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Career Exploration and Career Adaptation in Middle School Students: The Moderating Effect of Perceived Parental Expectations

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ABSTRACT

Good career adaptability is the bridge for students to enter the society successfully. In recent years, the employment situation is more and more severe, and the employment pressure continues to move to the middle school group, and the career adaptability of middle school students and its influencing factors have gradually become an important issue in career development. Therefore, this study focuses on the group of middle school students and discusses the influence of personal factors and family factors on their career adaptability. In order to explore the relationship between middle school students' career exploration and career adaptation, and the role of parents' expectation perception in it. In this study, Career Resilience Scale, Career Exploration Scale and Parents' Expectations perceived by Middle school students were adopted. A questionnaire survey was conducted among 340 non-graduating students from three middle schools in Beijing. SPSS 21.0, AMOS plug-in and Process plug-in were used to analyze the data. The results show that there are significant differences in perceived parental expectations by gender and school level. There is a significant positive correlation between perceived parental expectation and career exploration and career adaptation, and a significant negative correlation between career exploration and career adaptation. There is a significant correlation between the dimensions of middle school students' career exploration, perceived parents' expectations, career adaptability and their total scores, and perceived parents' expectations play a moderating role between middle school students' career exploration and career adaptability.

Keywords: Career exploration; Career adaptability; Perceiving parental expectations; Middle school student

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1. Introduction

In recent years, China's economy is developing rapidly and rapidly, and with the rapid transformation of the market, the employment mode is also undergoing profound changes, which leads to fierce competition for jobs, and the employment situation is becoming more and more severe. The middle school period is a critical period for career development. Teenagers at this stage not only have to face the adaptability of the transition period such as entrance examination and application for voluntary major, but also start to combine the current learning task with the ideal goal, explore the future development direction, and prepare for career development (Tang Qin et al., 2013). So how to improve the consciousness and ability of high school students' career planning is the key issue in the field of education. In 2019, The General Office of the State Council issued the Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Reform of Education methods in ordinary high schools in the New Era, which clearly pointed out that it was necessary to "strengthen guidance on students' ideals, psychology, study, life and career planning." Therefore, it is particularly important to explore the influencing factors of senior high school students' career adaptability.

1.1 Career exploration

In the research field of career exploration, different scholars have put forward their own distinctive theoretical viewpoints. As early as 1963, Jordaan emphasized the exploration of the individual's internal and external environment in order to achieve self-seeking career development^[1]. Blustein et al. (1997) further pointed out that career exploration is the pursuit process throughout an individual's career^[2]. Flum and Blustein adopted the theory of Stumpf et al., who explored the process of career exploration in depth and believed that the process involved extensive exploration and evaluation of internal attributes, external opportunities and constraints, which revealed the inner motivation of career exploration behavior from the perspective of identity and motivation^[3].

1.2 Career resilience

As the core ability of individuals to adapt to career changes, the concept of career resilience was first proposed

by Savickas in 1997, emphasizing the social psychological resources for self-adjustment required by individuals to cope with job tasks and role changes^[4]. With the deepening of research, Savickas further improved the theory of career adaptability in 2002, constructed the theory of career construction, and introduced a new dimension of "career confidence", thus expanding career adaptability into four dimensions^[5]. In 2005, as part of the career construction theory, Savickas redefined career resilience as "the psychosocial structure exhibited by individuals in coping with career development tasks, career transition preparations and resources", and constructed a more complete model of career resilience based on this definition^[6].

1.3 Perceiving parental expectations

Under the framework of career construction theory, family resources are regarded as an important background factor for individual development. Perception of parental expectations, as an individual's subjective cognition of parental expectations in family resources, has a profound impact on individual career development. This concept focuses on the subjective perception of parents' expectations, which more reflects the subjective interpretation of parents' expectations by children. Yu Hongfei (2017) and Wei Yicheng and Xu Fuzhen (2019) have discussed this issue in depth, arguing that the perception of parents' expectations is an individual's perception and understanding of parents' behaviors, attitudes, feelings and values^[7, 8]. This study also holds the same view, and believes that perceived parental expectations are an important perspective to understand individual career development.

