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THE EFFECT OF MORAL PERFECTIONISM AND MORAL IDENTITY ON DESIRABLE SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AND THE SUCCESS OF SCHOOL SPORTS-ATHLETES

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Wpływ moralnego perfekcjonizmu i tożsamości moralnej na pożądane zachowania społeczne i sukces sportowców szkolnych

Streszczenie

Celem analizy było zbadanie wpływu moralnego perfekcjonizmu i tożsamości moralnej na pożądane zachowania społeczne oraz sukces sportowców szkolnych w Iranie. Badanie miało charak-

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ter stosowany i opisowy. Dane statystyczne zebrano od mężczyzn ($n=536$) i kobiet ($n=456$) sportowców-uczniów w Iranie. Narzędzia pomiarowe były standardowymi kwestionariuszami, których ważność określono za pomocą kryteriów diagnostycznych, zbieżnych i rozbieżnych. Rzetelność kwestionariuszy dotyczących moralnego perfekcjonizmu, tożsamości moralnej, pożądanych zachowań społecznych i sukcesu sportowego określono za pomocą współczynnika alfa Cronbacha, wynoszącego odpowiednio 0,74, 0,81, 0,85 i 0,71, co wskazuje na dobrą rzetelność. Wyniki badania wykazały, że moralny perfekcjonizm ma znaczący wpływ na pożądane zachowania ($\beta = 0,34$; $p < 0,001$), wpływa on także na sukces sportowy ($\beta = 0,45$; $p < 0,001$). Z drugiej strony, tożsamość moralna wpływa na pożądane zachowania społeczne ($\beta = 0,77$; $p < 0,001$) oraz na sukces sportowy ($\beta = 0,50$; $p < 0,001$). W związku z tym można stwierdzić, że osiągnięcie pożądanych zachowań społecznych i sukcesu w sporcie wymaga połączenia osobistego wysiłku, silnego charakteru moralnego i głębokiego zrozumienia zasad moralnego perfekcjonizmu i tożsamości moralnej.

Słowa kluczowe: zasady moralne, tożsamość indywidualna, wyniki sportowe, kultura sportowa.

Abstract

The purpose of this research was to examine the effect of moral perfectionism and moral identity on desirable social behaviour and the success of school sports athletes in Iran. The research study used an applied and descriptive survey design. Statistical data was collected from male ($n=536$) and female ($n=456$) student-athletes in Iran. The measurement tools were standard questionnaires, whose validity was determined using diagnostic, convergent and divergent validity criteria. The reliability of moral perfectionism, moral identity, desirable social behaviour, and sports success questionnaires was determined using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, reporting 0.74, 0.81, 0.85 and 0.71 respectively, showing good reliability. The findings of the research showed that moral perfectionism has a significant effect on desirable behaviour ($\beta = 0.34$; $p < 0.001$), it also impacts sports success ($\beta = 0.45$; $p < 0.001$), whereas moral identity influences desirable social behaviour ($\beta = 0.77$; $p < 0.001$), and sports success ($\beta = 0.50$; $p < 0.001$). Therefore, it can be concluded that achieving desirable social behavior and success in sports requires a combination of personal effort, a strong moral character, and a deep understanding of the principles of moral perfectionism and moral identity.

Keywords: moral principles, individual identity, sports performance, sports culture.

Introduction

Moral perfectionism is a concept that originates from the concept of perfectionism in psychology. Perfectionism is characterized by setting very high standards, with a strong awareness and concern for potential mistakes and any form of negative criticism from others (Hewitt et al., 2017). Perfectionism is a type of personality tendency that includes two dimensions: personal standards and value concerns (Dunn et al., 2005). Having high perfectionism and using high-level standards can lead to success in life (Wang & Li, 2017). Adaptability and success require setting performance goals, managing emotions, and managing dysfunctional cognitions. These factors are essential for superior performance and success in sports (Mosewich et al., 2013).

