

Parenting Styles, Belongingness, and Career Decision-Making Difficulties Among College Students: The Mediating Role of Amotivation

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Abstract

Career decision-making is a critical developmental task for college students, yet many students experience difficulties in clarifying, evaluating, and committing to future career choices. Guided by Self-Determination Theory, the present study examined whether amotivation mediated the associations of authoritarian parenting, permissive parenting, and belongingness with career decision-making difficulties. A cross-sectional correlational design was used. Participants were recruited using a cluster random sampling strategy. The sample comprised 400 college students who filled out questionnaires that assessed perceived parenting styles, belongingness, academic amotivation, and career decision making problems. Pearson correlations and mediation analyses using Hayes' PROCESS Model 4 were conducted. Authoritarian parenting and permissive parenting were positively associated with career decision-making difficulties, whereas belongingness was negatively associated with career decision-making difficulties. Amotivation was positively associated with career decision-making difficulties and significantly mediated all three relationships. Specifically, authoritarian parenting and permissive parenting predicted higher amotivation, which in turn predicted greater career decision-making difficulties. Belongingness, on the other hand, predicted lower amotivation, which was in turn predicted to less career decision making difficulties. Partial mediation occurred in the direct effects, which remained significant in all models. The findings indicated that the only family and relational factors in students' career decision-

making problems were not sufficient, but also in their motivational disengagement. Interventions for career counseling, in turn, should focus on amotivation, build purpose of students, and promote autonomy, structure, and belongingness in school and family environments.

Keywords: Parenting Styles, Belongingness, Amotivation, Career Decision-making Difficulties, College Students, Self-Determination Theory

Introduction

Career decision-making is a central developmental task during adolescence and early adulthood because students are required to make educational and occupational choices that may shape later academic pathways, vocational identity, and work opportunities (Super, 1990; Gati et al., 1996; Duru, 2022). In this phase, students have to reflect on their interests, capabilities, values, educational possibilities and occupational alternatives prior to the choice of a career direction (Gati et al., 1996; Pečjak et al., 2019). For some students, these decisions are made fairly clearly, while for other students they may be facing ongoing obstacles that slow their progress, disrupt their decisions, or diminish the quality of their decisions (Gati et al., 1996; Gati & Saka, 2001; Bian, 2023). They are known as career decision-making difficulties (CDMD) and are problems that hinder individuals from making an optimal career decision (Gati et al., 1996; Levin et al., 2020).

A significant theoretical basis for comprehending students' career hesitation is provided by the taxonomy of career decision-making challenges put forth by Gati et al. (1996). This framework divides professional decision-making challenges into three main categories: lack of information, inconsistent information, and lack of preparation. These challenges might arise before to or during the decision-making process (Gati et al., 1996; Pečjak & Košir, 2007). Lack of enthusiasm, general indecision, and dysfunctional ideas regarding career choice are examples of being unprepared (Gati et al., 1996; Pečjak & Košir, 2007). Insufficient knowledge about oneself, potential careers, decision-making processes, and methods for acquiring more information are all considered forms of lack of information (Gati et al., 1996; Duru, 2022). This framework is relevant for college students because career decision-making requires both

motivational readiness and access to reliable personal and occupational information (Gati et al., 1996; Lee et al., 2022).

Career decision-making difficulties are not merely cognitive or informational problems; they are also shaped by motivational and relational contexts (Guay et al., 2003; Cordeiro et al., 2023; Mbanga et al., 2024). Recent career development research shows that students' career difficulties are associated with family influences, self-efficacy, career adaptability, school belongingness, and motivational quality (Tian et al., 2021; Parola & Marcionetti, 2021; Anozie et al., 2024; Mbanga et al., 2024). This is consistent with developmental and contextual perspectives suggesting that students' career decisions are embedded in family, school, and social environments rather than being purely individual choices (Keller & Whiston, 2008; Sovet & Metz, 2014; Alexander & Harris, 2022). In collectivistic and family-oriented contexts, students' career choices may be particularly influenced by parental expectations, relational approval, and family communication patterns (Sovet & Metz, 2014; Tian et al., 2021).