1.4 Research on career exploration, perceived parental expectations and career adaptation

Relationship between career exploration and career adaptability

In reviewing previous studies, we found that career adaptability has a significant positive predictive effect on career exploration. The follow-up study by Hirschi, Herrmann and Keller (2015) further confirmed this point, and their research results showed that career adaptability can positively predict individuals' career exploration behaviors^[9].

In addition, the study of Judge and Kammeyer (2011) also shows that individuals who are confident in their ability to solve problems in their career development are more likely to exhibit more career exploration behaviors^[10].

The relationship between career exploration and perceived parental expectations

The study of Liu and McMahon (2015) reveals that parents' overemphasis on highly qualified occupations may lead to their children's unrealistic expectations for future work, which in turn affects their employment choices^[11]. On the other hand, Leung and Shek (2011) found that perceptions of parental expectations in a specific career field can predict career decision-making difficulties of college students. These studies all show that parents' expectations play an important role in their children's career choice and development^[12].

Perceiving the relationship between parental expectations and career resilience

Although relatively few studies have directly explored the relationship between perceived parental expectations and career resilience, studies have provided indirect clues. Chen Yufei et al. (2019) found that parental autonomy support has a significant positive predictive effect on the career adaptability of high school students, that is, when parents give their children more autonomy support, their level of career resilience is higher^[13]. The study of Yang Qiang et al. (2021) also shows that parental emotional warmth has a positive predictive effect on college students' career adaptability. These studies suggest that perceiving parental expectations, especially parental support and warmth, may promote the development of career resilience^[14].

2. Materials and methods

2.1 Subject

The subjects of this study were 351 middle school students in Beijing. After communicating with the head teacher of the school in advance, they entered the class to issue questionnaires, and a total of 345 questionnaires were collected. After the questionnaire screening, 5 incomplete questionnaires were excluded, and 340 effective questionnaires were obtained, with an effective rate of 98.55%. Among them, 172 were male, accounting for 50.6%; There are 168 female students, accounting for 49.4%. Only child 247, 69.7%; There

were 103 non-only children, accounting for 30.3%.

2.2 Method

In this study, two middle schools in Beijing were distributed with questionnaires, including Career Adaptability Scale, Career Exploration Scale and Parents' Expectation Questionnaire perceived by Middle school students. Students answered the questionnaires by themselves and collected the questionnaires after completing the questionnaires.

2.3 Survey tools

Career exploration scale

In this study, the Chinese version of Stumpf based Career Exploration Scale (Career Exploration Scale) revised by Xu Cun in 2008 was adopted^[15]. The scale consists of 18 items in 4 dimensions, including: environmental exploration (1–5), self-exploration (6–10), purpose-system exploration (11–14) and quantity of information (15–18). Using a 5-point Likert scale, 1 means "very little" and 5 means "very much." The higher the score, the higher the motivation to explore. The internal consistency reliability of the scale was 0.93.

Career resilience scale

This study adopts the Chinese version of Savickas career Resilience Scale revised by Chinese scholar Hou Zhijin et al.^[16]. The scale is composed of 24 items, including four dimensions of career concern, career control, career curiosity and career confidence. The scale is scored by Likert 5 points, and the higher the total score is, the higher the level of career adaptability. The internal consistency reliability of the scale was 0.89.

Perceive parental expectations scale

In this study, the perceived parental expectation questionnaire of middle school students^[17] revised by Jin Lu in 2014 was adopted. It contains 24 questions, including five dimensions of academic performance, moral performance, future achievement, interpersonal relationship, and physical and mental quality. The interpersonal dimension was deleted in this study. The scale was scored by Likert 5 points. Cronbach's α coefficient of four dimensions were: academic performance 0.765, moral performance 0.830, future achievement 0.845, and physical and mental quality 0.863. The Cronbach's α coefficient of the whole population is 0.875.

2.4 Statistical method

SPSS21.0 software and AMOS plug-in were used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to deal with the basic situation of each variable. Independent sample T test and single factor analysis of variance were used to deal with the differences of demographic variables. Pearson correlation analysis was used to analyze the correlation between variables. Multiple regression and AMOS and process were used to investigate the mediating effect, establish a standard mediating model, and test the model fit.