Perfectionism is often seen in competitive athletes and can negatively impact their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral performance. While many sports psychologists view perfectionism as a key trait of successful athletes, it can also cause high pressure, anxiety, and decreased performance. Therefore, balancing and managing perfectionism is crucial for improving performance and enjoying sports (Frost et al., 1993). This trait in top athletes aligns with the normal, compromised, and positive aspects of perfectionism (Harris et al., 2008). According to Zeng et al. (2020), perfectionism is recognized as a healthy and natural trait in many athletes. This characteristic drives them towards continuous improvement in their performance and striving to achieve higher goals. Healthy perfectionism enables athletes to focus meticulously on details and learn from their mistakes without being subjected to excessive pressure or causing themselves psychological harm. In this context, perfectionism acts as a positive motivator for progress and success. Athletes in this structure shift their focus from aggressive behaviour and anger to persistence and effort. They focus less on the worrisome aspects and more on the logical aspects of sports situations.

Research has shown that perfectionistic tendencies and strivings are often adaptive and rarely maladaptive for athletes, especially when setting personal performance standards. Consequently, the key point is that perfectionism is widely recognized as a natural and healthy trait in many athletes. Contrary to theories that may view perfectionism as a maladaptive characteristic, research indicates that perfectionism can serve as a positive motivator for progress and performance improvement in athletes, provided that this trait is applied in a healthy manner and with consideration of optimal individual performance standards. (Gotwals et al., 2012). Moral identity is an integrated concept of self and moral principles (Frimer & Walker, 2009). Aquino et al. (2009) defined moral identity as a reflection on self-knowledge and perception that focuses on several moral qualities and principles, such as kindness, justice, and generosity. From the socio-cognitive perspective, moral identity may require having a moral schema, a structure of subjective knowledge activated by environmental influences (Hardy et al., 2015). Moral identity is associated with concern about moral wrongdoing, is typically associated with moral values and judgments (Stoeber & Yang, 2016). People with high levels of moral perfectionism and high moral values are likely to have higher moral identity. In other words, people who actively seek moral excellence and have determined value principles for themselves may appear as more prominent and influential moral agents in their choices and behaviours. These people may benefit from commitment and adherence to ethical principles in their communication in different situations and be considered as a moral role model for others (Ring et al., 2019), as a result of feeling they have a duty to uphold their moral standards. Therefore, we can conclude that moral perfectionism and moral identity are interrelated and complementing (Zeng et al., 2020).

Moral identity may have a direct effect as well as an additive interaction effect with other social cognitions (Gino et al. , 2011). Hardy et al. (2015) confirmed the mediating role of moral identity in the relationship between self-regulation and desirable social behaviour and stated that moral identity has sufficient motivational and self-regulatory power to compensate for socially maladaptive cognition. Hardy et al. (2015) believe moral identity may play multiple roles. Socially desirable behaviour can be defined as voluntary behaviour aimed at benefiting others or promoting harmony among individuals, such as sharing resources, helping others, and providing comfort (Van Rijsewijk et al., 2016). Studies show that desirable social behaviour is influenced by individual moral factors (Lin & Shek, 2022). In this regard, Carlo et al. (2010) suggest that feelings, cognitions and moral emotions are important predictors of desirable social behaviours.

Nooien et al. (2013) indicate that there is a relationship between moral reasoning and desirable social behaviour. Few studies have investigated the suggested relationship between moral perfectionism and desirable social behaviour, and research has shown that moral perfectionism is related to desirable social behaviour online (Zeng et al., 2020). For example, people with high levels of moral perfectionism tend to have high levels of moral reasoning. This means that they can analyze and evaluate values, standards, and moral principles, all of which are considered effective predictors of social behaviour. These people may be known as moral role models at different times and tend to adjust social behaviors towards moral standards and values (Carlo et al., 2010). Similarly, Gino et al. (2011) showed perfectionists are more sociable than non-perfectionists and have less traumatic behaviour. The critical challenge in sports science is identifying the factors that influence the acquisition and maintenance of success in sport. Typical sports stressors significantly affect performance and success in sport, such as committing a mental or physical error (Anshel et al., 2000). Sports success is an active learning process resulting from purposeful practice and improvement of the skills necessary to achieve a high level of sports performance and victory (Zeng et al., 2020). Athletes, like most people, are trying to improve optimal performance and face a lot of pressure. Research has shown that athletes experience stress due to competition pressures, fear of failure, feelings of failure, guilt, loss of control, parental involvement, performance improvement, and the like (Silva & Metzler, 2011).

