (e.g., mothers were reported to be more likely to indulge their children than fathers, Chen et al. 2000), examining these profiles separately could be particularly meaningful.

In addition to its theoretical contribution, a person-centered approach in this study will add to the current literature which is based on a variable-centered approach. To explore the different profiles of indulgent parenting practice, a latent profile analysis (LPA) was used (Muthén and Muthén 1996–2012). LPA is a person-centered approach to identify whether distinct profiles (i.e., groups) of parents with certain patterns of parental indulgence exist in the sample. With a group of heterogeneous individuals (i.e., different levels of material, relational, and behavioral indulgence among parents), LPA can identify homogeneous subgroups of individuals based on similar response patterns to the three indulgence dimensions (i.e., if there are underlying groups of individuals who reported indulgent parenting with similar patterns; e.g., a group of parents who are high on material indulgence only) (Roesch et al. 2010).

Regarding the link between indulgent parenting and college students' well-being, from the perspective of a parenting framework, indulgent parenting is associated with child problems (Baumrind 1967; Maccoby and Martin 1983). Research on children and adolescents has generally demonstrated that indulgent parenting was associated with emotional problems (e.g., anxiety and depression, Bayer et al. 2006; Gar and Hudson 2008) and behavioral problems (e.g., conduct problems, Clarke et al. 2014; delinquency and alcohol/drug use, Bahr and Hoffman 2010; Driscoll et al.

2008; Kindlon 2001; Steinberg et al. 1994; and aggressive-disruptive behavior, Chen et al. 2000). However, the findings are not always consistent, with some studies suggesting fewer depressive symptoms (Driscoll et al. 2008; Sharma et al. 2011) and less delinquency (Roche et al. 2007).

A major reason for the mixed findings could be due to the inconsistent operationalization of indulgent parenting in variable centered research. With a variable-centered approach, the measurements of indulgent parenting vary across studies; some used a unidimensional scale of indulgent parenting (e.g., indulgent/permissive parenting scale from PAQ by Buri 1991 in Sharma et al. 2011), whereas others focused on a single dimension of parental indulgence (e.g., overprotective—relational indulgence, Cohen and Lwow 2004; Gar and Hudson 2008; low behavioral control—behavioral indulgence, Dishion and McMahon 1998). With a multi-dimensional construct of indulgent parenting, findings provided insight into how indulgent parenting as a multi-faceted construct was associated with child outcomes (Clarke et al. 2014). However, such an approach could also mask the differences in each dimension of indulgent parenting and their potential differential implications.

Because parents likely indulge their children in various ways, differences in profiles of indulgent parenting could affect children dissimilarly, leading to the development of different emotional and behavioral problems. Indeed, examining profiles of parental indulgence practices would complement the current variable-centered approach by examining how parents practice indulgence and how different profiles could be associated with different child outcomes. Children whose parents indulge them mainly with materials goods (material indulgence) may demonstrate self-centeredness and sense of entitlement, lack of motivation to work hard toward goals, inconsideration of other people and properties, and trouble with delaying gratification (Richins and Dawson 1992). These issues could lead to both emotional and behavioral problems in children (Clarke et al. 2014). Parents who indulge their children mostly by being overly protective and overly involved (relational indulgence) might contribute to the children's lack of motivation, sense of autonomy, and deprivation of opportunities to learn critical skills (e.g., emotional-regulation) (Rehm et al. 2016), which then may potentially develop into emotional problems. Children whose parents give too much behavioral freedom and hold fewer expectations for responsible behavior (behavioral indulgence) could reduce children's sense of responsibility and self-control, which could lead to a greater likelihood of risky behaviors such as alcohol and drug use (Brody and Ge 2001; Heaven and Ciarrochi 2009). As a result, it is expected that even though all indulgence profiles would be associated with more emotional and behavioral problems, children whose parents have different profiles of parental indulgence may demonstrate different outcomes.