3. Results

3.1 Demographic variables are tested for differences in each variable

The differences of career exploration and dimensions, career adaptability and dimensions, perception of parents' expectations and dimensions were examined for students of different genders. The results are shown in **Table 1**. As for the career confidence dimension of the career adaptability questionnaire, the score of male students is significantly lower than that of female students ($t=-0.502, p=0.01$). The score of perceived conduct of parents' expectations questionnaire was significantly lower for boys than for girls ($t=-1.97, p=0.003$). In addition, there were no significant gender differences in other dimensions.

Table 1. Test the differences of different genders in each dimension.

Dimensionality	Male		Female		t
	M	SD	M	SD	
Environmental exploration	14.23	4.99	13.55	5.37	1.20
self-exploration	14.41	3.21	14.34	3.46	0.18
Objective exploration	15.24	5.02	15.19	5.01	0.08
Information exploration	12.79	3.98	12.51	4.06	0.65
Career concern	23.14	4.80	23.82	4.28	-1.39
Career curiosity	23.86	4.15	23.68	4.69	0.36
Career control	25.07	3.88	25.20	4.25	-0.31
Career confidence	24.36	3.89	24.58	4.50	-0.50**
School work	17.99	2.37	17.64	2.24	1.37
Moral performance	14.02	1.72	14.35	1.30	-1.97**
Future achievement	15.38	3.47	14.46	2.98	2.61
Physical and mental quality	31.92	3.66	31.92	3.66	-1.97
Career exploration	56.68	15.17	55.60	15.84	0.64
Career resilience	96.43	13.90	97.31	15.17	-0.55
Perceived parental expectations	105.43	10.44	104.60	9.56	0.76

Note: * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$.

The students who are the only child or not are explored in their career and tested the differences of various dimensions, self-clarity in future work and proactive personality. After testing, there is no significant difference in each variable whether it is the only child or not.

3.2 Correlation analysis of each variable

The correlation analysis of each variable is conducted, and the results in **Table 2** show that there is a significant correlation between career exploration, career adaptation and perceived parental expectations ($p<0.01$). There is a significant positive correlation among the three.

3.3 An examination of the moderating effects of perceived parental expectations

Model 1 in PROCESS 3.0 plug-in of SPSS 19.0 compiled by Hayes (2014) was used to test the adjustment effect. First, gender was used as the control variable (C), then career adaptation was used as the dependent variable (Y) and career exploration was used as the independent variable (X), and parental career support was divided into high and low groups with ± 1 standard deviation to investigate the moderating effect of perceived parental expectation (M) on career exploration (X) and career adaptation (Y). The adjustment model is shown in **Figure 1**.

Table 2. Correlation between the three variables and their dimensions.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1Environmental exploration	1														
2self-exploration	0.676**	1													
3Objective exploration	0.711**	0.726**	1												
4Information exploration	0.684**	0.678**	0.724**	1											
5Career concern	0.298**	0.493**	0.376**	0.385**	1										
6Career curiosity	0.231**	0.440**	0.381**	0.296**	0.657**	1									
7Career control	0.134*	0.287**	0.232**	0.164**	0.529**	0.609**	1								
8Career confidence	0.151**	0.274**	0.253**	0.209**	0.540**	0.658**	0.689**	1							
9School work	0.102	0.086	0.09	0.09	.120*	0.174**	0.081	0.110*	1						
10Moral performance	0.204**	0.137*	0.240**	0.165**	0.140**	0.217**	0.148**	0.122*	0.547**	1					
11Future achievement	-0.002	0.092	0.051	-0.001	0.222**	0.227**	0.247**	0.200**	0.276**	0.139*	1				
12Physical and mental quality	0.037	0.157**	0.115*	0.055	0.338**	0.283**	0.369**	0.314**	0.184**	0.137*	0.488**	1			
13Career exploration	0.888**	0.853**	0.906**	0.869**	0.427**	0.372**	0.224**	0.245**	0.105	0.218**	0.035	0.098	1		
14Career resilience	0.245**	0.448**	0.372**	0.317**	0.818**	0.871**	0.830**	0.852**	0.145**	0.186**	0.266**	0.386**	0.381**	1	
15Perceived parental expectations	0.096	0.153**	0.169**	0.119*	0.325**	0.318**	0.361**	0.309**	0.556**	0.536**	0.585**	0.699**	0.151**	0.389**	1

Note: *p<0.05, **p<0.01.