A study by Atkinson et al. (2022) concluded that perfectionism efforts positively predict prosocial and altruistic behaviours, while perfectionism concerns positively predict altruism and prosocial behaviours. Furthermore, perfectionism efforts have a negative social impact and lead to moral neutrality and anti-social behaviour in wheelchair athletes. In their research, Kozłowska & Kutypachecka. (2023) found that incompatible perfectionism and generalized self-

efficacy predict health behaviours and mental health outcomes, and adaptive perfectionism and generalized self-efficacy predict preventive practices. The results of Aghaei et al. (2023) research shows that moral behaviour (5.36 %) and patience (5.28 %) have a positive and significant effect on success in sports among athletes, and any amount of moral behaviour and patience is high. The success rate in sport also increases (0.61 %), and the results showed that the patience variable moderates the relationship between moral behaviour and success in sport. In their research, Rostami Zeinali et al. (2023) concluded that moral perfectionism has a significant relationship with desirable social behaviour and moral identity, and the relationship model between moral perfectionism and desirable social behaviour and the mediating role of moral identity is significant. Similarly, Motaharnejad et al. (2024) concluded that moral identity directly affects all the components of desirable social behaviour.

The results of Birkandi & Khaje's research (2022) showed that moral identity and online interpersonal trust mediate the relationship between moral perfectionism and online social behaviour. Researchers Zhang et al. (2021) observed that moral identity partially mediates the relationship between moral perfectionism and online social behaviour. Specifically, the relationship between moral identity and online social behaviour was significant for participants with high online interpersonal trust. In another study, Stoeber and Yang (2016) showed that moral perfectionism relates to students' moral judgment and values. Also, some studies have confirmed the relationship between moral perfectionism and desirable social behaviour. In their research, Hardy et al. (2015) confirmed the mediating role of moral identity in the relationship between self-regulation and desirable social behaviour.

Research on the effect of moral perfectionism and moral identity on desirable social behaviour and sports success of students and athletes is necessary. This issue is particularly important because people's moral and ideal approaches in sport and their daily lives directly affect their behavior and performance. People with moral perfectionism may tend to strive beyond their trained capabilities and set high sports and lifestyle standards. This may lead to psychological and social pressures, which in some cases can be detrimental to sports success or undue adjustment, causing psychological problems and high pressures. On the other hand, a person with a strong moral identity is likely to make choices consistent with their moral values to achieve success in sport and social life.

Research shows that people who follow values and moral principles are likely to perform better in sport and social life (Ring, 2023). These people usually benefit from positive communication and social behaviours and strive to improve athletic performance. For student-athletes, having a moral identity and moral perfectionism can directly affect desirable social behaviours and athletic success. These individuals may be recognized as role models of ethical behaviour

and moral values for their peers and teammates and, in this way, significantly contribute to their sports and social success and good social behaviour with others. Therefore, research in this field can help better understand the relationship between ethics, moral identity and successful behaviour in sport and social life (see Figure 1). Through this understanding, plans and policies should be formulated and implemented to strengthen moral values and identity among students and athletes. Therefore, this research aims to determine whether moral perfectionism and moral identity influence desirable social behavior and sports success among student-athletes in Iran.

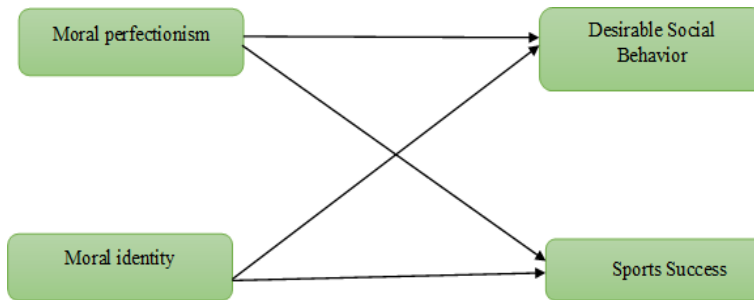


Figure 1

The research conceptual framework

Materials and methods

The purpose of this research was to examine the effect of moral perfectionism and moral identity on desirable social behaviour and sports success of student-athletes Iran. The research method was applied in terms of purpose, using a descriptive survey design.

