OVERPROTECTIVE PARENTING AND IDENTITY CONFUSION IN GEORGIAN EMERGING ADULTS: THE INTERVENING ROLE OF GOAL DISENGAGEMENT

Skhirtladze N. 1, Van Petegem S. 2

1 Ilia State University, Georgia
2 University of Lausanne, Switzerland

Overprotective parenting refers to parents’ overinvolvement and the provision of developmentally inappropriate protection. Overprotective parenting is hypothesized to be associated with dysfunctional developmental processes and outcomes. In the present study, we examined overprotective parenting as a potential predictor of identity synthesis and identity confusion, as the development of a coherent identity is conceived as one of the primary goals of adolescence and emerging adulthood. Thereby, we also tested whether goal engagement and disengagement functions as a mediator on the pathway between overprotective parenting and identity, as these developmentally regulatory strategies are assumed to be important processes that drive identity formation.

Participants were 318 Georgian emerging adults (Mage=23.41, 58% female). Perceived overprotective parenting was measured using the Georgian translation of four subscales of the Multidimensional Overprotective Parenting Scale (Kins & Soenens 2013). Identity synthesis and confusion were assessed using the Georgian translation of the Identity subscale from the Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory (EPSI; Rosenthal et al. 1981). Goal engagement and disengagement were assessed using the corresponding subscales from Optimization in Primary and Secondary Control Scale (OPS; Heckhausen, Schulz, & Wrosch, 1998).

Path analysis indicated that overprotective parenting directly predicted less identity synthesis and more identity confusion. Further, overprotection was unrelated to goal engagement, but predicted more goal disengagement. Goal engagement, in turn, positively predicted identity synthesis and negatively predicted identity confusion, whereas goal disengagement positively predicted identity confusion, indicating that goal disengagement partially mediated the relation between overprotective parenting and identity confusion.

These results suggest that overprotective parenting creates a context that is negatively associated with the successful resolution of the identity formation task. Goal disengagement, which is a relatively passive developmental strategy, seems to play an intervening role in this association.