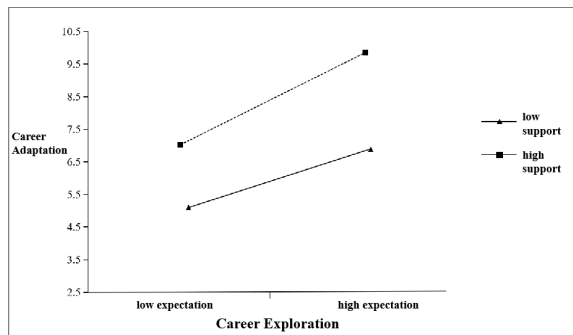


Figure 1. Structural equation model.

The results of moderating analysis showed that the interaction between perceived parental expectation and career exploration was significant ($\beta=0.206, p=0.001, CI[0.085, 0.327]$), and parental career support played a moderating effect in the pathway. The higher the level of parental career support, the more the positive predictive effect of perceived parental expectation on career adaptability.

4. Discussion

4.1 The differences of demographic variables in various indicators

The survey found that in the four dimensions of career exploration, there was no significant difference between men and women. In the four dimensions of career adaptability, except for the dimension of career confidence, girls are significantly higher than boys, and there is no significant difference in other dimensions. Boys in middle school are less confident than girls about their future career choices and have more doubts about their ability to solve career problems.

In the scores of perceived parental expectation and its four dimensions, there is no significant difference between

boys and girls except for the character dimension. It can be seen that boys are more likely than girls to be influenced by their parents' expectations in their behavior.

4.2 The relationship between career exploration, perceived parental expectations, and career adaptation

There is a significant positive correlation between all dimensions of career exploration except environment dimension and perceived parental expectation, that is, the higher the score of career exploration, the higher the score of perceived parental expectation. There is a significant positive correlation between perceived parental expectations and career adaptation and its dimensions, that is, perceived parental expectations can positively predict career adaptation. Career exploration and all dimensions of career exploration have significant positive correlation with career adaptability and its dimensions, that is, the higher the score of career exploration, the higher the degree of career adaptability.

4.3 The moderating effect of perceived parental expectations on the relationship between career exploration and career adaptation

The results show that perceived parental expectations have a significant moderating effect on career exploration and career adaptation. High perceived parental expectations can enhance the relationship between career exploration and career adaptation in middle school students. In the middle school stage, teenagers are easily affected by the family environment. Middle school students with high perception of parents' expectations may be more willing and active to carry out some future planning and exploration in order to meet

their parents' expectations and expectations, thus affecting and enhancing their career adaptability. Therefore, parental expectation has an important effect on individual's career adaptability.

5. Conclusions

Through the research on the relationship between middle school students' career exploration, perception of parents' expectations and career adaptability, this paper draws the following conclusions:

(1) Career exploration of middle school students has a significant positive predictive effect on career adaptability.

(2) Middle school students' perception of parents' expectations has a significant positive predictive effect on career adaptability.

(3) Middle school students' perception of parents' expectation plays a moderating role between career exploration and career adaptability.

Author Contributions

Tianlin Liu: Responsible for literature review, data collection, data analysis and thesis writing. Junqing Yue: Responsible for data collection. Zeren Liang: Responsible for data collection and data analysis. Shixiang Liu: Responsible for overall design and thesis writing.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement

In the data availability statement, authors should provide information about the availability of data and materials used in the study. It should include details about how and where to access the data, including any restrictions on access or use. The statement should be clear and concise, and should provide sufficient information for others to access and use the data. If the data is not publicly available, authors should explain why and describe any conditions or limitations on access.

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