Participants

Based on information from the provincial education department, students who do sport professionally and have won championships in provincial, national, and international competitions were selected as samples. In this research, "school students" refers to those between 15 and 18 years old. The average age of the students was 17 years ($SD = 1.073$). The population group in this research consisted of male ($n = 536$) and female ($n = 456$) secondary school students from the cities of Tehran, Tabriz, Mashhad, Isfahan, and Shiraz. The random sampling method used was simple random sampling. The sample size was calculated using Cohen's formula based on statistical power analysis. The sample size for the study, calculated using the G*Power statistical test, was 942 participants, with

a power of 0.80 and an effect size of 0.15. An additional 10% was added to the sample size to account for the possibility of incomplete questionnaires. Finally, the total sample size determined was 1036 student-athletes. After collecting the questionnaires and removing incomplete and outlier responses, data from 992 questionnaires were analyzed.

Measurement tools

The data collection tools included the following questionnaires; (i) Ethical perfectionism (Stoeber & Yang, 2016), which consists of 16 questions in the two dimensions of personal moral standards and concern about moral errors; (ii) Ethical identity questionnaire (Lin & Shek, 2022) consisting of 5 questions, all measuring a single dimension of ethical identity; (iii) Desirable Social Behaviour Questionnaire (Mestre, Carlo, Samper, Malonda, & Mestre, 2019), which consists of 25 questions in 5 components of unknown desirable social behaviours, desirable altruistic and collective social behaviours, desirable emotional social behaviours, desirable social behaviours in a critical situation, and desirable conforming social behaviors; and (iv) Sports Success Questionnaire (Mousavi, Vaez Mousavi, & Yaghobi, 2015), which consisted of 29 questions in 5 components of smooth performance, attention, technique, error sensitivity, commitment and progress. The questionnaires' content and face validity were verified before the primary research study was conducted. Cronbach's alpha coefficients indicated satisfactory reliability, with values of 0.74 for the Moral Perfectionism Questionnaire, 0.81 for the Moral Identity Questionnaire, 0.83 for the Desirable Social Behavior Questionnaire, and 0.71 for the Sports Success Questionnaire

Data Analysis

Prior to analyzing the statistical data using descriptive statistics, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to determine the normality of the statistical population. The structural equation model was examined using SPSS19 and AMOS23 software to analyze the research hypotheses. The data analysis for this research involved several statistical procedures to evaluate the relationships between moral perfectionism, moral identity, desirable social behavior, and sports success among student-athletes. Initially, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test was used to assess data normality for each variable, determining whether the data followed a normal distribution, and guiding the choice of appropriate statistical techniques. Skewness and kurtosis values were also calculated to further understand the distribution characteristics, such as symmetry and peakedness. To explore the associations between the research variables, Spearman's correlation analysis was conducted, given the non-parametric nature of some of the data, allowing for an assessment of the strength and direction of these relationships.

Furthermore, structural equation modeling (SEM) was applied to develop and evaluate the relationships between the variables, with model fit assessed using goodness-of-fit indices such as GFI, AGFI, TLI, IFI, NFI, CFI, and RMSEA. These indices helped determine how well the proposed model fit the observed data. Finally, path analysis was conducted to test the research hypotheses, focusing on the effects of moral perfectionism and moral identity on desirable social behavior and sports success, using path coefficients, T-values, and significance levels to verify the hypothesized relationships. These comprehensive statistical methods provided a robust analysis of how moral perfectionism and moral identity influence the social behavior and sports success of student-athletes.

Findings

The research data were analyzed in two parts, the first part is related to demographic findings, including gender, educational level, field of study, type of school, and the second part is data related to questionnaires. It was analyzed using the structural equation model.

Table 1
Demographic findings

Variables		Number	Percentage
Biological Sex	Boy	536	54.03
	Girl	456	45.97
Education Level	the tenth	216	21.81
	the eleventh	355	35.78
	the twelfth	421	42.41
Field of Study	Math and Physics	251	25.30
	Experimental	225	22.68
	Humanities	263	26.51
	Other	253	25.51
Type of School	Governmental	511	51.51
	NGOs	481	48.49
Age	15 Years	122	12.3
	16 Years	184	18.5
	17 Years	215	21.7
	18 Years	471	47.5

Note: NGO: Non-governmental organization

A descriptive analysis of research variables based on central parameters (mean, median, mode) and dispersion parameters (standard deviation, variance

and range of changes) for the primary research factors are presented in Table 2. First, the skewness and skewness of the data are tested. Figure 2 shows the impact of moral perfectionism and moral identity on desirable social behaviour and sports success in the standard state.

