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ORIGINAL RESEARCH

The Influence of Overparenting on College Students' Career Indecision: A Moderated Mediation Analysis

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Purpose: Avoiding difficulties in career decision-making has long been recognized as an important lifelong pursuit for individuals. Parental influence is an important environmental factor in college students' career decision-making. In recent years it has been shown that overparenting can be a risk factor that hinders college students' career development.

Participants and Method: This study was conducted with third-year students from four universities in Northeast China, and 743 valid questionnaires were received. With SPSS 24.0 and PROCESS plug-in, we built a moderated mediation model to examine the mediation effects of career expectation pressure and career decision self-efficacy between overparenting and career indecision and parent-adolescent expectation congruence's moderating role in this relationship.

Results: The results of this study indicate that overparenting is positively associated with college students' career indecision. Career expectation pressure and career decision self-efficacy mediate the relationship between overparenting and career indecision. In addition, parent-adolescent expectation congruence moderated the adverse relationship of overparenting on career expectation pressure and career indecision.

Conclusion: This study builds on previous research to explore the potential mechanisms of overparenting on adolescent career indecision. The results of this study may have implications for interventions in adolescent career decision-making to reduce the negative impact of overparenting on adolescent career development by providing feasible and effective interventions for overparenting families.

Limitation: Other factors (eg, proactive personality) may also have played a positive role in this relationship in this study. We hope future studies will explore the moderating effects of different personality traits.

Keywords: career decision self-efficacy, career expectation pressure, career indecision, college students, expectation congruence, overparenting

Introduction

Career decision-making is an important event that affects the life course of college students, and avoiding career decision-making difficulties has long been recognized as a critical lifelong pursuit for individuals.[1,2] Career decisions can play a crucial role in an individual's career development regarding job performance, career satisfaction, and career success.[3,4] Especially for college students during the job-seeking period, career-related decisions are challenging, and being under high stress may lead to career indecision.[5]

In recent years, the COVID-19 has significantly impacted the global economy. The production and operation of industries such as tourism, catering, and finance have been challenged, the demand for social recruitment has dropped sharply, and the structural contradiction of the co-existence of difficulties in employing enterprises and difficulties in hiring graduates has become more prominent. In China, young adults' employment has become a severe social problem. According to National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), until April 2023, China's young adults' unemployment rate has reached 20.4%, the first time since 2018 that it has exceeded 20%. It is not difficult to imagine that the phenomenon of college students' employment difficulties is more severe than before and aggravates the typical manifestations of many graduating college students in the process of choosing their careers, such as feeling very

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confused about their careers, hesitating, and even generating anxiety and other typical manifestations related to career decision-making difficulties.[6,7]

There are many reasons for college students' career indecision, such as changing social patterns, incomplete college education programs for career planning and career decision-making counseling, and poor college students' autonomy in employment.[8–10] These issues can be addressed through career-related support provided by parents, such as assistance in finding information about career choices and improving college students' self-awareness (interests, values).[11,12] However, for parents, inappropriate levels of control, involvement, and assistance with their children can instead lead to their children experiencing stress, confusion, lack of confidence, and indecision when choosing a career direction.[13,14] In recent years, such overparenting behaviors have also become prevalent in the lives of college students, and the incidence is rapidly increasing (Furstenberg 2010). Therefore, to effectively prevent and scientifically control the career indecision of college students, the present study takes college students in the job-seeking stage as the research object and starts from overparenting, taking into account career expectation pressure, career decision self-efficacy and expectation congruence and other factors, to fully understand the link between overparenting and college students' career indecision, in order to help college students reduce the reverse impact of overparenting on career development.

Overparenting on College Students' Career Indecision

For most people, career indecision is one of the most significant types of barriers to career decision-making difficulties and may be a long-standing problem.[15] A large of research on career decision-making difficulties suggests that the influence of the family has emerged as an essential environmental factor and that parental support can help them to overcome obstacles they may encounter during the career choice process.[16–19]Adolescents report that parental support is the most significant factor influencing their career choices compared to teachers, peers, or school counselors.[20] However, adolescents tend to feel more passive if they think their parents try to be too involved and control their career behaviors and choices.[21] As a result, well-intentioned parental involvement can appear "excessive" and counterproductive.[22]

Overparenting refers to parenting behaviors characterized by over-reactivity/support, over-demand/control, and low autonomy, which are manifested in excessive parental assistance and guidance, anticipatory problem-solving, management of affairs, and influences on behalf of the child, frequent information querying and monitoring, and interventions.[23–25] Overparenting is frequently associated with failures in children, adolescents, and adults across multiple developmental domains, including psychosocial, behavioral, relational, academic, and vocational domains.[22,26–28] Thus, overparenting is often viewed as maldevelopment and a risk factor that hinders an individual's development. Career-related studies also confirm this, ie, when parents give their children more opportunities to be independent, individuals feel more autonomy support. Their coping skills, career adaptation, and adjustment improve.[29] In contrast, parental over-demanding and controlling affect children's ability to experience more confusion and hesitation in choosing a career.[30] Based on this, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Overparenting has a positive association with college students' career indecision.

