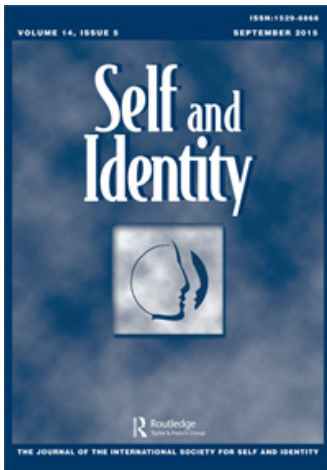


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## Self and Identity

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# Insofar as You Can Be Part of Me: The Influence of Intrusive Parenting on Young Adult Children's Couple Identity

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What is the role of family of origin in the formation of couple identity (i.e., considering couplehood as central to one's sense of self) among young adults? Two studies tested and supported the hypothesis that intrusive parenting hinders the couple identity of young adults. In Study 1, intrusive parenting was associated with weaker couple identity in a sample of 702 dating partners (351 couples). In Study 2, intrusive parenting was linked to a confused individual self-concept (i.e., lower self-concept clarity), which in turn was associated with weaker couple identity in a sample of 200 dating partners. Extra-relational factors, such as intrusive parenting, can and do predict the quality of couple identity.

**Keywords:** Couple Identity; Self-Concept Clarity; Family Relations; Intrusive Parenting.

During young adulthood, romantic relationships become more interdependent and stable (Furman, 2002). Couplehood entails each partner building and maintaining a new identity within the relationship. Each partner's self-concept extends beyond individual boundaries, and both the partner and the relationship become part of one's self-concept (Agnew, Van Lange, Rusbult, & Langston, 1998). The incorporation of the relationship into one's self-concept is referred to as *couple identity* (Badr, Acitelli, & Carmack Taylor, 2007; Surra & Bartell, 2001). Partners value their couple identity and defend it vigorously when it is under threat (Martz et al., 1998; Rusbult, Van Lange, Wildschut, Yovetich, & Verette, 2000). A strong couple identity (i.e., considering couplehood as central to one's sense of self) is pivotal for partner well-being, especially when the couple is faced with stressful life events (Badr et al., 2007).

Why, then, do some relationship partners fail to form a strong couple identity? Answers to this question may clarify key antecedents of couple identity development, shed light on optimal processes for the formation of such identity, and promote greater partner or

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relational well-being. Prior research has provided a partial answer to this question: commitment. As one becomes more committed to one's partner, cognitive representations of the self shift from "individual" to "couple member;" that is, the more committed individuals are to the relationship, the stronger their couple identity will be (Rusbult et al., 2000). Commitment is a proximal antecedent of couple identity formation: it acts as a strong motivator for partners toward developing this specific relational self. Here, we focus on a distal antecedent, family of origin. We posit that couple processes are rooted in partners' family relations (Scabini & Manzi, 2011) and that young adults' relationships with their parents influence their ability to develop a couple identity. In particular, we hypothesize that an intrusive relationship with parents interferes with the strength of young adults' couple identity.

### **Intrusive Parenting and Children's Personal Identity**

Parent-child relationship theories converge on the idea that parents influence the process of self-concept (or identity) formation in their children (Beyers & Goossens, 2008). Intrusive parenting is defined as "parental behaviors that are intrusive and manipulative of children's thoughts, feelings, and attachments to parents" (Barber & Harmon, 2002, p. 15). Such behaviors include discomfort when the child requires his/her privacy, engaging in mindreading (i.e., presuming to know better the child's needs, thoughts, and feelings than the child does), overreacting to life events bestowed upon the child, and interfering excessively with problems that the child is facing (Green & Werner, 1996).

Intrusive parenting hinders the development of a clear self-concept (Regalia, Manzi, & Scabini, 2013). Specifically, intrusive parents obstruct the child's efforts to construct autonomously her or his self-concept, because they do not fully recognize the child's self as distinct from their own wishes, expectations, and desires. Given that self-concept formation is largely a socio-relational process (Harter, 2012), individuals who grow up in such a family environment will form a confused self-concept. Studies have shown that intrusive parenting influences negatively the development of self-esteem and self-reliance (Barber & Harmon, 2002; Barber, Stoltz, & Olsen, 2005), while impeding the satisfaction of identity needs (Manzi, Vignoles, Regalia, & Scabini, 2006). In addition, intrusive parenting interferes with identity formation processes in adolescence and young adulthood (i.e., separation-individuation, identity exploration, commitment; Kins, Soenens, & Beyers, 2011; Luyckx, Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Goossens, & Berzonsky, 2007). Although it is well-established that intrusive parenting has harmful consequences for the offspring's self-concept, it remains to be seen whether it has a long-term and negative impact on the grown-up child's (i.e., young adult's) couple identity.

