Positive Affect and Career Decision-Making: The Moderating Role of Interpersonal Spin

In-Jo Park, Shenyang Hai, Jos Akkermans, and Marijke Verbruggen

We investigated the moderating role of interpersonal spin in the relationships between positive affect, career decision self-efficacy (CDSE), and career indecision among young adults (16 women, 79 men). Interpersonal spin was calculated using the diary method, wherein students reported their daily interpersonal behaviors for 14 consecutive days. Results indicated that positive affect was positively associated with CDSE and negatively associated with career indecision. Interpersonal spin diminished the positive relationship between positive affect and CDSE and the negative relationship between positive affect and career indecision. Our findings extend prior studies by uncovering the influence of positive affect and behavioral stability, including interpersonal spin, on the career decision process. Counselors are encouraged to foster individuals' positive affect and reduce their interpersonal spin to obtain positive career outcomes, such as high CDSE and low career indecision.

Keywords: positive affect, interpersonal spin, career decision self-efficacy, career indecision, young adults

Career decision-making remains among one of the most important processes in which young adults must engage (Creed et al., 2006; Fouad, 2007). Early career decisions, such as what educational path to pursue and what kind of jobs to apply for, have a significant and often long-term impact on young adults' career success, subsequent career opportunities, social network, and sense of identity (Verbruggen & De Vos, 2020). However, early career decision-making has become more challenging than ever because of the increasing demands on individual agency (Akkermans & Tims, 2017). Indeed, career decision-making is a complex process involving information search and career exploration, as well as evaluating and choosing among multiple career options (Burns et al., 2013). As such, making a career decision is highly challenging, and not all young adults are equally able to address the career decision process confidently and successfully (Santos et al., 2018). Young adults may lack the confidence and self-efficacy to take the necessary actions (e.g., gathering and processing information about the self and the environment; Santos et al., 2018) or may feel overwhelmed, potentially leading to

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career indecision (van Vianen et al., 2009). Given the importance of early career decisions, it is therefore critical to understand how young adults can be supported in these decisions, as well as their confidence to make them.

Positive affect is an important facilitator of decision-making in general (Isen & Means, 1983) and of career decisions in particular (Farnia et al., 2018; Park et al., 2019), although not all studies have supported positive affect in this way (e.g., Rottinghaus et al., 2009). These inconsistent findings suggest that boundary conditions may be at play in the relationship between positive affect and career decisions. Specifically, scholars have suggested that the career decision-making process is simultaneously influenced by affect and behaviors (Germeijs & De Boeck, 2003; Lent et al., 2008). However, little is known about how such an interaction would have an impact on this process. Therefore, we theorize and empirically test the interaction between positive affect and interpersonal spin as antecedents of career decision self-efficacy (CDSE) and career indecision. Interpersonal spin refers to the magnitude of dispersion (i.e., the degree of variability) in an individual's interpersonal behaviors over time and across situations (Côté et al., 2012; Moskowitz & Zuroff, 2004). We argue that interpersonal spin acts as a moderator in the positive affect–career decision relationship because high levels of interpersonal spin imply that the individual is unfocused and highly variable in the things they do, which leads other people to avoid them (Côté et al., 2012). Hence, a high level of variability in behaviors may mitigate the effect of positive affect on career decision-making. That is, interpersonal spin may diminish the role of positive affect in promoting CDSE and reducing career indecision. This would be especially problematic for young adults who are still forming their vocational identities and often lack established social networks (e.g., De Vos et al., 2019; Ng & Feldman, 2007).

Our study examines the factors that are major determinants in the career decision process. First, we explore the interactive relationship of affect and behavior in the career decision process. Although they both have been emphasized as critical antecedents of career decision (Lent et al., 2008), their joint effects have rarely been studied. In particular, we examine whether high interpersonal spin weakens the role of positive affect in CDSE and career indecision. Second, we study both positive (i.e., positive affect and self-efficacy) and negative (i.e., interpersonal spin and indecision) aspects of the career decision process. We thereby respond to calls to examine the "dark side" (Akkermans & Kubasch, 2017, p. 605) of career development. Third, we aim to bridge the disciplines of applied psychology and career development that have been largely isolated from each other (Fouad & Kozlowski, 2019) by examining the influence of affect and behavior on career decision-making.