The Mediation Effect of Career Expectation Pressure

Recent research suggests that parents' higher expectations for their children often lead to overparenting.[31,32] Overparenting parents by having high expectations and overemphasizing their children's successes, these children are likely to internalize the high expectations and become sensitive to their ability to achieve these expectations and become susceptible to them, resulting in higher expectation stress.[33] The pressure of career expectations is significant in early adulthood, as this is a period when Overparenting parents may be mainly involved in their children's career choices.[26] This perceived pressure stems from the high-value parents place on their children's career success. When children perceive these expectations as unrealistic for them or contradictory to their desires, the pressure may be greater.[34] Researchers note that higher Career expectation pressure interferes with individual independent decision-making and self-regulation, as well as developmental tasks that become salient during these life cycles, such as maladjustment in careers.[8,35] In addition, Overparenting is associated with parental behavior and psychological control.[13,23,36] In particular, Chinese adolescents are influenced by filial piety, and they often prioritize their parents' expectations over their own goals and aspirations and are more susceptible to Overparenting behaviors and feel higher Career expectation

pressure.[33,37] Overparenting parents impose their perceptions on their children's career directions and choices (career related over intervention), causing adolescent career ambivalence and indecision through high expectation pressure.[38] Therefore, it can be argued that parental career expectation pressure may mediate between overparenting and adolescent career indecision. We propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Career expectation pressure mediates the relationship between overparenting and college students' career indecision.

The Mediation Effect of Career Decision Self-Efficacy

College students are in the critical period of value concept, cognitive mode, and personality shaping. Actively exploring and choosing the career that suits their ability and personality, planning their career prospects, and forming a stable goal is the main task of this stage. In this process, career decision self-efficacy refers to an individual's beliefs or judgments about their ability to achieve the behavioral goals related to career decision-making, which profoundly influences a series of behaviors in the development of an individual's career.[39] As a restrictive and stressful parenting style, overprotective parenting can impede this need, leading to frustrated autonomy and feelings of stress and coercion, contributing to adolescents' lack of confidence and motivation in career planning and goal selection.[40–42] In other words, overprotective parenting can negatively affect adolescents' career self-efficacy. Social cognitive career theory (SCCT) suggests that self-efficacy is a key factor in career development, plays an important role in improving overall employee performance and outcomes, and is a career decision self-efficacy directly affects an individual's psychological motivation in career choice.[16,43–46] It is a key factor in career development. It influences the degree of effort, persistence, and emotional responsiveness during career development by moderating individual personality, cognitive, and affective factors, which can affect the career indecision faced during career development.[15] Based on this, it can be argued that overparenting may contribute to adolescents' career indecision by reducing their career decision self-efficacy, and we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: Career decision self-efficacy mediates the relationship between overparenting and college students' career indecision.

Moderating Effect of Parent-Adolescent Expectation Congruence

Researchers have produced mixed results regarding the effectiveness of overparenting.[47,48] On the one hand, parental support is often reported as an important contributor to positive career-related outcomes, the original purpose of Overparenting is to help children succeed.[18,49] On the other hand, Overparenting intervention or help is excessive and inappropriate for the child.[50] From an adolescent's perspective, Overparenting may be perceived as overwhelming, stressful, restrictive, intrusive, or controlling.[25,51] At this point, differences in career expectations between parents and children are an important consideration. The alignment of career expectations between parents and children can significantly influence the career development of teenagers.[52,53] Sawitri's findings in a sample of adolescents indicated that adolescent-parent congruence in career expectations was positively associated with adolescents positively related to a variety of career development outcomes, including career decision-making power, career self-efficacy, career aspirations, and career exploration.[54] In this context, relevant parental involvement and support should be more responsive and appropriate to adolescents' pursuit of goals.[55] That is, aligning with parental expectations may be beneficial because it reduces the impact of parental over-involvement on one's career development. Adolescents who perceive themselves to be able to meet their parents' expectations in terms of career and academics show a more remarkable ability to cope with career-related problems.[28] In contrast, students who perceive themselves as unable to meet their parents' expectations show more career difficulties.[28] Based on this, we argue that if expectations are aligned between parents and adolescents, adolescents are less inclined to perceive parental Overparenting as inappropriate, and they may perceive this parental over-involvement as supportive, reducing the negative impact of overparenting on them.[51,56] Based on the above literature exploration, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4a: Parent-adolescent expectation congruence moderates the relationship between overparenting on career indecision.