Parenting style is one of the major relational conditions that may shape students' autonomy, self-regulation, and decision-making confidence (Baumrind, 1971; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Alexander & Harris, 2022). Parenting styles are commonly understood through dimensions of responsiveness, warmth, demandingness, control, and autonomy support (Baumrind, 1971; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Autocratic parenting style holds control, strictness and low responsiveness, however unautocratic parenting are usually lenient with limited structure and behavioral regulation (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). These parenting patterns may influence career development because students need both autonomy and structure to explore options, evaluate alternatives, and take responsibility for career decisions (Sovet & Metz, 2014; Parola & Marcionetti, 2021).

Parenting and job decision-making are related, according to previous research. Parenting practices were linked to professional decision-making challenges and career decision self-efficacy among French and Korean teenagers, according to Sovet and Metz (2014). According to Tian et al. (2021), Chinese college students' professional decision-making challenges

were predicted by parenting styles through psychological mediators. Additionally, parental practices were linked to college students' self-efficacy in making professional decisions, according to Alexander and Harris (2022). Recent studies also indicated that there is a relationship between problematic or intrusive parenting behaviors and career indecision and poor career development outcomes (Wang, 2023; Parola & Marcionetti, 2021). The results suggest that family relational patterns can impact students' career decision-making practices by affecting students' autonomy, confidence, exploration, and perceived readiness (Keller & Whiston, 2008; Sovet & Metz, 2014; Tian et al., 2021).

The difficulty in making career decisions can be attributed to authoritarian parenting, which can limit the students' independent exploration and decrease their feelings of ownership when making career decisions (Sovet & Metz, 2014; Tian et al., 2021). In the context of career decision making, students may face difficulties when they feel the strong pressure from the outside and/or the strict requirements from the family, thus experiencing internal or external conflicts in career decision making (Gati et al., 1996; Pečjak et al., 2019). While limits on structure and guidance can create problems, in a different way, because of the possible loss of planning time, persistence, and disciplined exploration (Baumrind, 1971; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Hence, too much control and too little structure can also be detrimental to the career decision-making process, albeit in different ways (Sovet & Metz, 2014; Parola & Marcionetti, 2021).

Another important relational factor is belongingness in students' academic/career development. Belongingness is the degree to which people feel accepted, valued, included and connected in a social or educational setting (Goodenow, 1993; Ryan & Deci, 2000). In educational settings, belongingness has been associated with academic engagement, motivation, well-being, and achievement (Goodenow, 1993; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Anozie et al., 2024). Recent research also indicates that school belongingness is related to career indecision and academic performance among students, suggesting that students who feel more connected to their school context may experience fewer barriers in academic and career development (Anozie et al., 2024). Self-Determination Theory provides a

strong theoretical basis for linking parenting styles, belongingness, motivation, and career decision-making difficulties (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Cordeiro et al., 2023). Autonomy, competence, and relatedness are three fundamental psychological demands that must be met for optimal functioning, according to SDT. Competence is feeling effective, relatedness is feeling connected to others, and autonomy is feeling that one's activities are self-endorsed (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Cordeiro et al., 2023). Social contexts that support these needs promote more self-determined motivation, whereas controlling, inconsistent, or disconnected contexts may produce controlled motivation or amotivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Cordeiro et al., 2023; Mbanga et al., 2024).

Amotivation is particularly relevant to career decision-making difficulties because it represents a lack of intention, purpose, and perceived connection between one's actions and outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Jung, 2013; Mbanga et al., 2024). In academic contexts, amotivated students may not perceive educational effort as meaningful or useful for future outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Jung, 2013). In career decision-making, this lack of purpose can interfere with self-exploration, information seeking, persistence, and commitment to a career direction (Gati et al., 1996; Jung, 2013; Mbanga et al., 2024). Jung (2013) reported that there was a positive correlation between amotivation and indecision in a university entry decision making. The findings of Mbanga et al. (2024) also demonstrated that students' motivational profiles explained vocational indecision development, thus substantiating the role of motivational quality in vocational development. Cordeiro et al. (2023) also highlighted that self-determined and controlled motivational processes are associated with career decision making and career transition from school to work.