Positive Affect and Career Decision-Making

Fredrickson's (2001, 2003) broaden-and-build theory argues that positive emotions broaden individuals' momentary thought-action repertoires and help individuals build psychological, cognitive, and social resources. Specifically, positive affect fosters individual growth through information and experience seeking, as well as learning and developing

new skills (Demerouti et al., 2010). Therefore, the broaden-and-build theory helps one understand how positive affect can enhance CDSE and reduce career indecision by providing individuals with the necessary resources to make career decisions.

Empirical studies have supported the theory's underlying assumptions and the critical role of positive affect (Fredrickson, 2013). More generally, empirical evidence supports the theoretical expectation that positive affect enhances career decisions. For example, Hammond et al. (2010) found that positive affect was closely associated with both career-related self-efficacy and career indecision. Similarly, affective factors have been found to have an impact on CDSE (e.g., Gati et al., 2011; Hartung, 2010). Park et al. (2019) empirically demonstrated that young adults' positive affect enhanced their confidence in career decisions and CDSE.

Although empirical evidence for the positive affect—career indecision relationship is less direct, there are indications that experiencing positive affect diminishes indecision. For example, Farnia et al. (2018) found that positive affect mediated the relationship between emotional intelligence and career decision-making difficulties in a sample of undergraduate students. Furthermore, in a longitudinal study by Haase et al. (2012), young adults with high positive affect had more control in reaching their goals and reported enhanced control beliefs and success expectations. Additionally, Côté et al. (2006) reported that job seekers with high positive affect achieved higher clarity in their job search and found a job successfully because they were optimistic and concentrated more on positive information. On the basis of the broaden-and-build theory and prior empirical evidence, we made the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Positive affect is (a) positively related to CDSE and (b) negatively related to career indecision.

The Moderating Role of Interpersonal Spin

Interpersonal spin refers to the extent of dispersion in interpersonal behaviors across situations and over time (Moskowitz & Zuroff, 2004). Individuals with high interpersonal spin report a wider range of such dispersion. For example, they may engage in agreeable behavior (e.g., smiling and laughing with others) in a first interaction, submissive behavior (e.g., avoiding responsibility) in a second interaction, and dominant behavior (e.g., criticizing others) in a third interaction. Such behavioral variability can lead to an unpredictable behavioral pattern that distracts them from goal-oriented behavior (Sadikaj et al., 2015) and increases difficulties in career decision-making. Interpersonal spin—one of the most representative forms of intraindividual variability in interpersonal behavior—has mainly been studied as a negative influence on the quality of social relationships (Côté et al., 2012; Sadikaj et al., 2015).

Previous research on interpersonal spin has generally focused on interpersonal behaviors described by the interpersonal circumplex model (Sadikaj et al., 2015). According to this model, interpersonal behavior can be depicted as a circle defined by two orthogonal dimensions: agency and communion. Agentic behaviors range from assertive-dominant to unassertive-submissive and represent acts to assert one's status relative to others. Communal behaviors range from warm-agreeable to cold-

quarrelsome and reflect acts that foster or inhibit interpersonal ties. We focused particularly on interpersonal behaviors because they are critical in work and career behaviors (Nauta et al., 2001; Tims et al., 2015). For example, high-quality relationships with families, friends, and teachers can enhance young adults' confidence to pursue career goals (Garcia et al., 2015; Vertsberger & Gati, 2016). Young adults are prone to seek help from sources of support that are easily accessible during their career decision process (Vertsberger & Gati, 2016).

Interpersonal spin is a stable and distinctive feature describing behavioral patterns during social interactions, and it constitutes a meaningful variable to characterize individuals across societies (Moskowitz & Zuroff, 2004). Previous studies have reported that high interpersonal spin is related to various unfavorable outcomes, such as neuroticism (Moskowitz & Zuroff, 2004), anxiety symptoms (Rappaport et al., 2014), and interpersonal problems (Foltz et al., 1999). People with high interpersonal spin tend to change their interpersonal behaviors frequently, and such unstable behavioral patterns may subsequently hinder dedicated goal-oriented behaviors and cause distant social relationships, potentially leading to decreased progress in career decisions (Côté et al., 2012).