H4b: Parent-adolescent expectation congruence moderates the relationship between overparenting on career expectation pressure.

H4c: Parent-adolescent Expectation congruence moderates the relationship between overparenting on career decision self-efficacy.

Current Study

Previous research has confirmed the important influence of the family on students' career development. Parents, in particular, play a central role in nurturing their children's career aspirations and facilitating their career path exploration and career choices.[12] While most studies have focused on the impact of overparenting on college student development, few studies have focused on the potential mechanisms of overparenting on career development. Similarly, although some scholars have emphasized that expectation congruence between parents and their children are important considerations in adolescents' career development, however, there is a shortage of studies that have explored the role of adolescent-parental expectation congruence in the relationship between overparenting and career decision-making.[28,33,57] The present study will extend this work by examining adolescents' perceived congruence of career expectations. Therefore, the present study builds on previous research by exploring the potential mechanisms of overparenting's role in college students' career indecision. This will not only add new perspectives and inspiration to existing research findings but may also provide feasible and effective interventions to minimize the negative impact of overparenting on career development.

The research framework of this study is shown in Figure 1. In the current study, we tested the following hypotheses: (1) Does overparenting positively associate with adolescent career indecision? (2) Do career expectation pressure and career decision self-efficacy mediate the relationship between overparenting and adolescent career indecision? (3) Does parent-adolescent career expectation congruence moderates the direct and indirect paths between overparenting and college students' career indecision?

Materials and Methods

Participants

We recruited participants from data of 743 junior students (391 males and 352 females) from four universities in Northeast China, whose ages ranged from 20 to 24 years old, with a mean age of 21.24 years old (SD = 0.613), and 382 students were from rural areas (51.413%), 11.306% were from single parent families and 77.389% were only children. The sample size of this study is appropriate.[58] The survey was conducted in June-July 2023 when students were considering employment and looking for internships. If successful, the students will intern with a company during the following summer vacation to prepare for work afterward. Before the start of the survey, the researcher distributed information about the program to the students through their school counselors and sent out invitations to the students. After obtaining their informed consent, six research assistants administered the self-report questionnaire to the participants at an agreed-upon after-school time. They asked them to complete it independently, which took about 30 minutes.

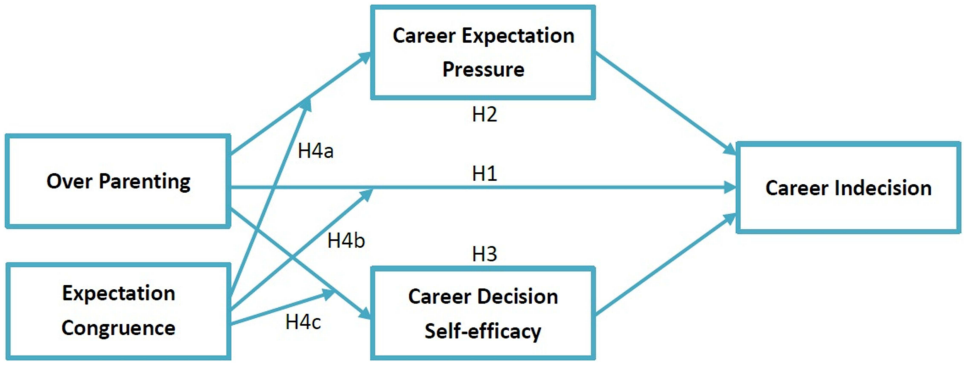

Figure 1 Research Framework.

Responses were collected on the spot by the research assistants. The specific purpose of the study and a detailed description of the questionnaire were explained to all participants before the administration of the survey. Participants were informed that the survey data would be used for research purposes only and that their information would be kept strictly confidential. All participants will receive a random cash prize (up to 10 RMB).

Measures

Adolescent Perceived Overparenting

The 5-item Over Parenting Scale was used to assess students' perceptions of their parents' overparenting.[59] Sample items included "I think my mother/father is overinvolved in my life" and "I sometimes wish my mother/father would back off and stay out of my issues". Students indicated how much they agreed or disagreed with each item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The mean of the item scores was used to indicate the perceived level of overparenting in the past six months. This scale has been validated in previous studies.[60] The Cronbach's α for this scale is 0.815 in this study.