Many changes that occur in young adulthood are associated with the risk of behavioral and mental health problems (Schulenberg et al. 2004; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2013). There has been minimal research concerning indulgent parenting and behavioral and emotional problems beyond the childhood and adolescent years and into young adulthood (Cui et al. 2016). From a life course perspective, individuals' later lives are influenced by their earlier experience in the family of origin (DiPrete and Eirich 2006). This suggests that parenting behaviors have long lasting effects on children beyond the childhood and adolescent years. When parents satisfy their children's every request and do things for them, these children may feel happy as long as their parents are by their side providing such help. When young adult children leave their parents' home (e.g., attending college), however, they face many challenges, such as adjusting to independent living, taking on responsibility, establishing new relationships, and handling financial needs (e.g., Wechsler and Nelson 2008). It is during this stage that their parents cannot help them all the time and the long-term ill effects of indulgent parenting could be particularly salient.

Some research on college students using a variable-centered approach suggested that parental indulgence during childhood was associated with emotional and behavioral problems, such as depression, anxiety, drinking, and drug use—with a focus on relational overinvolvement (e.g., LeMoyne and Buchanan 2011; Patock-Peckham and Morgan-Lopez 2006; Reed et al. 2016). These findings provide some insight into the effect of earlier indulgent parenting on college students' emotional and behavioral outcomes.

This study has two purposes. The first purpose of this study was to use a person-centered approach to explore profiles of parental indulgence to fill the gap in current research and to complement a variable-centered approach to the study of indulgent parenting. Though no specific hypotheses were proposed due to the exploratory nature of the research question, it was expected that there would be different profiles of parental indulgence, such as one profile that is high on all dimensions, one low on all dimensions, and one or more high on some dimensions but low on other dimensions. The second purpose was to examine the relationships between indulgent parenting profiles and college students' behavioral and emotional problems. It was expected that children of parents who are high on all dimensions of indulgence would report the highest levels of problems, children of relational-focused indulgence may experience relatively more emotional problems, and children of behavioral-focused indulgence may experience more behavioral problems.

Method

Participants

Participants were undergraduate students recruited from two large southern universities in spring 2017. Students were recruited from family studies courses that met university liberal studies requirements and served as college core courses. Most of the students attending these family studies classes were from human and social sciences where the majority of the students in these departments and colleges are female. Of the 712 students enrolled in these courses, 449 (63%) participated in the online survey. Among the 449 participants, 89% were female. Regarding race and ethnicity, 84% were white (12% black, 3% Asian, and 1% other) and 68% were Non-Hispanic. The average age was 20.71.

Procedure

Students in the targeted classes were invited to participate in an online survey for extra credits at the discretion of the instructors. Participants were asked to complete a battery of questionnaires, which included assessments of their parents' indulgent parenting behaviors during their childhood and adolescent years as well as their own emotional (e.g., self-regulation difficulties, anxiety, and depression) and behavioral (alcohol and substance use) functioning and demographic information.

Measures

Indulgent parenting

Indulgent parenting was assessed using a 30-item measure with subscales of material, relational, and behavioral indulgence (Cui et al. 2016). Participants were asked to report the indulgent behaviors of their mother (or mother figure) and father (or father figure) with whom they lived most of the time during their childhood and adolescent years. The measure included 10 items for each dimension: *material indulgence* (e.g., "my mother/father gave me all the clothes I wanted," $\alpha = .90$ for mothers, $\alpha = .92$ for fathers), *relational indulgence* (e.g., "my mother/father tried to solve problems for me before I even experienced them," $\alpha = .82$ for mothers, $\alpha = .80$ for fathers), and *behavioral indulgence* (e.g., "my mother/father let me get away without doing work she/he told me to do," $\alpha = .84$ for mothers, $\alpha = .80$ for fathers). Each item ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree* with several items being reverse coded. Scores for the items were summed within each dimension with a higher score indicating a higher level of parental indulgence.

College students' emotional and behavioral problems

Depressive symptoms were assessed by the 10-item Center for Epidemiologic Studies—Depression Scale (CES-D; Radloff 1977). Participants were asked to indicate how often they had felt a particular way during the past week. Sample items included "I felt that everything I did was an effort" and "I felt fearful." Response categories for these items ranged from 1 = *rarely or none of the times (less than one day)* to 4 = *most or all the time (5–7 days)*. Two items were reverse coded (e.g., "I was happy") and the items were summed together ($\alpha = .80$). *Anxiety symptoms* were assessed by the 10-item Beck Anxiety Inventory (Beck et al. 1988), which asked participants how much they were bothered by symptoms during the past month. Sample items included "unable to relax" and "fear of losing control." Response categories ranged from 0 = *not at all* to 3 = *severely—it bothered me a lot*. The items were summed together ($\alpha = .88$). *Emotional dysregulation* was measured by the brief version of the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS-18; Victor and Klonsky 2016). This 18-item measure tapped elements, such as awareness, clarity, goals, impulse, nonacceptance, and strategies. Sample items included "when I'm upset, I become out of control" and "when I'm upset, I have difficulty concentrating." Responses ranged from 0 = *almost never (0–10%)* to 5 = *almost always (91–100%)*. After several items were reverse coded, the items were summed together ($\alpha = .89$). *Alcohol use* was assessed by a question asking participants how often they drank alcohol during the past 30 days; response categories ranged from 1 = *never* to 6 = *every day*.