From an SDT perspective, authoritarian parenting may increase amotivation by frustrating autonomy and reducing students' personal ownership of academic and career goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Sovet & Metz, 2014; Tian et al., 2021). Permissive parenting may increase amotivation by failing to provide the structure and guidance needed for competence development and purposeful planning (Baumrind, 1971; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Parola & Marcionetti, 2021). In contrast, belongingness may

reduce amotivation by satisfying the need for relatedness and strengthening students' emotional connection with academic and future-oriented tasks (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Goodenow, 1993; Anozie et al., 2024). Therefore, amotivation may serve as a motivational mechanism through which parenting styles and belongingness are linked to career decision-making difficulties (Jung, 2013; Cordeiro et al., 2023; Mbanga et al., 2024).

Although previous research has examined parenting styles, career self-efficacy, career adaptability, and career decision-making difficulties, fewer studies have tested amotivation as a mediator linking relational contexts with CDMD among college students (Tian et al., 2021; Parola & Marcionetti, 2021; Mbanga et al., 2024). This gap is significant as the process of career intervention may emphasize information provision and skills in decision making, while SDT argues that the motivational readiness and psychological need of individuals is also essential for effective career decision making (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Cordeiro et al., 2023). This relationship can be better viewed between students' relational experiences and career difficulties can emerge by looking at amotivation as a mediator, as it is related to diminished purpose, agency, and motivational engagement (Jung, 2013; Mbanga et al., 2024).

The present study investigated the effects of authoritarian parenting, permissive parenting and belongingness on career decision-making problems among college students mediated by amotivation. According to the Self-Determination Theory and previous studies on career development, authoritarian and permissive parenting was anticipated to be positively correlated with career decision-making difficulties while belongingness was anticipated to be negatively correlated with career decision-making difficulties (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Sovet & Metz, 2014; Tian et al., 2021; Anozie et al., 2024). It was also hypothesized that the previous relationships would be mediated by amotivation, with authoritarian and permissive parenting being related to higher amotivation and higher career decision making difficulties, and belongingness being related to lower amotivation and lower career decision making difficulties (Jung, 2013; Cordeiro et al., 2023; Mbanga et al., 2024).

Methodology

Research Design

This study followed a cross sectional, correlational research design to investigate the relationship of parenting styles and belongingness with career decision making difficulties of college students. Simple mediation models were adopted to test the hypothesis of the mediating role of amotivation.

Participants

A total of 400 college students were selected from KIPS college Khanewal (Pakistan) as a sample. Participants enrolled in first or second year of college and within the age range appropriate for early career decision making. Participants were recruited using a cluster random sampling strategy. Classes were randomly selected from participating colleges and the participation of students within these classes was completely voluntary. Both male and female students were counted in inclusion criteria. Participants were eligible to be students of the college at the time of the study and gave informed consent. Participants with incomplete or invalid responses on key study variables were handled according to the scale-level missing value procedures described below.

Measures

Demographic Information

Participants provided information about age group, gender, academic year, socioeconomic status, geographical area, and parents' education.

Parenting Styles

Parenting styles were assessed using the Perceived Parenting Style Scale (PPSS; Divya & Manikandan, 2013), a 30-item measure of perceived authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting. The scale contains 30 items measuring three perceived parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale. In the present article, authoritarian parenting and permissive parenting were included in the main analyses because these dimensions were directly relevant to the final mediation model. Higher scores indicated

greater perceived levels of the respective parenting style. In the current study, Cronbach's alpha was .676 for authoritarian parenting and .766 for permissive parenting.