We argue that high interpersonal spin can act as a boundary condition in the positive affect–career decision-making relationship by undermining the career decision process. The broaden-and-build theory (Frederickson, 2001, 2003) states that positive affect allows individuals to form close interpersonal relations, demonstrate cooperative interpersonal tactics, and reduce interpersonal conflict (Barsade et al., 2000). Because people with high interpersonal spin tend to be avoided by others due to their unpredictable behavior, this will likely undermine the process of positive affect, leading to lower CDSE and higher career indecision. In terms of the broaden-and-build theory, interpersonal spin likely diminishes the resource-building process that positive affect initiates, thereby undermining the career decision process. Furthermore, individuals with high behavioral variability may need to invest more energy and effort in their career decisions and ultimately end up being fatigued and distracted. Thus, high interpersonal spin may interfere with the positive relationship between positive affect and career decision because of the increased energy and effort required to manage the process, which further drains them of their resources (i.e., positive affect).

Although direct empirical evidence for the moderating role of interpersonal spin is lacking, there are indirect indications that it may influence the positive affect and career decision-making relationship. For example, individuals with high interpersonal spin tend to be more neurotic (Moskowitz & Zuroff, 2004) and anxious (Rappaport et al., 2014), factors likely to decrease CDSE and increase career indecision (Gati et al., 2011). Similarly, individuals with high interpersonal spin tend to have more distant social relationships, thus likely isolating themselves from others (Côté et al., 2012). Even though young adults with high positive affect may seek advice and information from others in the process of career decision-making, they will be less likely to get useful help if they are high in interpersonal spin because others will tend to avoid them. Interpersonal spin can cause people to be less confident and decisive, thereby hindering the resource-building process formulated

by the broaden-and-build theory. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2a: Interpersonal spin moderates the positive relationship between positive affect and CDSE such that the relationship is weaker in individuals with high interpersonal spin than those with low interpersonal spin.

Hypothesis 2b: Interpersonal spin moderates the negative relationship between positive affect and career indecision such that the relationship is weaker in individuals with high interpersonal spin than those with low interpersonal spin.

Method

Participants and Procedure

We were primarily interested in the career decision-making process of young adults preparing to transition into working life. Therefore, participants were 105 undergraduate students enrolled in psychology courses at a large urban public university in South Korea. All participants were Koreans. They received course credits if they participated in the baseline survey and rated their daily interpersonal behaviors for 14 consecutive days. We chose this particular time frame because previous research (Timmermans et al., 2010) has demonstrated the reliability and validity of assessing individual behavioral variability over a 14-day period. Ten participants did not complete the daily survey, which led to a final sample of 95 students (79 men, 16 women) with a mean age of 22.23 years (SD = 2.25, range = 20–29). Most participants were freshmen (n = 35) or sophomores (n = 42), with fewer juniors (n = 2) and seniors (n = 16).

Participants were informed about the research purpose and the procedure during a psychology class, and they were instructed about how to rate their interpersonal behaviors. For 14 consecutive days, they received text messages at 7 p.m. that contained a web address for an online survey. Participants were asked to use their smartphone or computer to report on their daily interpersonal behaviors of interacting with others. On the first day of reporting their interpersonal behaviors, they were also asked to evaluate their positive affect, CDSE, and career indecision. All participants voluntarily took part in this study.

Measures

Positive affect. We used eight words from the Core Affect Scale (Kuppens et al., 2007) to measure positive affect. The eight words included "enthusiastic," "happy," "proud," "excited," "satisfied," "calm," "peaceful," and "relaxed." Participants were asked to rate the words on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much). Higher values indicate higher positive affect. In this study, Cronbach's alpha was .90.

Interpersonal spin. We used the Social Behavior Inventory (Moskowitz, 1994) to measure interpersonal spin. The inventory comprises 12 behavior items measuring each of the four poles of the interpersonal circle: quarrelsome, dominant, agreeable, and submissive. Example items included "I made a sarcastic comment" (quarrelsome), "I made a suggestion"

(dominance), "I smiled and laughed with others" (agreeable), and "I gave in" (submissive). Respondents indicate the frequency of engaging in these behaviors on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*always*). Cronbach's alpha was .74, .65, .85, and .59, respectively, for quarrelsome, dominance, agreeable, and submissive, indicating acceptable reliability (Timmermans et al., 2010).