### **Intrusive Parenting and Children's Couple Identity**

Family of origin influences the quality of young adults' romantic relationships (Sabatelli & Bartle-Haring, 2003). It may also influence their couple identity. Wallerstein (1994) stated that, for someone to create a new identity as a married person, they must psychologically separate from their family of origin. Wamboldt and Reiss (1989) emphasized that, in order to achieve a new relationship identity, young persons should be able to define the ways in which their cultural or relational values differ from those of their family of origin. Finally, Scabini and Manzi (2011) argued that non-intrusive parenting is a prerequisite for the formation of a strong couple identity. According to these authors, in order to perceive oneself as partner in a couple and to perceive the couple as part of

oneself, a person needs to renegotiate autonomously their relationship with their family of origin; this is possible when parents refrain from intrusiveness.

In Study 1, we tested the hypothesis that intrusive parenting impacts negatively on couple identity. We controlled for commitment, given that this variable has been conceptualized as a key proximal predictor of couple identity formation (Rusbult et al., 2000), has been found to correlate with measures of couple identity (Agnew et al., 1998; Linardatos & Lydon, 2011), and is often controlled for when studying other predictors of couple identity (e.g., forgiveness; Karremans & Van Lange, 2008). Moreover, we controlled for possible crossover effects between partners' level of intrusive parenting and individual couple identity (Seider, Hirschberger, Nelson, & Levenson, 2009), using the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kenny & Cook, 1999). An individual outcome may result not only from where one falls on the predictor variable (i.e., actor effect), but also from where one's partner falls on the same predictor (i.e., partner effect). To control for possible partner effects, then, we treated "couple" as the unit of analysis.

In Study 2, we probed the process through which intrusive parenting may encumber couple identity. To do so, we took into account the negative influence that intrusive parenting bears on the child's self-concept (Mashek & Sherman, 2004). Children of intrusive parents are relatively unlikely to explore, understand, and clarify their self-concept (Beyers & Goossens, 2008; Regalia et al., 2013). Lower self-concept clarity is linked to weaker couple identity: a person with a confused self-concept is less able judiciously to seek out aspects of the couple relationship for inclusion in his/her own sense of self (Lewandowski, Nardone, & Raines, 2010). Hence, we proposed and tested a mediational model, according to which intrusive parenting promotes a confused sense of self, which in turn impairs the formation of couple identity. Here, we controlled for participants' attachment style. Attachment style is one of the most potent predictors of individuals' orientation in the couple relationship (Simpson, 1990): It predicts positively relational interdependence and commitment in romantic couples (Etcheverry, Le, Wu, & Wei, 2013), and is associated negatively with intrusive parenting (Barber, 1996) and self-concept clarity (Wu, 2009).

## Assessing Couple Identity

An important issue concerns the assessment of couple identity. According to diverse perspectives in the identity literature (Breakwell, 1986; Gurin & Markus, 1988; Leach et al., 2008; Rosenberg & Gara, 1985; for a review, see Vignoles, 2014), different elements of identity vary in their value (i.e., degree of importance or centrality) within the self-concept. Consequently, the importance of an identity element (or the relative importance of a set of identity elements) can be empirically assessed using various indicators of its perceived value (Martz et al., 1998; Sedikides, Gaertner, Luke, O'Mara, & Gebauer, 2013; Vignoles, Regalia, Manzi, Golledge, & Scabini, 2006). For example, researchers can probe directly the extent to which an identity element is perceived as central to participants' self-concepts (Vignoles et al., 2006), gauge its perceived superiority (Martz et al., 1998), or assess its monetary value (Gaertner et al., 2012). Here, we implemented the latter two approaches. In Study 1, we assessed better-than-average beliefs (Brown, 2012; Sedikides & Alicke, 2012) or perceived superiority (Rusbult et al., 2000); in Study 2, we measured the monetary value ascribed to couple identity.