Pressure from Parental Career Expectations

Parental career expectation pressure was assessed using the five items of the General Career Expectation subscale.[61] The scale measured the extent to which participants felt parental Career expectation pressure and the burden they felt to meet their parents' career expectations, including "It is difficult to realize the career plans my parents made for me", "I feel pressured whenever I think of my parents' expectations for my career" and "It is difficult for me to choose a career for my future because of my parent's expectations". Using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree), higher scores indicate higher levels of perceived parental career expectation pressure. The Cronbach's α for this scale is 0.786 in this study.

Career Decision Self-Efficacy

Using the 25-item short form of the Career Decision Self Efficacy Scale (CDSE-SF) to assess it.[45] The instrument assesses an individual's self-efficacy in career decision-making and exploration tasks, including gathering career information, self-evaluation, goal selection, making plans, and problem-solving. Using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all confident) to 5 (completely confident), questions included "Choose a major from a list of potential majors you are considering", "Talk to people who are already working in your field of interest" and "using the Internet to find information about" items you are interested in pursuing as a career. A mean was calculated for each participant, with higher scores reflecting higher Career decision self-efficacy. The Cronbach's α for this scale is 0.949 in this study.

Career Indecision

The CCA subscale of the Career Indecision Profile (CIP-65) was used to measure adolescents' discomfort with the career decision-making process.[62] The scale contains 24 items: career information needs, self-information needs, approach-approach conflict, choice anxiety and frustration, and inability to make career choices. Sample items include "I often feel nervous when thinking about choosing a career" and "I am reluctant to commit myself to a particular career direction." Participants were asked to rate the items on a 6-point Likert-type scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). Scale scores were determined by summing item scores and dividing by 24, with higher scores indicating greater difficulty in making a career decision. The Cronbach's α for this scale is 0.962 in this study.

Parent-Adolescent Expectation Congruence

The parent-adolescent career congruence scale consists of 12 items.[63] Seven of the items represent complementary areas of congruence (ie, students believe that their parents help them achieve their career goals and that their parents are happy or satisfied with their career direction and progress), as well as five items that represent complementary areas of congruence (ie, students believe that their parents have matching ideas about career interests, values, plans, and goals). Students were graded on a 6-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree). Higher total scores reflect higher levels of perceived congruence with parents on career issues. The Cronbach's α for this scale is 0.954 in this study.

Analysis Strategy

First, we used SPSS 24.0 to test the reliability of the scales. Then, we calculated means, standard deviations, and correlations for the key variables with SPSS. Finally, we tested the hypothesized mediation and moderation effects using PROCESS model 4 and model 8.[64] To avoid bias in the results due to sample distribution, we used Bootstrap bias correction based on 5000 times to obtain 95% confidence intervals to test for effect significance.

Result

Preliminary Analysis

Table 1 presents the basic descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation coefficients for the variables in this study. As can be seen in Table 1, overparenting was significantly and positively associated with career expectation pressure ($r=0.274$, $p<0.01$) and career indecision ($r=0.247$, $p<0.01$); however, it was significantly and negatively associated with career decision self-efficacy ($r=-0.311$, $p<0.01$). In other words, college students with higher levels of overparenting tend to be accompanied by higher levels of career expectation pressure, career indecision, and lower levels of career decision self-efficacy. Meanwhile, expectation congruence had a significant negative correlation with career indecision($r=-0.357$, $p<0.01$), overparenting($r=-0.210$, $p<0.01$) and career expectation pressure($r=-0.276$, $p<0.01$), but a significant positive correlation with career decision self-efficacy($r=0.371$, $p<0.01$).

Testing Mediation Effects of Career Expectation Pressure and Career Decision Self-Efficacy

H1 hypothesized a positive effect of overparenting on adolescent career indecision, and H2 and H3 respectively hypothesized the mediating role of career expectation pressure and career decision self-efficacy in the relationship between overparenting and career indecision. We used PROCESS model 4 to test the above hypotheses, and the results are shown in Table 2.

As shown in Table 2, Overparenting significantly and positively associate with career expectation pressure ($\beta=0.280$, $p<0.001$), while overparenting also negatively associates with career decision self-efficacy ($\beta=-0.311$, $p<0.001$). When using career indecision as the dependent variable, the results show that overparenting ($\beta=0.108$, $p<0.01$) and career expectation pressure ($\beta=0.279$, $p<0.001$) positively associates with career indecision, while career decision self-efficacy ($\beta=-0.256$, $p<0.001$) negatively associates with career indecision.