Covariates

Several covariates were included in the analyses, including college students' gender, race and ethnicity, and family socioeconomic status. *Gender* of college students was coded as 1 = *male* and 2 = *female*. *Race* was dichotomized as 1 = *White* and 0 = *other* because of the small number of participants who were in other racial categories (i.e., Black, Asian, other). *Ethnicity* was coded as 1 = *Hispanic* and 0 = *non-Hispanic*. *Income* was assessed by 1 = *below 30k*, 2 = *30k–below 50k*, 3 = *50k–below 100k*, and 4 = *100k and above*. *Family structure* was categorized as *two-parent family, single-parent family*, and *other*.

Results

Table 1 provides the percentages or means and standard deviations for the variables of interest. Mean differences in parental indulgence between mothers and fathers were tested. Paired *t*-tests between mothers and fathers suggested

Table 1 Descriptive information on study variables

Variables	*M* or % (%)	S.D.	Min.	Max.
Maternal Indulgence				
Material Indulgence	28.22	8.12	10	50
Relational Indulgence	**23.63**	6.49	10	47
Behavioral Indulgence	21.15	6.05	10	42
Paternal Indulgence				
Material Indulgence	28.13	9.26	10	50
Relational Indulgence	**22.13**	6.47	10	41
Behavioral Indulgence	21.02	6.55	10	40
College Students				
Emotional Problems				
Depressive Symptoms	19.63	5.12	10	38
Anxiety Symptoms	8.69	6.19	0	30
Emotional Dysregulation	39.34	11.87	18	84
Behavioral Problems				
Drinking	2.24	0.99	1	5
Demographics				
Gender (Female)	89.0%			
Race (White)	83.9%			
Ethnicity (Hispanic)	31.9%			
Family Income				
Below 30k	13.9%			
30k–below 50k	17.3%			
50k–below 100k	34.9%			
100k and above	33.9%			
Family Structure				
Two-Parent Family	66.2%			
Single-Parent Family	24.6%			
Other	9.2%			

Bolded numbers indicate significant differences between mothers and fathers based on paired t-tests

$N = 449$ for the total sample

that the participants reported significantly higher relational indulgence for mothers than for fathers (bolded in Table 1, $p < .01$).

Exploring Profiles of Parental Indulgence

To determine whether distinct profiles emerged based on responses to the three dimensions of parental indulgence, a series of LPAs with the three subscales of indulgence (material, relational, and behavioral indulgence) were conducted using Mplus. Following convention, we began with a one-profile solution and moved on to solutions with more profiles. Decisions were made based on the following criteria. First, Akaike Information Criterion (AIC; Akaike 1974), Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC; Schwarz 1978), and the sample size adjusted Bayesian Information Criterion (SABIC; Sclove 1987) were used to compare competing models based on the log likelihood function for individual models. The profile solution with lower values of the above three indices indicates a better fit. Next, relative entropy (a measure of classification uncertainty based on an aggregate of posterior probabilities) was used as a fit index. Entropy ranges from 0 to 1, with a higher score indicating more distinguishable profiles and a better profile solution (Ramaswamy et al. 1993). Finally, one inferential test, the Adjusted Lo-Mendell-Rubin Likelihood Ratio Test (A-LMR; Lo et al. 2001) was used. The A-LMR compares one estimated profile solution to a model with one less profile based on a log likelihood difference distribution, with a significance value of $p < .05$ indicating that the *k*-profile model fits better than the *k*-1 profile solution (Lo et al. 2001). Consideration was also given to theoretically meaningful patterns as well as sufficient profile sizes. Separate analyses were conducted for maternal and paternal indulgence. Table 2 shows the results from the profile analyses for mothers and fathers.