## Study 1

In Study 1, we tested the hypothesis that intrusive parenting is a negative predictor of couple identity, above and beyond relationship commitment. By treating couples as the

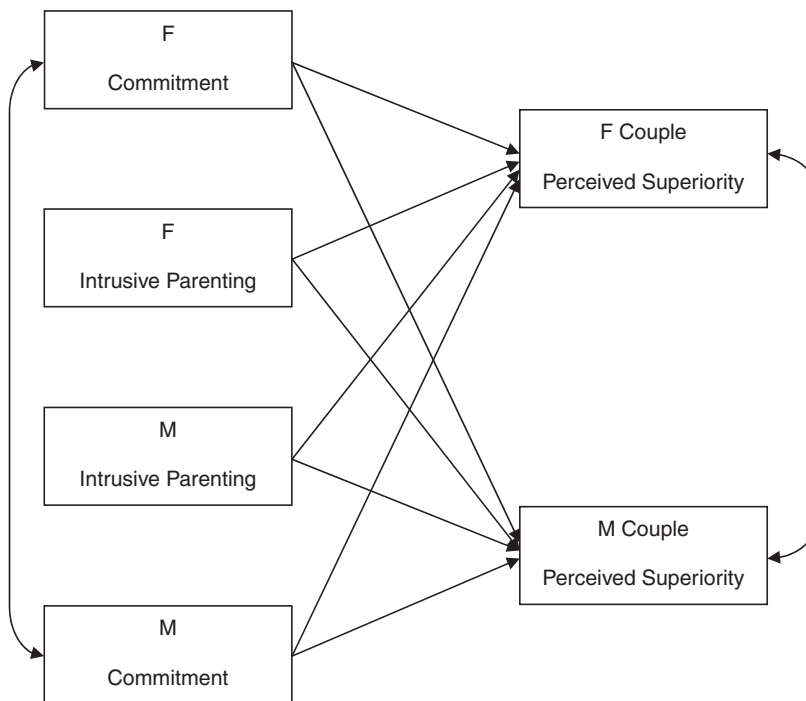
data-analytic unit, we were able to examine structural paths between the two partners in addition to paths between variables at the individual level. Put otherwise, we assessed the actor effect (i.e., the effect of one's intrusive parenting on one's couple identity) controlling for the interdependence between partner's couple identities and for possible partner effects (i.e., the effect of the partner's intrusive parenting on one's couple identity) (Figure 1). In so doing, we reflected the interpersonal nature of couple identity.

We used the concept of couple perceived superiority to measure couple identity strength, given that couple perceived superiority is an indicator of the relationship's centrality in one's self-concept (Martz et al., 1998). Perceived superiority entails considering one's relationship as better, more controllable, and more likely to have a positive future than the relationship of the average other person (Rusbult et al., 2000). Perceived superiority reflects the motivation to enhance and protect the couple identity (Buunk, 2001).

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

Participants were 702 Italian dating partners in transition to marriage (351 couples). We determined the data collection stopping rule in accordance with Kline (2005, pp. 111–178) general rule for structural equation models sample size appropriateness. The mean relationship duration was 6.02 years ( $SD = 4.05$ ). Most participants were in their late 20s or early 30s (Females:  $M = 29.53$ ,  $SD = 4.26$ ; Males:  $M = 31.86$ ,  $SD = 4.71$ ). We contacted them at pre-nuptial courses and handed them a pack of questionnaires, accompanied by both verbal and written instructions, to fill in at home. We instructed them to complete the questionnaires privately and independently from their partner.



**FIGURE 1** Hypothesized model of relations among females' and males' variables in Study 1. F = Females; M = Males.

## Measures

### **Intrusive Parenting**

We assessed intrusive parenting with the Intrusive Parenting Scale (Manzi & Scabini, 2014), which is a revised version of the Intrusive Parenting subscale of the California Inventory for Family Assessment (Werner & Green, 1989). The Intrusive Parenting Scale consists of six items (1 = *totally false*, 4 = *totally true*) referring to each parent. Sample items are: “My mother/my father doesn’t allow me to be a different person from what she/he thinks,” “My mother/my father isn’t really able to see some important aspects of me.” Given that maternal and paternal scores were correlated ( $r[342] = .64, p < .001$ , for women;  $r[342] = .60, p < .001$ , for men), we averaged them for each participant to derive a global indicator of intrusive parenting (Cronbach’s alphas = .83 for women, .77 for men).

### **Commitment**

We measured commitment with the Commitment Level subscale of the Investment Model Scale (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). This subscale comprises seven items (1 = *not at all*, 9 = *completely*). Sample items are: “I am completely committed to maintaining our relationship,” “I want our relationship to last for a very long time.” The scale had acceptable reliability (Cronbach’s alphas = .65 for women, .68 for men).