Table 1 Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Among the Study Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.Age	–							
2.Gender (1=Boys; 2=Girl)	−0.043	–						
3.Domain (1=Urban; 2=Rural)	−0.079*	−0.059	–					
4.Career indecision	−0.046	−0.043	0.164**	–				
5.Overparenting	−0.073*	0.092*	−0.084*	0.247**	–			
6.Career expectation pressure	−0.025	−0.082*	−0.051	0.325**	0.274**	–		
7.Career decision self-efficacy	0.000	−0.050	0.024	−0.308**	−0.311**	−0.089*	–	
8.Expectation congruence	0.036	−0.023	−0.074*	−0.357**	−0.210**	−0.276**	0.371**	–
Mean	21.244	1.474	1.514	3.780	10.102	2.729	3.169	38.977
SD	0.613	0.500	0.500	0.798	4.026	0.803	0.832	13.377

Notes: ** $p<0.01$; * $p<0.05$.

Table 2 Testing Mediation Effects of Career Expectation Pressure and Career Decision Self-Efficacy

Dependent Variables / Independent Variables	Career Expectation Pressure			Career Decision Self-Efficacy			Career Indecision		
	β	t	p	β	t	p	β	t	p
Overparenting	0.280	7.889	0.000	−0.311	−8.798	0.000	0.108	3.044	0.002
Career expectation pressure							0.279	8.252	0.000
Career decision self-efficacy							−0.256	−7.521	0.000
Age	−0.020	−0.349	0.727	−0.039	−0.676	0.499	−0.028	−0.528	0.598
Gender	−0.220	−3.106	0.002	−0.045	−0.639	0.523	−0.066	−1.001	0.317
Domain	−0.071	−1.001	0.317	−0.011	−0.149	0.882	0.380	5.818	0.000
R^2	0.088			0.098			0.230		
F	17.779		0.000	19.945		0.000	36.638		0.000

We continued to examine the effect sizes of each pathway using the Bootstrap method, which showed in Table 3 that the direct effect of overparenting on career indecision was 0.108(95%BootCI =[0.038,0.178]), the mediation effect of career expectation pressure was 0.078 (95%BootCI =[0.049, 0.110], p<0.01), and the mediation effect of career decision self-efficacy was 0.080 (95%BootCI =[0.049,0.116], p<0.01). None of the above effects 95% BootCI contain zero. Therefore, H1~H3 were supported.

Testing Moderating Effect of Expectation Congruence

H4a~c hypothesized that expectation congruence play moderating role in the relationship between overparenting and other variables. We use PROCESS model 8 to test these hypothesis. The results are shown in Table 4, and in addition, we computed and plotted the figures of how the effects change with the level of the moderating variable when the moderating effect is significant.

As shown in Table 4, when career expectation pressure is used as the dependent variable, the interaction term of overparenting and expectation congruence negatively associates with career expectation pressure (β=−0.115, p<0.001). Therefore, expectation congruence significantly moderates the relationship between overparenting and career expectation pressure. Specifically, the positive effect of overparenting on career expectation pressure was lower when college students had higher levels of expectation congruence. We plotted this changing effect in Figure 2.

The interaction term of overparenting and expectation congruence was insignificant when career decision self-efficacy was the dependent variable (β=−0.051, p>0.05). Therefore, expectation congruence in the relationship between overparenting and career decision self-efficacy does not have a moderating effect.

In addition, the interaction term of overparenting and expectation congruence negatively associates with career indecision (β=−0.076, p<0.01), while career indecision is the dependent variable. Therefore, expectation congruence

Table 3 The Bootstrap Test Result of Mediation Effects

Path	Effect	S.E	Bootstrap 95% CI	
			Lower	Upper
Overparenting-> Career indecision	0.108	0.036	0.038	0.178
Overparenting-> Career expectation pressure->Career indecision	0.078	0.015	0.049	0.110
Overparenting-> Career decision self-efficacy-> Career indecision	0.080	0.017	0.049	0.116

Table 4 Testing Moderating Effect of Expectation Congruence

Dependent Variables / Independent Variables	Career Expectation Pressure			Career Decision Self-Efficacy			Career Indecision		
	β	t	p	β	t	p	β	t	p
Overparenting	0.217	6.185	0.000	−0.246	−7.193	0.000	0.094	2.681	0.008
Career expectation pressure							0.222	6.417	0.000
Career decision self-efficacy							−0.198	−5.593	0.000
Expectation congruence	−0.190	−5.191	0.000	0.342	9.582	0.000	−0.160	−4.307	0.000
INT	−0.115	−3.868	0.000	−0.051	−1.755	0.080	−0.076	−2.701	0.007
Age	−0.018	−0.315	0.753	−0.046	−0.857	0.392	−0.025	−0.471	0.637
Gender	−0.219	−3.215	0.001	−0.038	−0.567	0.571	−0.076	−1.181	0.238
Domain	−0.123	−1.789	0.074	0.045	0.672	0.502	0.336	5.224	0.000
R^2	0.157			0.199			0.265		
F	22.825		0.000	30.524		0.000	33.086		0.000