Belongingness

The General Belongingness Scale (GBS; Malone et al., 2012) was adopted to map the variable belongingness. Twelve items were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale. Following the directions from the authors negative items were reversed while preparing for analysis. Higher scores indicated a stronger sense of belonging, and a mean score was computed. The calculated Cronbach α was .724.

Amotivation

The Short Academic Motivation Scale's amotivation subscale was used to measure amotivation (Kotera et al., 2020). A seven-point Likert-type scale was used to rate each item. Higher scores indicate stronger academic amotivation. The amotivation score was calculated by averaging the pertinent amotivation factors. The Cronbach α was .602.

Career Decision-Making Difficulties

The Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ) was developed by Gati et al., (1996). This was best suited to measure career decision-making difficulties with students studying in higher education. Thirty-four items make up the questionnaire, which evaluates issues with lack of information, conflicting information, and lack of preparedness. A 9-point Likert-type scale is used to rate the items. The two validity elements were removed from the substantive total score in accordance with scoring guidelines. The remaining 32 elements were used to calculate a mean score, with higher scores denoting more difficulty making career decisions. The scale used in this investigation had a Cronbach α .887.

Procedure

After getting approval from the relevant college authorities, data were gathered in classroom settings. Prior data collection, students were informed about research goals, their participation and instructions filling out the questionnaire. Participants filled out a paper-and-pencil version of

the questionnaire. The analysis did not use any identifying information. Prior to data input and analysis, completed surveys were checked for missing or incorrect answers.

Data Screening and Scoring

Data were screened for out-of-range values before analysis. Responses outside the possible scale ranges were treated as missing. Parenting style items were screened according to the 1–5 response range, belongingness and academic motivation items according to the 1–7 response range, and career decision-making difficulty items according to the 1–9 response range. The descriptive statistics were calculated for all variables to identify the trend in data. The negative items were reversed for the general belongingness scale prior to computing total scores. For the career decision-making difficulties questionnaire, validity items were excluded from the total score.

Data Analysis

IBM SPSS Statistics was used to analyze the data. For the study and demographic variables, descriptive statistics were computed. To investigate bivariate relationships between authoritarian parenting, permissive parenting, belongingness, amotivation, and career decision-making challenges, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated. Hayes' PROCESS macro-Model 4 was used to perform mediation analyses. Three distinct predictor models for mediation were examined: belongingness, permissive parenting, and authoritarian parenting. Each model included career decision-making challenges as the outcome variable and amotivation as the mediator. 5000 bootstrap samples and 95% confidence intervals were used to analyze the indirect effects test results. The indirect effect was considered significant if there was no zero in the bootstrap confidence interval.

Results

Participant Characteristics

The final sample had 400 college students. Most participants were aged 17–18 years (57.0%), followed by 15–16 years (37.3%) and 19–20 years

(5.8%). The sample included 195 males (48.8%) and 205 females (51.2%). Regarding academic year, 170 participants (42.5%) were enrolled in the first year and 230 participants (57.5%) were enrolled in the second year. Most participants belonged to the middle socioeconomic group (65.5%), followed by the higher (23.5%) and lower socioeconomic groups (11.0%). Most of the participants belong to urban areas and their parents were reported educated. The demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table1
Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Category	<i>n</i>	%
Age	15–16 years	149	37.3
	17–18 years	228	57.0
	19–20 years	23	5.8
Gender	Male	195	48.8
	Female	205	51.2
Academic year	First year	170	42.5
	Second year	230	57.5
Socioeconomic status	Higher	94	23.5
	Middle	262	65.5
	Lower	44	11.0
Geographical area	Urban	326	81.9
	Rural	72	18.1
Parents' education	Educated	310	77.9
	Uneducated	88	22.1

Note: N=400 for age, gender, academic year, and socioeconomic status. Fr geographical area and parents' education, valid N=398

Descriptive statistics and internal consistency estimate for the main study variables are presented in Table 2. The final analyses included

authoritarian parenting, permissive parenting, belongingness, amotivation, and career decision-making difficulties.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics and Internal Consistency of Study Variables