### **Couple Identity**

We measured couple identity with a couple superiority scale. This scale comprises two parallel sets of 12 items (1 = *completely disagree*, 5 = *completely agree*) adapted from Martz et al. (1998). In the first set, participants were instructed to rate their own couple relationship. Sample items are: “Through our joint efforts my partner and I are able to solve every problem,” “Our relationship just keeps getting better every day.” In the second set, participants were instructed to rate the relationship of the average couple that, similarly to them, was in transition to marriage. Sample items are: “Through their joint efforts they are able to solve every problem,” “Their relationship just keeps getting better every day.” We defined couple superiority in terms of the discrepancy (in favor of own couple) between own couple ratings and average couple ratings. As such, we derived an estimate of couple identity by calculating discrepancy scores for each item (own couple relationship minus average couple relationship), as in Martz et al. Higher discrepancies reflected stronger couple identity. Across the 12 item-pairs, the discrepancy scores showed good scale reliability (Cronbach’s alphas for women = .94 for women, .93 for men).

## Results

We tested our hypotheses via path analysis modeling (EQS Version 6; Bentler, 1995) following the APIM. We report descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations in Table 1.

We detected no skewness or kurtosis in the data. Mardia (1970) coefficients suggested significant deviations from multivariate normality. To reduce the impact of non-normality, we relied on Satorra and Bentler (2001) scaled estimates in rescaling the chi-square statistics into the Satorra–Bentler scaled chi-square (S–B  $\chi^2$ ) statistic. We also adjusted for non-normality fit indices such as the comparative fit index (CFI; Bentler, 1990) and the root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA; Bentler, 1995) by incorporating the S–B  $\chi^2$  into their calculations. We refer to these as robust estimates (i.e., R-CFI, R-RMSEA).

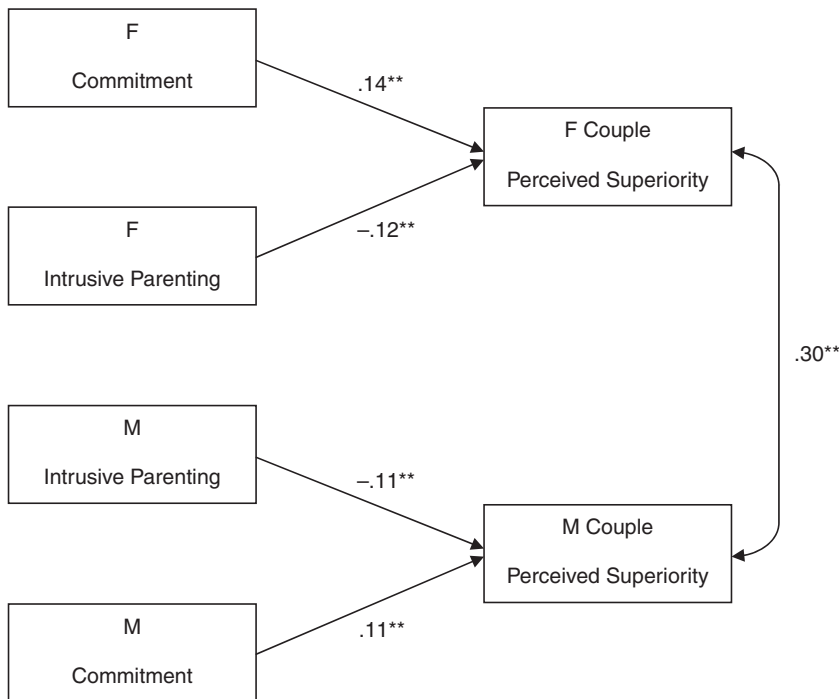
The model in which own and partner’s intrusive parenting and commitment predicted males’ couple identity, and own and partner’s intrusive parenting and commitment