Abbreviation: INT, Overparenting× Expectation congruence.

significantly moderates the relationship between overparenting and career indecision as well. It meant that the positive effect of overparenting on career indecision was lower when college students had higher levels of expectation congruence. We plotted this changing effect in Figure 3.

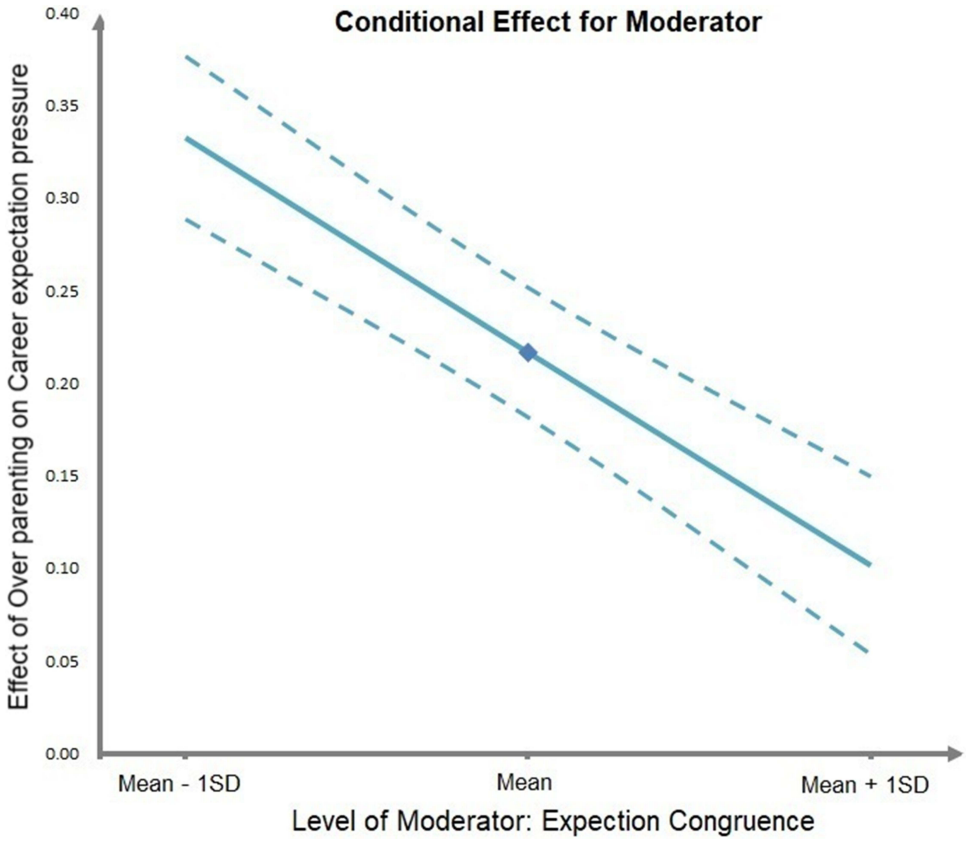

Figure 2 The conditional effect of overparenting on career expectation pressure for expectation congruence.
Notes: Solid lines represent the Effect between variables at different levels of expectation congruence; Dashed lines represent the upper and lower limits of the 95% confidence interval.