Table 2
Descriptive analysis of research variables

Research variables		Number	Mean	Me- dian	Mod	Std. error	Vari- ance	Variation range	Min	Max
Moral perfec- tionism	Personal ethics	992	3.78	3.88	4	0.570	0.325	3	2	5
	Concern about moral lapses	992	3.88	3.88	5	0.525	0.275	3	2	5
Moral iden- tity	Moral identity	992	18.79	19.00	22	3.86	14.90	17	8	25
Desirable so- cial behavior	ADSB ¹	992	3.93	4.00	4	0.669	0.447	3	2	5
	DACSB ²	992	3.97	4.00	4	0.640	0.410	3	2	5
	DSEB ³	992	4.13	4.20	5	0.595	0.354	3	2	5
	DSBCS ⁴	992	4.17	4.20	4	0.500	0.250	3	2	5
	DOSB ⁵	992	3.99	4.00	4	0.620	0.385	3	2	5
Sports suc- cess	Smooth execu- tion	992	3.97	4.00	4	0.589	0.347	3	2	5
	Attention	992	3.76	3.83	4	0.634	0.402	3	2	5
	Technique	992	3.84	3.83	4	0.583	0.340	3	2	5
	Error sensitivity	992	3.94	4.00	4	0.593	0.352	3	2	5
	Commitment and progress	992	3.91	4.00	5	0.649	0.421	3	2	5

Note: 1. Anonymous Desirable Social Behaviours, 2. Desirable altruistic and collective social behaviours, 3. Desirable social and emotional behaviours, 4. Desirable social behaviours in a critical situation, 5. Desirable and obedient social behaviours

Because the research based on the structural model is based on the assumption of normality of the data, therefore, the normality test was done first. In confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling, there is no need for all data to be normal. On the other hand, the factors (structures) must be normal.

Table 3
Data normality test

	Moral perfectionism	Moral identity	Desirable social behavior	Sports success
Number	992	992	992	992
Mean	7.66	18.79	20.17	19.42
Std. error	0.871	3.861	1.767	1.802
K-S	0.095	0.126	0.069	0.039
p-value	0.000	0.000	0.025	0.200

Table 4
Skewness and kurtosis of the data

Research variables	Number	Skewness	Kurtosis
Moral perfectionism	992	-0.277	-0.214
Moral identity	992	-0.751	0.015
Desirable social behavior	992	-0.373	-0.397
Sports success	992	-0.230	0.048

Table 5
Spearman's correlation test results

Research variables	Spearman's	Moral perfectionism	Moral identity	Desirable social behavior	Sports success
Moral perfectionism	correlation	1	0.532	0.599	0.550
	meaningful		0.000	0.000	0.000
Moral identity	correlation	0.532	1	0.447	0.463
	meaningful	0.000		0.000	0.000
Desirable social behavior	correlation	0.599	0.447	1	0.511
	meaningful	0.000	0.000		0.000
Sports success	correlation	0.550	0.463	0.511	1
	meaningful	0.000	0.000	0.000	

According to Table 5, there is a positive and significant relationship between moral perfectionism and moral identity (0.532), moral perfectionism and desired social behaviour (0.599), and moral perfectionism and sports success (0.550). Additionally, there is a positive and significant relationship between moral identity and desired social behaviour (0.447) and between moral identity and sports success (0.463). Finally, as indicated in the table, there is a positive and significant relationship between desired social behaviour and sports success (0.511).

Table 6
Goodness of fit indices of the final drawing model

Fit index	RMSEA	CFI	NFI	IFI	TLI	AGFI	GFI
Acceptable fit	< 0.08	> 0.9	> 0.9	> 0.9	> 0.9	> 0.8	> 0.8
Proposed model	0.054	0.935	0.962	0.944	0.962	0.802	0.874