**TABLE 1** Means, Standard Deviations (SD) and Pearson's Correlations (\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ) among Study 1 variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Intrusive parenting males	1					
2. Intrusive parenting females	.12*	1				
3. Commitment males	-.12*	-.04	1			
4. Commitment females	-.13*	-.04	.10*	1		
5. Couple perceived superiority males	-.12*	-.05	.10*	.02	1	
6. Couple perceived superiority females	-.13*	-.14**	.15**	.12*	.33**	1
<i>M</i>	1.80	1.90	7.87	7.87	.99	.82
<i>SD</i>	.52	.57	.39	.38	.70	.72

predicted females' couple identity (Figure 1), provided a good fit to the data:  $SB \div ^2(5, N = 342) = 7.404, p = .19, R\text{-CFI} = .94, R\text{-RMSEA} = .04$  (90% confidence interval: .00–.09). We present the significant parameter estimates of this final model in Figure 2. Couple identity was predicted by one's own relationship commitment ( $\beta = .14, 95\%$  confidence interval: .07, .51 for females;  $\beta = .11$  for males, 95% confidence interval: .01, .40) and one's own intrusive parenting ( $\beta = -.12, 95\%$  confidence interval:  $-.30, -.02$  for females;  $\beta = -.11, 95\%$  confidence interval:  $-.29, -.01$  for males). Also, the association between partners' couple identity was significant, evidencing its reciprocal and interdependent nature. All partner effects were nonsignificant, with the exception of the path between males' intrusive parenting and females' couple identity, which was marginal



**FIGURE 2** Path analysis of obtained relations among females' and males' variables in Study 1. Only significant paths are shown. F = Females; M = Males. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

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( $\beta = -.10$ , 95% confidence interval:  $-.28, .00$ ).

In order to test whether the effect of intrusive parenting on couple identity persists (i.e., is significant), regardless of whether we control for commitment, we tested a model in which commitment was absent. This model yielded acceptable goodness of fit indices, and the effect of one's intrusive parenting on one's couple identity persisted ( $\beta = -.11$ , for females confidence interval:  $-.28, -.01$ ;  $\beta = -.11$ , for males confidence interval:  $-.29, -.01$ ).

### *Discussion*

The results were consistent with the hypothesis that intrusive parenting is a negative predictor of couple identity. As the APIM indicated, this negative effect was exclusively an actor effect (i.e., the effect of one's own level of intrusive parenting on one's couple identity), not a partner effect. Moreover the association between intrusive parenting and couple identity was significant above and beyond the effect of the partners' commitment, indicating that couple identity is influenced by factors outside the couple relationship. In Study 1, we assessed couple identity via perceived couple superiority (Martz et al., 1998). We aimed to build on and extend these findings in our next study.

## **Study 2**

Our first objective in Study 2 was to test the replicability of the Study 1 findings with a different assessment of couple identity (Cumming, 2014). In particular, we assessed couple identity via monetary value. We capitalized on research showing that the value or strength of different selves (i.e., individual, relational, collective; Sedikides & Brewer, 2001) can be measured by asking participants to ascribe a monetary sum to each of them (Gaertner et al., 2012). Our second and more important objective in Study 2 was to focus on a mechanism through which intrusive parenting may hinder the development of a strong couple identity. We examined whether the association between intrusive parenting and couple identity strength is mediated by individual differences in self-concept clarity. Intrusive parenting has a negative influence on the individual self-concept (Barber & Harmon, 2002), and in particular on offspring's self-exploration and self-discovery in adolescence (Constanzo & Woody, 1985). Lower self-concept clarity is related to weaker couple identity (Lewandowski et al., 2010). We hypothesized that intrusive parenting is associated with a confused self-concept, which in turn is linked to a weak couple identity. We controlled for individual attachment style. Given that we obtained no significant partner effects in Study 1, we treated individuals rather than couples as the unit of analysis in Study 2.

### *Method*

#### ***Participants and Procedure***

We recruited in Italy 200 young adults (87.70% females, 12.30% males;  $M_{\text{age}} = 21.57$  years;  $S_{\text{age}} = 3.45$ ), currently in a relationship. The mean couple relationship duration was 33.40 months ( $SD = 25.40$ ). Of these participants, 7.90% were cohabiting with their partner, 78.30% were still living with the family of origin, and 13.80% were living alone or with flatmates. Participants completed the questionnaire during a class session.

#### ***Measures***

***Intrusive parenting.*** We measured intrusive parenting with the same Intrusive Parenting Scale as in Study 1. We averaged the maternal and paternal score for each participant ( $r$

[20] = .32,  $p < .01$ ) to arrive at a global indicator of intrusive parenting (Cronbach's alpha = .77).

*Self-concept clarity.* We measured self-concept clarity with the Self-Concept Clarity Scale (Campbell et al., 1996), which consists of 12 items (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Sample items are: "In general, I have a clear sense of who I am and what I am," "My beliefs about myself often conflict with one another" (reverse coded). The scale had good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .87).