Table 2 Fit indices for Latent Profile Models

Model	AIC	BIC	SA-BIC	Entropy	A-LMR
Maternal Indulgence					
2 Profile	8634.80	8675.57	8643.84	.53	$p = .08$
3 Profile	8563.46	8620.54	8576.12	.79	$p = .00$
4 Profile	**8560.35**	**8633.75**	**8576.62**	**.78**	***p* = .03**
5 Profile	8556.11	8645.81	8576.00	.79	$p = .42$
Paternal Indulgence					
2 Profile	8047.93	8087.79	8056.06	.55	$p = .00$
3 Profile	7997.62	8053.43	8009.01	.72	$p = .04$
4 Profile	**7976.52**	**8048.82**	**7991.16**	**.80**	***p* = .00**
5 Profile	7971.85	8059.55	7989.75	.82	$p = .27$

AIC Akaike Information Criterion, *BIC* Bayesian Information Criterion, *SA-BIC* sample size adjusted BIC, *A-LMR* adjusted Lo-Mendell-Rubin

For maternal indulgence, the number of observations was 436. LPAs were performed from a one-profile solution to a five-profile solution. Based on the above criteria (e.g., decreasing AIC, BIC, and SABIC, increasing entropy, and significant A-LMR) as well as further investigation of the patterns and profile sizes, the four-profile solution was selected as the best fitting model (bolded in Table 2). The four-profile solution provided meaningful profiles with a sufficient sample size in each profile. Figure 1 depicts the mean estimates for each subscale for the four-profile solution. Based on this comparative information from each profile, individuals in profile one ($N = 88$, 20%) were low on all three subscales of indulgence ($M = 19.55$ for material, $M = 16.10$ for relational, $M = 17.08$ for behavioral); this profile was labeled the "*low indulgence*" group. Those in profile two ($N = 38$, 9%) were high on all three subscales

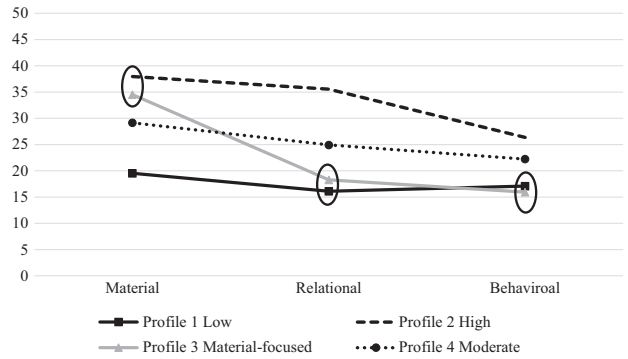

Fig. 1 Profiles of maternal indulgence. Circled pairs of means had no significant differences. $N = 436$

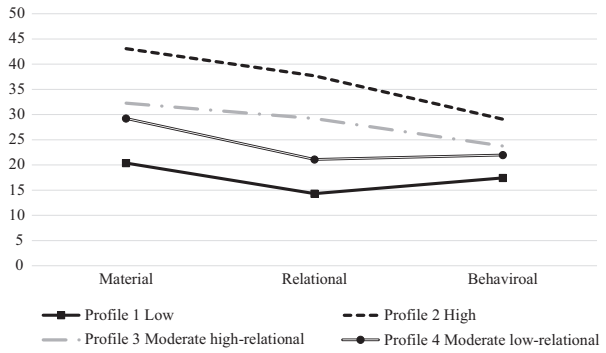

Fig. 2 Profiles of paternal indulgence. $N = 398$

($M = 37.95$ for material, $M = 35.56$ for relational, $M = 26.36$ for behavioral), thus, this profile was labeled the "*high indulgence*" group. Individuals in profile three ($N = 19$, 4%) were high on material indulgence ($M = 34.53$), but low on relational ($M = 18.29$) and behavioral ($M = 15.94$) indulgence; this profile was labeled "*material-focused indulgence*." Individuals in profile four ($N = 291$, 67%) were moderate on all three subscales ($M = 29.15$ for material, $M = 24.94$ for relational, $M = 22.23$ for behavioral); it was labeled as the "*moderate indulgence*" group. Further comparisons of mean levels of each subscale among the four profiles suggested that there were no differences between "high indulgence" and "material-focused indulgence" on material indulgence ($p = .94$); and there was no difference between "low indulgence" and "material-focused indulgence" on relational ($p = .06$) and behavioral ($p = .23$) indulgence. These non-significant pairs were circled in Fig. 1. All other mean comparisons were significant.