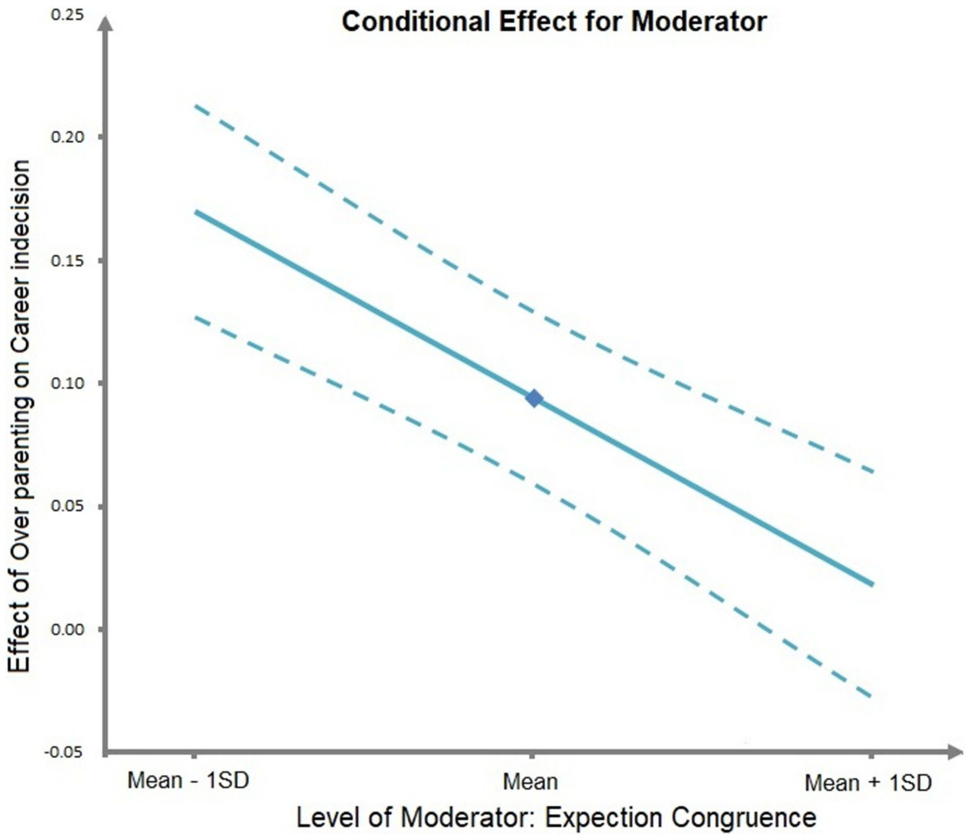

Figure 3 The conditional effect of overparenting on career indecision for expectation congruence.
Notes: Solid lines represent the Effect between variables at different levels of expectation congruence; Dashed lines represent the upper and lower limits of the 95% confidence interval.

Discussion

Parental influence is an important environmental factor in children's career decisions, and parental support can help them overcome obstacles they may encounter in their career choices. However, Overparenting has gradually become a risk factor that hinders the career development of individuals, and an inappropriate level of parental control, involvement, and assistance to their children can instead lead to their children experiencing stress, confusion, lack of self-confidence, and indecision when choosing a career direction. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the impact of overparenting on adolescents' career indecision. This study examined the mechanism of overparenting on college students' career indecision. This study found that overparenting strongly predicts students' career indecision. Overparenting indirectly affects career indecision through career expectation pressure, career decision self-efficacy. In addition, parent-adolescent career expectation congruence moderated the direct and indirect paths between overparenting and career indecision. This study expands the literature on overparenting in prior research, adds new perspectives and inspiration to existing research findings, and contributes to the career success of college students.

This study confirms hypothesis 1 about the positive relationship between overparenting and college students' career indecision. Specifically, those students who have experienced overparenting are likely to experience higher levels of career indecision in decision-making. In the highly competitive environment of China's education system and labor market, parents in a state of high anxiety provide intensive support for their children to reduce the risks and difficulties they may face as they enter society. Self-determinism adds to the understanding of the results of this study.[65] Overparenting parents have long demonstrated excessive involvement, control, and decision-making power over their children. They are overly involved in their adolescents' career-related activities, exhibit interfering behaviors in their career development, and intervene in career decisions. Such parenting does not provide a supportive social environment for adolescents. Instead, it inhibits the growth of adolescent autonomy, and this over-parenting behavior creates a social

environment in which psychological needs are undermined. If adolescents perceive less autonomy support and more control from their parents, this predicts low efficacy and autonomy in career decision-making activities.[30] This may directly lead to adolescents being impaired in career decision-making and experiencing high levels of career indecision. Thus, students who exhibit career indecision may do so because of perceived high parental control levels and low autonomy support.