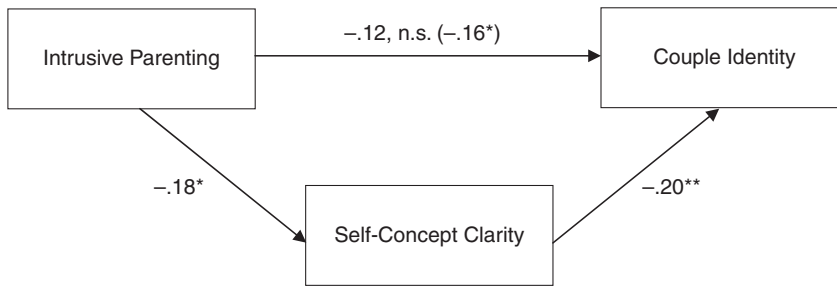
*Attachment style.* We measured adult attachment with the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (ECR, Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). The ECR is a 36-item self-report measure in which participants rate on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*) the extent to which each statement is descriptive of their typical feelings in romantic relationships. Eighteen items tap Attachment Anxiety (e.g., "I worry about being abandoned") and 18 items tap attachment avoidance (e.g., "I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down"). Higher scores on the Anxiety and Avoidance subscales indicate higher levels of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance, whereas low scores on both dimensions indicate attachment security. Both the Anxiety and Avoidance subscales showed good internal consistency (Cronbach's alphas = .86 for Anxiety, and .87 for Avoidance).

*Couple identity.* Participants were instructed that "Our identity (who we are) consists of different aspects ... [such as] individual characteristics or interpersonal relationships ... Think about ... your identity ... as a romantic relationship partner" (adapted from Gaertner et al., 2012). Next, they completed the dependent measure, comprising a money allocation task that was validated by Gaertner et al. (2012). First, participants imagined that they had €100,000 available to price their couple identity, and then they declared the amount their couple identity was worth. Second, participants imagined that they could receive €100,000 for selling their couple identity, and then declared the monetary sum that they would need to receive in order to sell it. Given that responses to the two items were correlated ( $r[203] = .45, p < .001$ ), we derived a couple identity composite and entered it in our analyses.

## Results

To test our hypothesis that self-concept clarity mediates the relation between intrusive parenting and couple identity, we conducted simple mediational analysis (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). We display the results in Figure 3. Intrusive parenting negatively predicted couple identity ( $\beta = -.16, p < .05$ ; 95% confidence interval:  $-1.25, -.09$ ). Also, intrusive parenting negatively predicted self-concept clarity; that is, intrusive parenting contributed to self-concept confusion ( $\beta = -.18, p < .05$ ; 95% confidence interval:  $-.48, -.06$ ). In turn, self-concept confusion negatively predicted couple identity, controlling for intrusive parenting ( $\beta = -.20, p < .01$ ; 95% confidence interval:  $-.92, -.17$ ). The effect of intrusive parenting on couple identity (controlling for self-concept clarity) was not significant ( $\beta = -.12, p = .06$ ; 95% confidence interval:  $-1.10, .06$ ).

To test whether the indirect effect of intrusive parenting on couple identity through self-concept clarity was statistically significant, we implemented a bootstrap approach (with 1000 bootstrap resamples). This indirect relation was estimated to lie between  $-.4015$  and  $-.0261$ , with a 95% confidence interval. Given that zero is not in the 95% CI, we can conclude that the indirect relation is statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ). Together, these findings indicate that self-concept clarity mediated the relation between intrusive parenting and couple identity strength.



**FIGURE 3** Mediation Model in Study 2. Reported values are standardized betas. The beta in parentheses represents the direct effect of intrusive parenting on couple identity without controlling for the indirect effect of intrusive parenting through self-concept clarity.  $p^* < .05$ ,  $**p < .01$ .

*Note.* Not shown is individual attachment style, which was positioned as an exogenous variable, correlated with intrusive parenting, and influencing self-concept clarity and couple identity.