For paternal indulgence, similar analyses were performed, and a four-profile solution was determined to be the best fitting profile solution (bolded in Table 2). The number of observations was 398. Table 2 shows the profile models and Fig. 2 shows the mean estimates for each subscale for the four-profile solution. Individuals in profile one ($N = 98$, 25%) were low on all three subscales of indulgence ($M = 20.37$ for material, $M = 14.31$ for relational, $M = 17.42$ for behavioral); this profile was labeled as the "*low indulgence*" group. Individuals in profile two ($N = 13$, 3%) were high on all three subscales ($M = 43.06$ for material, $M = 37.67$ for relational, $M = 29.09$ for behavioral), thus, it was labeled as the "*high indulgence*" group. Comparing profiles three and four, individuals in profile three ($N = 80$, 20%, $M = 32.26$ for material, $M = 29.22$ for relational, $M = 23.77$ for behavioral) were moderately high on all three subscales with a relatively higher level of relational indulgence. This group was labeled "*moderate with high-relational indulgence*." On the other hand, those in profile four ($N = 207$, 52%, $M = 29.23$ for material, $M = 21.11$ for relational, $M = 21.98$ for behavioral) were moderately low on all subscales, but with a relatively lower level of relational indulgence. This group was labeled "*moderate with low-relational indulgence*." Further comparisons of mean levels of each subscale among the four profiles suggested that all mean comparisons were significant. In addition, maternal and paternal indulgence were combined to examine the profiles of overall parental indulgence. The results from LPAs revealed a four-profile solution, with the patterns and percentages closely resembled those of maternal indulgence.

Profiles of Parental Indulgence and College Students' Emotional and Behavioral Problems

To test the relationships between indulgence profiles and college student outcomes, latent class probabilities from the LPA were used to assign profile membership. Individuals were assigned to the profile that reflected their highest probability of membership (Clark and Muthén 2009). Once profile membership was assigned, a variable of class membership was created, which was then used as an observed variable in regression analyses. In both maternal and paternal indulgence models, the high indulgence group was used as the reference group. Covariates, including gender, race, ethnicity, family income, and family structure were added in the regression. Results demonstrating the relationships between the profiles of maternal indulgence and college student outcomes are presented in Table 3.

For maternal indulgence profiles, low indulgence ($b = -.19$, $p < .01$) and moderate indulgence ($b = -.16$, $p < .05$) groups demonstrated significantly lower levels of depressive symptoms as compared to high indulgence (reference) group. Material-focused indulgence showed similar levels of depressive symptoms (i.e., no group difference) as compared to the high indulgence group. Similar patterns existed for anxiety symptoms and alcohol use. For emotional dysregulation, all groups (i.e., low, high, and material-focused indulgence) demonstrated significantly

Table 3 Maternal Indulgence Profiles and College Students' Emotional and Behavioral Problems

Variables	Depression	Anxiety	Emotional Dysregulation	Alcohol
Indulgence Profiles				
Low Indulgence	−.19**	−.19**	−.27**	−.27**
Moderate Indulgence	−.16*	−.13*	−.27**	−.15*
Material-focused Indulgence	−.05	−.07	−.18**	−.01
Covariates				
Gender	.05	.06	.08	−.03
Race (White)	−.03	−.04	−.06	.20**
Ethnicity (Hispanic)	−.04	.05	−.09*	−.04
Income	−.12*	−.04	−.07	.04
Two-Parent Family	−.07	−.12	−.01	.04
Single-Parent Family	−.03	−.04	−.06	.09
R-square	.042	.036	.058	.084

For indulgence, the reference group is the "high indulgence" group. For family structure, "other" is the reference group

$N = 402$. Gender: 1 = *male*, 2 = *female*

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$

Table 4 Paternal indulgence profiles and college students' emotional and behavioral problems