Hypothesis 2 regarding the relationship between overparenting, career expectation pressure, and career indecision was also confirmed. Specifically, overparenting behavior enhances students' career expectation pressure, leading to higher levels of indecision when making career decisions. It follows that this emotional burden and reduced decision-making ability may be closely related to parental overparenting. Especially in Chinese families, personal achievement is important for individuals to bring pride and honor to their families. Confucianism influences Chinese people to emphasize more on the importance of personal achievement to the family, and parents show great sensitivity to their children's school performance and career development aspects.[28,66,67] As a result, Chinese parents are more likely to exhibit overparenting behaviors, have high expectations for their children, and overemphasize their children's success. Parents who have higher expectations for their adolescents' educational attainment tend to be more involved in their adolescents' educational activities at home and school, including monitoring their academic progress, providing supportive resources, and participating in school activities.[33,68] Relatedly, such parents are more involved in and supportive of their adolescents' career preparation.[69] Students in such home environments are likely to internalize high expectations and become sensitive to their ability to meet those expectations, thus feeling the pressure of higher expectations and even experiencing anxiety, depression, and pain.[13,59,70] Similarly, this is true for young adults who experience increased stress due to parental expectations of their decisiveness and may further develop into chronic stressors, leading to generalized career decision-making difficulties in students.[71–73]

Similarly, the findings confirmed Hypothesis 3 that career decision self-efficacy mediates the relationship between overparenting and career indecision. Specifically, overparenting increases students' career indecision by decreasing adolescents' career self-efficacy. As career construct theory states that the essence of career development is the process of constructing the mutual adaptation of the self and the external world, family education, and family environment as a context play an important role in the transformation and development of college students' careers adolescents who overparenting families may be at a disadvantage compared to others.[74]

Overparenting, parents can force adolescents to think, feel, and act in a particular way by exerting pressure, inducing guilt, invalidating feelings, threatening, and punishing. These can hinder an adolescent's agency, willpower, and sense of worth.[75–77] Self-determination theory also emphasizes this point, ie, overparenting hinders children's autonomy development. Overparenting behaviors may signal to the child that the external environment in which the child lives is threatening or uncontrollable. From this point of view, adolescents are more likely to experience feelings of failure and inadequacy because their parents' overprotectiveness signals distrust in adolescents' problem-solving abilities, further leading to adolescents' lack of self-confidence in career goal selection, increased career uncertainty, and decision-making anxiety.[18,19,35,78]

In addition, this study examined the moderating role of parent-adolescent expectation congruence in the direct and indirect relationships between overparenting and students' career indecision. The study showed that career expectation congruence significantly moderated the adverse effects of overparenting on career expectation pressure and career indecision of college students. Specifically, the higher the parent-adolescent career expectation congruence, the lower the career expectation pressure and the less indecision in career decision-making showed at the same level of overparenting in students. The theory of Interactive Goal Dynamics (TGD) explains this result.[55] The theory posits that goal pursuit is interdependent, and that shared goal representations between partners are cognitive precursors to developing effectively coordinated behavior. When parents and adolescents are more aligned on future goals, they agree on which goals are more important to their children than other goals. Their goal coordination behaviors are more effective. In contrast, if parents and adolescents have different expectations for the adolescent's academic and career goals, their goal-coordination behaviors become less effective so that the parent's goal-related involvement and support are not responsive to the child's needs From this point of view,

adolescents can experience lower job search stress as well as career decision-making difficulties, among others.[55,57,79]

Although we have expanded the literature on parenting and adolescent career indecision, several limitations remain. First, although we collected many samples, all of them were from universities in northeastern China, which is a geographic limitation. In future studies, we will further collect a wider sample to generalize our findings to university students nationwide. Second, our study structure only explored the association of parent-adolescent career expectation congruence as a moderator between overparenting and adolescent career indecision. However, other factors (eg, proactive personality) may also have played a positive role in this relationship in this study. We hope future studies will explore the moderating effects of different personality traits.

Conclusion

Previous research has confirmed the important role of parents in fostering their children's career aspirations and facilitating their career path exploration and career choices. However, there is still a lack of research exploring the potential mechanisms of overparenting on college students' career development. This study builds on previous research to explore the link between overparenting and college students' career indecision. The study's results showed that overparenting negatively affects college students' career indecision. Career expectation pressure and career decision self-efficacy mediated the relationship between overparenting and career indecision. Significantly, parent-adolescent career expectation congruence moderated the positive effects of overparenting on career expectation pressure and career indecision. The results of this study may provide recommendations for intervention generation in adolescent career decision making. Specifically, schools should provide pre-employment related courses to answer the confusion of college students in the process of choosing a career, increase their self-efficacy in career decision-making, and at the same time, reduce the psychological pressure of college students in the period of choosing a career through psychological counseling. Parents should also fully respect students' self-development expectations and career planning. Full communication, understanding and mutual respect are the cornerstones of parent-child communication. Only with the efforts of parents, schools and students can we realize the good employment of college students.

Ethics Approval

This study was carried out in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the survey. The study was approved by the Academic Ethics Committee of the School of Marxism, Northeastern Agricultural University.

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Disclosure

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