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>α</i>
Authoritarian parenting	1.40	4.40	2.62	0.69	.676
Permissive parenting	1.00	4.30	2.33	0.78	.766
Belongingness	2.50	7.00	4.53	0.94	.724
Amotivation	1.00	7.00	3.53	1.76	.602
Career decision-making difficulties	1.47	8.35	5.18	1.25	.887

Table 3 displays the Pearson correlations between the research variables. Authoritarian parenting had a negative correlation with belongingness and a positive correlation with permissive parenting, amotivation, and career decision-making difficulties. Permissive parenting was positively correlated with amotivation and career decision-making difficulties and associated negatively with belongingness. Amotivation and difficulties making career decisions were adversely connected with belongingness. Amotivation and career decision-making difficulties were positively connected.

Table 3
Correlations Among Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Authoritarian parenting	—				
2. Permissive parenting	.57**	—			
3. Belongingness	-.32**	-.51**	—		
4. Amotivation	.22**	.39**	-.26**	—	
5. Career decision-making difficulties	.35**	.25**	-.26**	.26**	—

Note. $p < .01$.

Hayes' PROCESS macro-Model 4 was used to conduct mediation analyses with 5,000 bootstrap samples. Amotivation was entered as the mediator, and career decision-making difficulties as the outcome variable. Mediation models were tested separately for authoritarian parenting, permissive parenting, and belongingness.

Authoritarian Parenting Model

Authoritarian parenting significantly predicted amotivation, $B = .5742$, $SE = .1253$, $t = 4.58$, $p < .001$. The model predicting career decision-making difficulties from authoritarian parenting and amotivation was significant, $R^2 = .156$, $F(2, 397) = 36.79$, $p < .001$. In this model, authoritarian parenting significantly predicted career decision-making difficulties, $B = .5595$, $SE = .0862$, $t = 6.49$, $p < .001$, and amotivation also significantly predicted career decision-making difficulties, $B = .1348$, $SE = .0336$, $t = 4.01$, $p < .001$. The total effect of authoritarian parenting on career decision-making difficulties was significant, $B = .6369$, $SE = .0856$, $t = 7.44$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.4687, .8051]. The direct effect remained significant after including amotivation, $B = .5595$, $SE = .0862$, $t = 6.49$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.3901, .7289]. The indirect effect through amotivation was significant, $B = .0774$, $BootSE = .0305$, 95% CI [.0268, .1460].

Permissive Parenting Model

Permissive parenting significantly predicted amotivation, $B = .8798$, $SE = .1037$, $t = 8.48$, $p < .001$. The model predicting career decision-making difficulties from permissive parenting and amotivation was significant, $R^2 = .092$, $F(2, 397) = 20.16$, $p < .001$. In this model, permissive parenting significantly predicted career decision-making difficulties, $B = .2768$, $SE = .0830$, $t = 3.33$, $p = .001$, and amotivation also significantly predicted career decision-making difficulties, $B = .1355$, $SE = .0369$, $t = 3.67$, $p < .001$. The total effect of permissive parenting on career decision-making difficulties was significant, $B = .3960$, $SE = .0776$, $t = 5.10$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.2435, .5485]. The direct effect remained significant after including amotivation, $B = .2768$, $SE = .0830$, $t = 3.33$, $p = .001$, 95% CI [.1136, .4400]. The indirect effect through amotivation was significant, $B = .1192$, $BootSE = .0393$, 95% CI [.0467, .1995].