Variables	Depression	Anxiety	Emotional Dysregulation	Alcohol
Indulgence Profiles				
Low Indulgence	−.20*	−.44**	−.24*	.02
Moderate w/ Low-Relational	−.20	−.51**	−.25*	−.02
Moderate w/ High-Relational	−.03	−.33**	−.02	−.01
Covariates				
Gender	.06	.09*	.09	−.01
Race (white)	−.01	.01	−.03	.21**
Ethnicity (Hispanic)	−.03	.04	−.06	−.03
Income	−.10*	−.06	−.03	.04
Two-Parent Family	−.23**	−.20*	−.17	−.01
Single-Parent Family	−.17	−.09	−.16	.07
R-square	.061	.075	.063	.053

For indulgence, the reference group is "high indulgence" group. For family structure, "other" is the reference group

$N = 370$. Gender: 1 = *male*, 2 = *female*

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$

lower levels of difficulties in emotional regulation as compared to the high indulgence group.

Results for the paternal indulgence profiles are shown in Table 4. All groups (i.e., low, moderate with high-relational, and moderate with low-relational indulgence) demonstrated significantly lower levels of anxiety symptoms as compared to the high indulgence (reference) group (e.g., $b = -.44$, $p < .01$ for low indulgence group). For emotional dysregulation, both the low indulgence and moderate with low-relational indulgence groups demonstrated significantly lower levels of difficulties in emotional regulation as compared to the high indulgence group. The moderate with high-relational group, however, showed similar levels of emotional dysregulation (i.e., no group difference) compared to the high indulgence group. Low indulgence group demonstrated significantly lower depressive symptoms than high indulgence group. There were no group differences in alcohol use.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore profiles of parental indulgence and examine the relationships of these profiles

to college students' emotional and behavioral problems. With many of the changes that occur in college years (e.g., starting independent living, forming new relationships), college students are at risk for emotional and behavioral problems (Schulenberg et al. 2004). For example, according to the National Health Interview Survey, 3.6 to 5.2% of young adults from 1998 to 2011 reported two or more depressive symptoms during the past 30 days (Child Trends 2012). In a survey of college students at 140 campuses from 1993 to 2001 (College Alcohol Study), approximately two in five students reported binge drinking (Wechsler and Nelson 2008). Therefore, this study attempted to identify factors in the family of origin that may prevent or exacerbate such problems. Indulgent parenting, as a unique parenting practice, could be at the heart of these issues (Rehm et al. 2016).

Profiles of Indulgent Parenting

Despite the emergence of a dimensional model of indulgent parenting (Clarke et al. 2014), research to date has utilized a variable-centered approach. To address this gap in research, the present study used a person-centered approach to examine profiles of parental indulgence. Because individual parents, with varying beliefs and experiences, could practice indulgence differently, profiles of indulgence practice could be particularly meaningful to examine patterns of parental indulgence. Use of a person-centered approach could serve to complement mean level analyses derived from a variable-centered approach, provide a descriptive picture of the ways parents indulge their children, and understand how indulgent patterns influence important college-student outcomes.

Results from the LPAs suggested that, indeed, there were different profiles of parental indulgence. For mothers, four profiles emerged. About one fifth of mothers were relatively low on all subscales of indulgence. On the other hand, about 10 percent of mothers practiced relatively high indulgence in all aspects (i.e., material, relational, and behavioral). Tests of mean differences suggested that this all-high group demonstrated a particularly high level of relational indulgence. Not surprisingly, the majority of mothers were somewhere in between, with moderate levels of indulgence. Interestingly, a smaller group of mothers (less than 5%), represented a unique type of indulgence practice—material-focused indulgence. Mothers in this group demonstrated the same levels of material indulgence as the all-high group, but the same levels of relational and behavioral indulgence as the all-low group. This unique pattern suggested that these mothers indulge their children only by providing material goods (Clarke et al. 2014). Findings from the profile analysis demonstrated that there were different patterns of indulgence.

