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Self-determined motivation to choose college majors, its antecedents, and outcomes: A cross-cultural investigation

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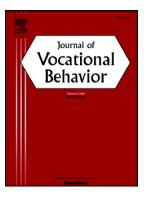
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Self-determined motivation to choose college majors, its antecedents, and outcomes: A cross-cultural investigation

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#### **Abstract**

The choice of college majors is an important career decision for many contemporary youths. Based on self-determination theory, we propose that the self-determined motivation underlying youths' choice of major is critical for their optimal functioning, performance and well-being in college. We also propose that the effects of a self-determined choice of major is mediated by the self-determined motivation to study and that the self-determined choice of major is predicted by autonomy-supportive parenting and individual differences in autonomous functioning. Structural equation modeling results obtained from college students in two studies (*N* = 146 and 479) showed that (1) these hypotheses were supported using both cross-sectional and longitudinal designs and subjective and objective measures; (2) these structural relationships received support and were invariant for both Chinese and American students; (3) Chinese students scored significantly lower on various variables related to self-determination than American students; and (4) several direct predictive effects were also identified beyond the model we proposed. We suggest that future studies could improve the psychometric quality of measurements, conduct in-depth cross-cultural comparisons, and expand the current model with additional variables. Implications for parenting and career counseling practices are also discussed.

#### **Keywords**

self-determination theory; college majors; academic motivation; parental autonomy support; autonomous functioning

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