Belongingness Model

Belongingness significantly predicted amotivation, $B = -.4886$, $SE = .0912$, $t = -5.36$, $p < .001$. The model predicting career decision-making difficulties from belongingness and amotivation was significant, $R^2 = .105$, $F(2, 397) = 23.39$, $p < .001$. In this model, belongingness significantly predicted career decision-making difficulties, $B = -.2724$, $SE = .0658$, $t = -4.14$, $p < .001$, and amotivation also significantly predicted career decision-making difficulties, $B = .1462$, $SE = .0349$, $t = 4.18$, $p < .001$. The total effect of belongingness on career decision-making difficulties was significant, $B = -.3438$, $SE = .0649$, $t = -5.30$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-.4713, -.2163]. The direct effect remained significant after including amotivation, $B = -.2724$, $SE = .0658$, $t = -4.14$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-.4018, -.1430]. The indirect effect through amotivation was significant, $B = -.0714$, $BootSE = .0238$, 95% CI [-.1223, -.0292].

Table 4

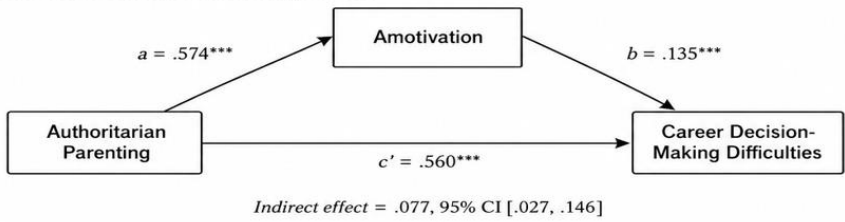
Mediation Effects of Amotivation Between Study Predictors and Career Decision-Making Difficulties

Predictor	Total effect	Direct effect	Indirect effect	BootSE	95% CI
Authoritarian parenting	.6369	.5595	.0774	.0305	[.0268, .1460]
Permissive parenting	.3960	.2768	.1192	.0393	[.0467, .1995]
Belongingness	-.3438	-.2724	-.0714	.0238	[-.1223, -.0292]

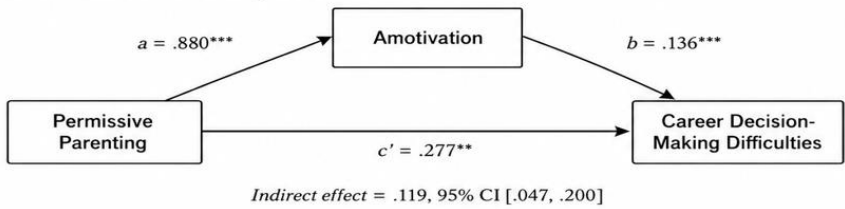
Note. Bootstrap confidence intervals=5,000 samples.

Figure 1. Amotivation as a mediator of the relationships between authoritarian parenting, permissive parenting, belongingness, and career decision-making difficulties.

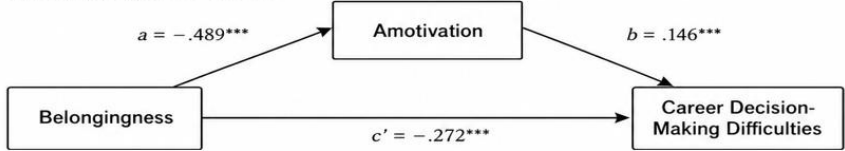
A. Authoritarian Parenting Model



B. Permissive Parenting Model



C. Belongingness Model



Discussion & Conclusion

This study investigated if the relationships existed between career decision-making difficulties, authoritarian parenting, permissive parenting, and belongingness were mediated by amotivation among college students. The results corroborated with the proposed relational-motivational model. Authoritarian parenting and permissive parenting were positively correlated with career decision making difficulties, and belongingness was negatively correlated with career decision making difficulties. All three associations were partially mediated by amotivation: the direct effects were significant when amotivation was entered as the mediator.

The positive relationships between authoritarian parenting styles and career decision-making problems are in line with the previous studies that found family and parenting factors as correlates of students' career decision-making processes (Keller & Whiston, 2008; Sovet & Metz, 2014; Tian et al., 2021). Authoritarian parenting is a parenting style that is high in control and low in responsiveness, which can limit autonomy and opportunities for independent exploration (Baumrind, 1971; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). When students have learned to make decisions in situations where they are subject to others' influence or their parents' rigid demands, they may be less inclined to engage in career decision-making processes and have greater difficulty in doing so (Gati et al., 1996; Sovet & Metz, 2014). The present finding is also aligned with the findings that negative or controlling parenting styles are related to increased career decision-making challenges or decreased career adaptive outcomes (Tian et al., 2021; Wang, 2023).