We calculated interpersonal spin following the procedure used in Moskowitz and Zuroff (2004). First, we calculated scores for each behavioral scale by averaging scale items. Then, a communal behavior score was calculated by subtracting quarrelsome behavior scores from agreeable behavior scores, and an agentic behavior score was calculated by subtracting submissive behavior scores from dominant behavior scores. The communal and agentic scores for each event were treated as Cartesian coordinates (x, y) and were transformed to polar coordinates (r, θ) , where θ was expressed in radians. Conceptually, spin is the standard deviation of θ . The means and standard deviations of θ were calculated by using Mardia's (1972) formula for the circular standard deviation (Moskowitz & Zuroff, 2004). High spin scores indicate a higher magnitude of scatter in interpersonal behaviors over time.

CDSE. We assessed CDSE with the short 25-item version of the Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale (Betz et al., 1996). Respondents are asked to rate how much confidence they feel in performing career-related tasks on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (no confidence at all) to 5 (complete confidence). A sample item is "Persistently work at your career goal, even when you get frustrated." Cronbach's alpha in the present study was .95.

Career indecision. We assessed career indecision with the 18-item Career Decision Scale (Osipow et al., 1987). A sample item is "There are several professions I am equally interested in and I am having a really hard time choosing among them." Responses are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all like me) to 5 (exactly like me). Higher scores indicate greater levels of indecision. In this study, Cronbach's alpha was .95.

Data Analysis

First, we ran a post hoc power analysis (Faul et al., 2007), which revealed that the sample size (N = 95), with a medium effect size of .15 and alpha level of .05, yielded a statistical power of .88. Therefore, our study had a sufficient sample size to obtain adequate power for a multiple regression analysis. We then conducted multiple regression analysis to examine the hypotheses (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). In Step 1, we entered age, gender, and grade (i.e., year in school) as control variables. Positive affect and interpersonal spin were entered in Step 2. In Step 3, the product of positive affect and interpersonal spin was entered. We applied mean-centered variables for positive affect and interpersonal spin to avoid multicollinearity effects (Jaccard et al., 1990).

Results

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and correlations for the study variables. All variables were significantly correlated in the expected

TABLE 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations
Among Study Variables

Variable	М	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Age	22.16	2.25	_						
2. Gender ^a	1.16	0.37	09	_					
3. Grade ^b	1.98	1.05	.86**	.03					
Positive affect	3.59	0.71	08	01	19	_			
5. Interpersonal spin	0.69	0.50	15	.20*	19	27**			
6. CDSE	3.51	0.57	01	.00	11	.60**	21*	_	
7. CI	2.72	0.59	11	.20*	03	50**	.36**	61**	_

Note. CDSE = career decision self-efficacy; CI = career indecision.

direction. Table 2 shows results of the multiple regression analyses. Hypothesis 1 proposed that positive affect would be (a) positively related to CDSE and (b) negatively related to career indecision. Results indicated that positive affect, interpersonal spin, and the interaction of positive affect and interpersonal spin in Model 1.2 explained 36% of the variance in CDSE (p < .001). Positive affect was positively related to CDSE ($\beta = .57$, p < .001), which supported Hypothesis 1a. Results also indicated that positive affect, interpersonal spin, and the interaction of positive affect and interpersonal spin in Model 2.2 explained 35% variance for career indecision (p < .001). Positive affect was negatively related to career indecision (p < .001). Positive affect was negatively related to career indecision (p < .001), which confirmed Hypothesis 1b.

TABLE 2
Results of Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting
Career Decision Self-Efficacy and Career Indecision

	C	DSE (Mode	l 1)	CI (Model 2)			
Step	1	2	3	1	2	3	
Step 1							
Age	.31	.17	.10	23	14	03	
Gender	.03	.04	.06	.20	.16	.13	
Grade	34	14	07	.12	.10	10	
Step 2							
Positive affect (A)		.57***	.61***		45***	51***	
Interpersonal spin (B)		07	08		.19	.21	
Step 3							
$A \times B$			18 [*]			.28**	
R^2	.03	.36	.39	.07	.35	.41	
Adjusted R ²	.00	.33	.35	.04	.31	.37	
ΔR^2	.03	.33	.03	.07	.27	.07	
F	0.93	10.19***	9.53***	2.32	9.36***	10.38***	
F change ^a	0.93	23.40***	4.32*	2.32	18.57***	10.48**	

Note. Standardized coefficients are presented in the columns for Step 1 to Step 3. CDSE = career decision self-efficacy; CI = career indecision.