For fathers, even though there were also four profiles found, the structure of the profiles differed to some degree from those of mothers. About one quarter of fathers showed relatively low indulgence in all three aspects, which was a higher proportion than the mother's low indulgence profile. Compared with mothers, a much smaller percent (3%) demonstrated high indulgence. Such a difference is consistent with previous variable-centered research suggesting that mothers are more likely to indulge their children than fathers (e.g., Cui et al. 2016). Between low and high indulgence, there were two meaningfully different groups: a moderately high indulgence group and a moderately low indulgence group, with a salient difference in relational indulgence. Though, on average, fathers demonstrated lower levels of perceived relational indulgence as compared to mothers, the variation in relational indulgence within fathers could be especially meaningful with regard to child outcomes. Finally, the different findings for maternal and paternal indulgence profiles suggested that aside from some similarities (e.g., high or low on all three indulgence dimensions for some mothers and fathers), there were some different focuses. For example, material focused indulgence emerged as a unique pattern among mothers, whereas there were more variations in relational indulgence among fathers.

Profiles of Indulgent Parenting and College Students' Well-being

Regarding the effects of indulgence profiles on college students, results for maternal indulgence suggested that, as compared to high indulgence, (1) low and moderate indulgence groups reported significantly lower levels of depressive and anxiety symptoms and alcohol use, and (2) low, moderate, and material-focused indulgence groups demonstrated significantly lower emotional dysregulation. These findings have several important implications. First, maternal low indulgence and moderate indulgence did not differ in their association with college-student outcomes, suggesting that maternal indulgence to a moderate degree does not seem to have more negative effects as compared to low indulgence. Second, maternal material-focused indulgence had similar effects on depressive and anxiety symptoms and alcohol use as high indulgence, highlighting the negative effect of material indulgence on college-student outcomes. Maternal indulgence of materials goods may lead to children's lack of self-control, lack of perseverance to work toward goals, and feeling frustrated and helpless when things do not go their way, which could lead to both emotional and behavioral problems (Clarke et al. 2014; Richins and Dawson 1992). Finally, all groups reported significantly lower levels of emotional dysregulation than the high maternal indulgence group. Given that the high

indulgence group is notably high on relational indulgence, this suggested that maternal relational indulgence is particularly detrimental for emotional regulation. Indeed, when mothers indulge their children by doing everything for them, children may not have the opportunity to develop self-regulatory skills (Clarke et al. 2014). Especially during college years, when individuals start to assume an independent life and face unique challenges (Eccles and Gootman 2002), deficiencies in self-regulatory skills could become particularly evident (Arnett and Taber 1994).

For paternal indulgence, in general, the results were not as salient as those of mothers. Compared to the high indulgence profile, (1) paternal low, moderate low-relational, and moderate with high-relational indulgence groups all showed lower levels of anxiety symptoms, and (2) paternal low and moderate with low-relational indulgence groups demonstrated lower levels of emotional dysregulation. First, these results suggested that high levels of indulgence by fathers was associated with anxiety symptoms for college-age children. Second, paternal moderate with high-relational indulgence was markedly different from moderate with low-relational indulgence, but similar to all-high indulgence on emotional dysregulation, highlighting the negative effect of fathers' relational indulgence on college students' emotional regulatory abilities. From a traditional gender role perspective (Bem 1981), mothers are expected to be more emotionally nurturing whereas fathers are regarded as the authority figure. Fathers who were relationally indulgent may have a more negative effect because they deviated from their traditional authority role expectation (Chen et al. 2000).

Limitations

The findings of the current study contribute to extant research by using a person-centered approach to explore the profiles of parental indulgence and their association with college students' emotional and behavioral problems. However, they should be viewed in the light of relevant limitations. First, the sample was comprised of undergraduate students from two southern universities, the majority of whom were white female students. Therefore, the findings have limited generalizability in both the college-student population and the general young-adult population. Future studies are needed to use a more diverse population to test the generalizability of the findings. Second, all data came from college students' reports. Getting perspectives from parents will be important in future studies (Cui et al. 2005). Third, the measurement of behavioral problems only included a single item assessing alcohol use. Future studies should examine a broader range of behavioral problems with more comprehensive measurement. Fourth, the study was cross-sectional in design with retrospective data on indulgent parenting, which could increase recall bias. Further, the analyses were correlational. Longitudinal and prospective studies are needed to further delineate the developmental processes.

Notwithstanding the above observations, this study suggests that profiles of indulgent parenting have important influences on college students' emotional and behavioral problems. Given the relative lack of research in this area, especially of studies using a person-centered approach, the findings from this study make a unique contribution to the field by identifying distinct profiles of indulgence practices and their association with college students' well-being.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval All procedures performed in this study involving human subjects were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Florida State University.

Informed Consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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