The link between authoritarian parenting and career decision-making difficulties was partially mediated by amotivation. The result is in line with Self-Determination Theory (SDT) which suggests that control over social contexts can interfere with autonomy and decrease self-determined motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Students might feel compelled to adhere to career-related expectations but not necessarily endorse them, leading to a diminished sense of purpose and agency (Ryan

& Deci, 2000; Cordeiro et al., 2023). Amotivation can be seen as a lack of intention and perceived relevance of efforts and outcomes and can lead to less willingness among students to explore their career options, search for information or to make a decision (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Jung, 2013). The finding consequently indicates that motivational disengagement is, at least partially, a result of authoritarian parenting that may lead to CDMD.

The positive relationship between permissive parenting and career decision-making problems suggest that lack of structure can negatively impact career development processes as well. Permissive parenting is marked by leniency and limited behavioral regulation, and this may reduce the guidance and accountability needed for effective planning (Baumrind, 1971; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Career decision-making is a structured process that requires information gathering, self-assessment, comparison of alternatives, and management of uncertainty (Gati et al., 1996; Pečjak et al., 2019). Students who experience low structure may struggle with disciplined exploration or may delay decision-making because they have not developed adequate self-regulatory habits (Parola & Marcionetti, 2021). This finding is consistent with the broader parenting literature showing that adaptive development requires not only emotional support but also appropriate structure and guidance (Baumrind, 1971; Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

Amotivation also partially mediated the relationship between permissive parenting and career decision-making difficulties. This suggests that permissive parenting may contribute to CDMD by increasing students' lack of purpose, direction, and perceived relevance of academic effort. Competence, support and structured guidance are crucial in SDT to maintain motivation as students must feel competent when dealing with developmental tasks (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Cordeiro et al., 2023). The lack of structure in the home environment can also lead to students receiving insufficient scaffolding to make the link between current academic involvement and their future career aspirations (Parola & Marcionetti, 2021; Mbanga et al., 2024). The significant indirect effect through amotivation indicates that motivational disengagement is one pathway

through which permissive parenting is linked with career decision-making difficulties.

The negative association between belongingness and career decision-making difficulties supports the role of relatedness in students' career development. Belongingness reflects feeling accepted, valued, and connected within an educational or social environment (Goodenow, 1993; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Students with a stronger sense of belonging may feel more emotionally secure, more willing to seek guidance, and more able to tolerate uncertainty during career exploration (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Anozie et al., 2024). Recent research indicates that school belongingness predicts academic performance and is associated with career indecision, supporting the relevance of belongingness for both academic and career outcomes (Anozie et al., 2024). The study findings add to the earlier literature that belongingness is linked with a few difficulties in relation to career decision-making.

Amotivation partially mediated the relationship between belongingness and career decision-making difficulties. This finding is theoretically consistent with SDT because satisfaction relatedness is expected to strengthen motivational engagement and reduce amotivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Cordeiro et al., 2023). Students who feel connected and valued may be more likely to perceive academic and career planning as meaningful, whereas students with low belongingness may experience detachment and lack of purpose (Goodenow, 1993; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Because amotivation has been linked with indecision and problematic vocational trajectories, reduced amotivation may help explain why belongingness is associated with fewer CDMD (Jung, 2013; Mbanga et al., 2024). Thus, belongings appear to function as both a relational and motivational resource.