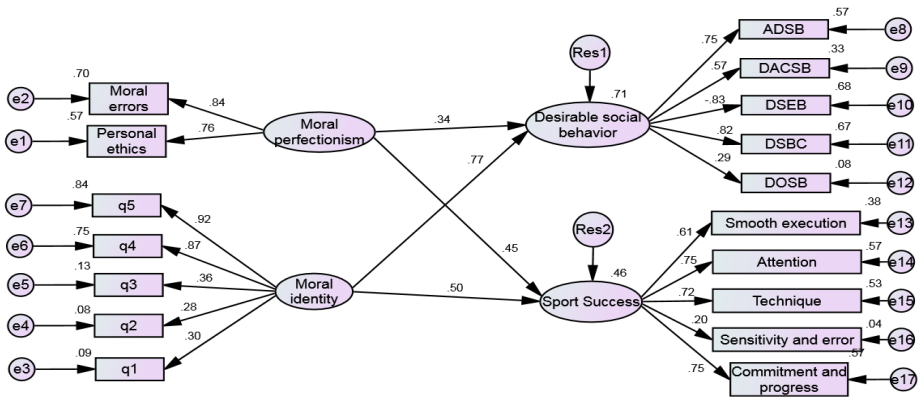


Figure 2
Structural model in a standard path coefficient estimation mode
Note: 1. Anonymous Desirable Social Behaviours, 2. Desirable altruistic and collective social behaviours, 3. Desirable social and emotional behaviours, 4. Desirable social behaviours in a critical situation, 5. Desirable and obedient social behaviours. Because the research based on the structural model is based on the assumption of normality of the data, therefore, the normality test was done first. In confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling, there is no need for all data to be normal. On the other hand, the factors (structures) must be normal.

Table 7
Research hypotheses test

Research assumptions	Path coefficient (β)	T-VALUE	Statistically significant (P-VALUE)	Result
The effect of moral perfectionism on the desirable social behavior of student-athletes	0.34	5.949	0.000	confirmation
The effect of moral perfectionism on the sports success of student-athletes	0.45	5.969	0.000	confirmation
The effect of moral identity on the desirable social behavior of student-athletes	0.77	4.731	0.000	confirmation
The effect of moral identity on the sports success of student-athletes	0.50	4.153	0.000	confirmation

Discussion

The results of the first hypothesis showed that moral perfectionism positively and significantly affects the desirable social behaviour of student-athletes in Iran. Birkandi & Khaje (2022) showed in their research that for the growth of

desirable online social behaviour in student-athletes, attention should be paid to the discussion of ethics, especially moral perfectionism and moral identity in their schools and education. Nounopoulos (2013) showed that perfectionists are considered more sociable and less destructive than non-perfectionists. Therefore, moral perfectionism may have a positive relationship with social behaviour. The findings of this hypothesis are in line with the findings of previous studies (Kozłowska & Kutty-Pachecka, 2023; Rostami, Zeinali, & Yazdani, 2023; Stoeber & Yang, 2016; Zhang et al., 2021). Moral perfectionism, as a tendency to try to achieve moral and social ideals too much, can have effects on people's behaviour. Athletes, especially student-athletes, are an important group in investigating this issue because emotions, values, and moral behaviours are specifically tested in sports activities. The findings of these studies showed that moral perfectionism can be related to a series of behavioural patterns such as professional ethics, positive leadership, and effective cooperation, all of which are of great importance in sports environments. Moral perfectionism can have a positive effect on the desirable social behaviours of athletes. These results can help coaches, administrators, and sports experts design more appropriate training programs to strengthen moral perfectionism in athletes, which will bring significant improvement in the local sports and social environment.

The results of the second hypothesis showed that moral perfectionism has a positive and significant effect on the sports success of student-athletes in Iran. Mousavi et al. (2015) reported similar findings, which showed the importance of perfectionism in the field of sports and its value, hence warranting the need for it to be encouraged and strengthened in athletes. An explanation for this might be that trying to reach high standards for personal reasons in sports can make a person reach higher levels of sports progress. This is further supported by Besharat & Hoseini (2012), who showed in their research that only positive perfectionism can predict the success of athletes. Based on the results of the aforementioned studies conducted on the relationship between perfectionism dimensions and mood states, it was found that the feeling of worry about the occurrence of mistakes in sports competitions is associated with various negative consequences such as feelings of failure and guilt, and may cause a decrease in self-esteem and confidence of athletes. The findings of this hypothesis are in line with the study results of Appleton et al. (2009), and Dehghani et al. (2013). The findings in the current study in relation to this hypothesis showed that moral perfectionism can play an important role in the development and progress of students' sports success. This research, indicates that student-athletes who have a high level of moral perfectionism are more successful in the field of sports. Moreover, they focus and strive more to achieve their sports goals and follow the positive values and ethics emphasized in sports. This can lead to an improvement in their sports performance and ultimately, more success in sports competitions.