^a1 = male; 2 = female. ^b1 = freshman; 2 = sophomore; 3 = junior; 4 = senior.

^{*}p < .05. **p < .01.

^aF change reports changes from the prior model.

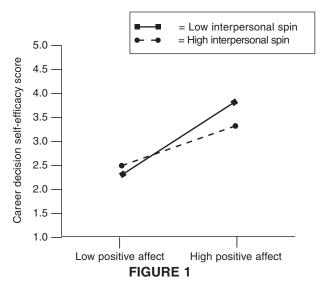
^{*}p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Hypothesis 2a proposed that interpersonal spin would moderate the positive relationship between positive affect and CDSE, such that the relationship would be weaker in individuals with higher interpersonal spin. Results indicated that interpersonal spin indeed moderated this relationship ($\beta = -.18$, p < .05, Model 1.3), thus confirming Hypothesis 2a. We then conducted a simple slopes analysis to verify the results (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). When interpersonal spin was higher, the association between positive affect and CDSE was weaker (B = 0.33, SE = 0.13, p = .014), and when interpersonal spin was lower, the association was stronger (B = 0.76, SE = 0.11, p < .001; see Figure 1).

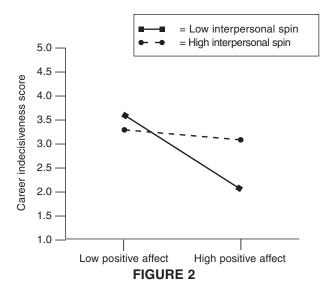
Hypothesis 2b proposed that interpersonal spin would moderate the negative relationship between positive affect and career indecision, such that the relationship would be weaker in individuals with higher interpersonal spin. Results indicated that interpersonal spin acted as a moderator in this relationship (β = .28, p < .01, Model 2.3), thus confirming Hypothesis 2b. The simple slopes analysis revealed that when interpersonal spin was higher, the relationship between positive affect and career indecision was weaker and nonsignificant (B = -0.05, SE = 0.11, p = .66), and when interpersonal spin was lower, the relationship was stronger and significant (B = -0.79, SE = 0.18, p < .001; see Figure 2).

Discussion

We examined the interaction between positive affect and interpersonal spin and its impact on CDSE and career indecision among young adults preparing for the transition to work. Following the broaden-and-build theory (Frederickson, 2001, 2003), we hypothesized that individuals high in interpersonal spin—characterized by a wide range of behaviors over time—would be less effective in using their positive affect to enhance



Relationship Between Positive Affect and Career Decision Self-Efficacy Moderated by Interpersonal Spin



Relationship Between Positive Affect and Career Indecisiveness Moderated by Interpersonal Spin

CDSE and reduce career indecision. In line with our expectations, positive affect was positively related to CDSE and negatively related to career indecision. Moreover, interpersonal spin moderated these relationships. Specifically, positive affect was strongly positively related to CDSE and negatively related to career indecision when interpersonal spin was low, but these relationships were weaker when interpersonal spin was high. In line with the broaden-and-build theory, these findings imply that young adults can capitalize on their positive affect to build resources and gain self-efficacy in their career decisions when they show stable behavioral patterns. Furthermore, their positive affect can only serve to diminish career indecision if they show stable behavioral patterns, likely because being high in interpersonal spin means that they will have difficulty building networks and generating support due to their unpredictable behavior.

Theoretical Implications

Our first theoretical contribution relates to the interplay between affective and behavioral factors as antecedents of the career decision process. With regard to positive affect, in line with the principles of the broaden-and-build theory (Frederickson, 2001, 2003) and prior empirical research, we found support for the positive role of positive affect in enhancing CDSE and diminishing career indecision among young adults (Hirschi & Freund, 2014). We also found support for the interaction of positive affect and interpersonal spin, a behavioral measure that indicates the variability in a person's behavior over time. Specifically, our findings show that young adults with high levels of interpersonal spin have a reduced ability to use their positive affect to increase their CDSE and diminish their career indecision. Although one's affect and behavior

have both been considered key factors in the career decision process (e.g., Lent et al., 2008), there has been limited research investigating their interactive effects. Our study provides empirical support for this interaction. These results extend previous research on intraindividual variability and interpersonal behaviors by demonstrating that the negative outcomes of interpersonal spin can occur early in the career decision-making process.