Overall, the findings support a relational-motivational explanation of career decision-making difficulties. The results suggest that students' CDMD are associated not only with informational barriers but also with relational experiences and motivational disengagement. This interpretation is based on the CDDQ framework which encompasses lack of motivation

under lack of readiness, and SDT which posits that social context shape motivation by autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs (Gati et al., 1996; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Authoritarian parenting can be a source of frustration for autonomy, permissive parenting can be a source of frustration for competence through structure, and weak belongingness can be a source of frustration for relatedness (Baumrind, 1971; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Cordeiro et al., 2023). Amotivation may be heightened by these conditions and may contribute to increased challenges with career decision making (Jung, 2013; Mbanga et al., 2024).

The findings further add to the existing research on parenting and career development. Previous studies have demonstrated associations between parenting styles and behaviors, with career decision making self-efficacy, career adaptability, career calling and career decision making difficulties (Sovet & Metz, 2014; Tian et al., 2021; Parola & Marcionetti, 2021; Alexander & Harris, 2022). Amotivation as a mediator between parenting styles and belongingness and CDMD also contributes to the existing research. This contribution is valuable as it moves away from a strictly relational or informational description of career struggles and focuses on a motivational mechanism based on SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Cordeiro et al., 2023).

The results are of relevance to career counseling and student development programs. Career interventions should not only look at how much career information students have at their disposal, but also their motivational readiness, the perceived purpose of their intervention, and their sense of agency (Gati et al., 1996; Jung, 2013; Cordeiro et al., 2023). For high amotivation students, activities that communicate values, link academic effort with future career, and bolster perceived control over career planning (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Mbanga et al., 2024) might be beneficial. Additionally, family-sensitive elements may be necessary for career counseling programs, particularly in the case of parent participation in educational and occupational decision making (Keller & Whiston, 2008; Sovet & Metz, 2014; Tian et al., 2021). Parents can better support students by providing guidance and structure, and also by giving them opportunities to gain autonomy support without prohibiting control or providing them

with no direction (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Parola & Marcionetti, 2021; Baumrind, 1971).

The findings also indicate that schools need to be more focused on creating a sense of belongingness as an integral part of career development support. Mentoring, peer support, teacher-student connection, and career discussion groups are examples of belonging-oriented practices that can support students during uncertain times (Goodenow, 1993; Anozie et al., 2024). Since relatedness is a fundamental psychological need in SDT, building a sense of belonging among students can lead to lower amotivation and enhance their career decision-making engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Cordeiro et al., 2023). This inference is especially important for students that feel isolated, lack confidence, or feel disengaged in their academic and/or career journeys (Anozie et al., 2024; Mbanga et al., 2024).

A few cautions should be kept in mind. First, because of the cross-sectional design, the findings of this study do not allow for causal interpretation of the relationships found despite the presence of theoretically informed mediation model on the basis of SDT and career decision-making literature (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Gati et al., 1996). Longitudinal research is required to examine the predictive power of parenting styles and belongingness on later amotivation and later career decision-making difficulties on a longitudinal basis (Mbanga et al., 2024). Second, the study used self-report scales which can be more susceptible to response bias and shared method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2012). Validity could be further enhanced by future studies incorporating parent reports, teacher or counselor ratings, or behavioral measures of career exploration. Thirdly, the internal consistency for the amotivation subscale was modest and might be due to the small number of items. Future studies should employ wider instruments to measure academic amotivation or field-specific amotivation to gain more accuracy (Jung, 2013; Mbanga et al., 2024). Fourth, the study was carried out in a certain student context, which means that the replication of the study should be conducted across different levels of education, institutions, and cultural environments because the meaning and definition of the parenting phenomenon and career decision-making process may be different in various cultures (Sovet & Metz, 2014; Tian et al., 2021).

The study makes a contribution to literature despite these limitations of combining parenting styles, belongingness and amotivation in one explanatory model of career decision making difficulties. The results indicate that authoritarian and permissive parenting is linked to higher CDMD in part via increased amotivation and belongingness is linked to decreased CDMD in part via decreased amotivation. The results confirm the applicability of SCT to the understanding of college students' career decision making and underscore the significance of autonomy, structure, relatedness, and purpose in career counseling for college students (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Cordeiro et al., 2023; Mbanga et al., 2024).

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