To control for individual attachment style, we used the Preacher and Hayes (2008) method. This estimates the total, direct, and single-step indirect effects (specific and total) of a causal variable on an outcome variable through a proposed mediator variable, while controlling for one or more covariates. We entered couple identity as the outcome variable, intrusive parenting as independent variable, self-clarity as mediator, and avoidant attachment style and anxious attachment style as covariates. The indirect relation between intrusive parenting and couple identity through self-clarity, controlling for the two attachment styles, was estimated to lie between  $-.1949$  and  $-.0038$ , with a 95% confidence interval. These results indicated that the negative influence of intrusive parenting on couple identity is mediated by (lack of) self-concept clarity, even when attachment style is taken into consideration.

### Discussion

The results of Study 2 replicated those of Study 1 regarding the detrimental influence of intrusive parenting on couple identity using a different assessment of couple identity (i.e., monetary value). Moreover, the Study 2 results showed that intrusive parenting influences young adults' potential to develop a strong couple identity by impeding the development of a clear sense of self. Indeed, our results are consistent with the view that self-concept clarity fully mediates the relation between intrusive parenting and couple identity. Intrusive parenting, then, impinges on the offspring's self-system not only on the individual level, but also on the relational level.

### General Discussion

Developmental, personality, and clinical psychologists have pointed to the role of family relationships in the identity formation process during adolescence. For example, the literature on the individuation–differentiation process has shown that family relationships, and in particular intrusive parental behaviors, hinder the identity exploration process (Manzi et al., 2006; Regalia et al., 2013). Highly intrusive families, then, may hinder children's self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-concept clarity (Barber & Harmon, 2002; Beyers & Goossens, 2008).

Our research advanced this literature by asking a novel question. Does intrusive parenting interfere with an individual's ability to form a strong couple identity? Two studies provided affirmative answers. In Study 1, we obtained evidence for actor effects: one's level of intrusive parenting predicted negatively one's couple identity. Despite the partners' commitment to the relationship, a controlling parental style seemingly constrained the young adult offspring's ability to expand their identity in domains external to the parental relationship (Aron et al., 2004). The use of the APIM to control for crossover effects between partners' level of intrusive parenting and individual couple identity allowed us to conclude that couple identity is a function of individual-level processes; that is, we did not find evidence that couple identity is affected by the partner's individuation from family of origin. In Study 2, we examined whether the putative negative influence of intrusive parenting on couple identity is mediated by self-concept clarity. Self-concept clarity indeed mediated the association between intrusive parenting and weak couple identity. Past research has shown that individuals with a confused self-concept have difficulty including relational elements into their self-concept (Lewandowski et al., 2010; Van Dijk et al., 2014). Our results directly link self-concept clarity with an antecedent (intrusive parenting) and an outcome (weak couple identity), thus painting a broader picture of the psychological processes in action.

We controlled in both studies for potential confounds and obtained negative effects of intrusive parenting on couple identity above and beyond partner commitment (Study 1) and individual attachment style (Study 2). Nevertheless, longitudinal designs may help elucidate the causal processes underling the effects that we hypothesized and tested.

Our research contributes to the literature on intrusive parenting and child identity as well as the literature on couple identity development. The negative influence of intrusive parenting has been examined in relation to general identity processes, such as identity exploration, but not in relation to the development of particular identity elements (e.g., professional or couple identities). Our findings indicate that intrusive parenting influences identity processes more broadly than previously thought. The negative influence of intrusive parenting impacts not only on the general identity process of individuation and identity formation (Regalia et al., 2013), but also at a more specific level, that is, the individual's capability to develop a couple identity.

In addition, the literature on couple identity has mainly analyzed links with couple-level variables, such as commitment and relationship satisfaction, thus overlooking the influence of the broader relational context on the development of couple identity. Although some family scholars (e.g. Wallerstein, 1994) have speculated that family of origin may influence the development of one's couple identity, to our knowledge this idea has not previously been tested. Our findings imply that the effort to build a strong, committed couple relationship does not suffice for the development of couple identity. Even if one is committed toward one's partner, an individual's ability to develop a couple identity may be undermined by intrusive parenting. Given the strong relation between couple identity and relational well-being (Badr et al., 2007), this finding has implications for interventions aimed at couple relationship enrichment (Halford, Markman, Kling, & Stanley, 2003). Optimal couple identity formation depends not only on the encouragement of couple-level processes (e.g., commitment), but also on a healthy bond between partners and their parents. Thus, in prenuptial courses as well as in couple preventive programs, partners may benefit from discussing the importance of the family-of-origin in influencing the development of their romantic relationship. Our research clarifies which aspect of the family relations may have a negative impact on couple identity; it is intrusive parenting. This knowledge can be used to promote greater individual and relational well-being.

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