As a second theoretical contribution, our study builds on critiques that previous research has mainly concentrated on the positive aspects of the career decision process (e.g., Choi et al., 2012), and we address calls for more research investigating the dark side of career development (Akkermans & Kubasch, 2017). Specifically, our study shows that interpersonal spin can act as an undermining factor in the career decision process, diminishing young adults' ability to mobilize their positive emotions into effective career decision-making. This finding implies that high behavioral variability is a risk factor that can undermine early career decision-making in terms of indecision and low self-efficacy.

Finally, our third contribution is that this study bridges the disciplines of applied psychology and vocational psychology. Fouad and Kozlowski (2019) argued that these fields still barely connect with each other 20 years after the enormous separation between the two fields was first observed. Our study brought in the interplay between affect and behavior, as well as the broaden-and-build theory—hallmarks of applied psychology research—and examined their role in early career decisions—hallmarks of vocational psychology research. In doing so, although previous studies have demonstrated that interpersonal spin is closely associated with poor social outcomes (e.g., Côté et al., 2012; Sadikaj et al., 2015), to our knowledge, this is the first study to investigate the interplay between positive affect and interpersonal spin and its role in the career decision process.

Practical Implications

Our results confirm that positive affect is an important predictor of career decision-making among young adults, thus underscoring that counselors need to prioritize positive emotions as a key foundation for effective early career decision-making. Positive affect can help young adults broaden their knowledge, skills, thinking patterns, and social networks (Fredrickson, 2003) and help them make career decisions confidently and effectively. As examples of possible activities to achieve such positive emotions, counselors could use insights from positive psychology—where the broaden-and-build theory (Frederickson, 2001) originated—to help clients focus on their strengths and unique contributions to become more confident and less worried about their career decisions. Asking students to conduct strengths identification analysis and review they memory of accomplishments may enhance positive affect, leading to higher levels of self-efficacy and lower levels of inaction related to their career decisions.

Our findings suggest that young adults preparing to enter the labor market should strive for a certain degree of behavioral stability, as this will help them to use their positive emotions to build a strong resource pool and ultimately enhance their career decisions. Despite reporting high positive affect, if young adults frequently change their interpersonal behaviors across situations and over time, they may show lower levels of CDSE and higher levels of career indecision as compared with those with stable interpersonal behavior styles. Therefore, it is important for young adults to strive for a lower interpersonal spin, because interpersonal spin is closely related to poor interpersonal problems and decreased goal-oriented behavior (Sadikaj et al., 2015), which may reduce the positive influence of positive affect on career decision. Counselors may need to consider developing programs to reduce interpersonal spin in young adults, such as interventions aimed at increasing interpersonal emotion regulation (Madrid et al., 2019). Furthermore, given that social support plays a critical role in early career decision-making (Li et al., 2017), and because this likely supports the social resource—building process among young adults, career counseling programs might consider incorporating this element.

Limitations and Future Directions

Our study used a cross-sectional survey to assess positive affect, CDSE, and career indecision; therefore, it is difficult to make inferences regarding causal directions. Future research could adopt longitudinal or experimental designs to provide evidence of causal relationships for our theoretical model. In addition, affective factors such as positive affect may vary over time (Hartung, 2011). It would be interesting to investigate positive affect day to day and its impact on career-related variables, such as career satisfaction, that also vary daily. Furthermore, the present study used self-reports to evaluate daily interpersonal behaviors. Future research could use other observational methods to assess interpersonal spin and replicate the present findings (Sadikaj et al., 2015). Finally, the sample included more young men than young women because the participants were enrolled in psychology courses that consisted of more men than women. Future studies using a more balanced gender distribution could improve the generalizability of results.

Conclusion

The present study helps clarify the relationships among affect, interpersonal spin, and career decision-making in young adults by using an experience sampling method. The findings indicate that positive affect can predict CDSE and career indecision, and interpersonal spin can moderate the relationship between positive affect and CDSE and career indecision. Individuals can attain positive career outcomes such as high CDSE and low career indecision, thereby experiencing positive affect and sustaining behavioral stability.

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