The results of the third hypothesis showed that moral identity positively and significantly affects the desirable social behaviour of student-athletes in Iran. Motaharnejad et al. (2024) observed that the self-regulation structure as a factor derived from parenting methods would lead to the development of a sense of control over emotions, the development of self-awareness and a better understanding of social relationships, culminating in the promotion of moral identity and desirable social behaviour. Zhang et al. (2021) showed that moral identity is related to desirable social behaviour and moral perfectionism, and that moral identity is an integrated concept of self and ethics. The findings of this hypothesis, i.e. that moral identity positively and significantly affects the desirable social behaviour of student-athletes, are in line with the findings of Hardy et al. (2015), Motaharnejad et al. (2024), Rostami et al. (2023). The current research study showed that the moral identity of sports players significantly affects their desirable behaviour in societies. For instance, a study published in the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* found that a positive moral climate in sports is associated with more prosocial behaviour and less antisocial behaviour among young athletes (Ring et al., 2019). This means that when athletes are part of an environment that emphasizes moral values, they are more likely to exhibit behaviours that are beneficial to society, such as fairness, respect, and teamwork. Moral identity, one of the most important mechanisms for shaping desirable behaviour, can also play a significant role in increasing such behaviours. Athletes with a strong moral identity are more inclined to be responsible, respect their teammates, and follow the game's rules. Conversely, athletes with a weak moral identity may engage in violations, inappropriate behaviour, and disagreements with teammates. Therefore, strengthening the moral identity of student-athletes through sports training programs can guarantee the improvement of their social behaviour and make them better adapt in different societies. Consequently, promoting moral identity in student-athletes can ensure the improvement of their social behaviours and increase their adaptability in different societies.

The results of the fourth hypothesis showed that moral identity has a positive and significant effect on student-athletes' success in sport. These results may be explained by the suggestion that strengthening patience and moral behaviour increases success in sport due to increased focus on achievement of set goals by elite athletes (Aghaei J. et al., 2023). It is recommended that sports psychologists, coaches, sports experts and athletes use strategies of ethical behaviour and patience to increase success. The findings of this hypothesis align with the results of Aghaei J. et al. (2023), which showed that athletes with a strong moral identity are generally on the path to better athletic success. As such, these people are familiar with moral values and standards such as discipline, responsibility and respect for others, which play an important role in improving their performance and success. Athletes with a weak moral identity may face prob-

lems such as breaking the rules, and inappropriate behaviour inside and outside the sports fields, which can harm their success. Therefore, strengthening the moral identity of these student-athletes can guarantee the improvement of their sports performance and contribute to their personal and professional growth. In general, the hypothesis of the effect of moral identity on student-athletes' sports success can be considered an important guide in designing sports training programs and supporting their personal and sports development.

Conclusion

The effect of moral perfectionism and moral identity on desirable social behaviour and sports success of student-athletes examines important aspects of athletes' personal growth. Athletes with a strong moral identity usually have moral perfectionism and follow high standards of ethical behaviour. These athletes generally adhere to desirable social behaviours, including respect for others, commitment to the team, and adherence to rules and discipline on the sports field. At the same time, if moral perfectionism is extreme and excessive, it may lead to stress and anxiety in athletes and affect their sports performance. For example, the pressures imposed on student-athletes can reduce their performance or even make them lose their enjoyment of sport. As a result, sports training programs should continue to emphasise strengthening athletes' moral identity and perfectionism, but they should also be careful about going too far in this field. Elevating moral identity and teaching stress and pressure management skills can help improve student-athletes' social behaviours and sports success and provide effective recovery from the point of view of the sports community.

This study provides valuable insights but has several limitations. Conducted exclusively in Iran, the findings may not generalize to other cultural contexts where moral values and perfectionism may vary. However, while cultural and educational systems may influence the broader environment in which individuals develop, the constructs examined in this study are based on psychological theory and are not inherently tied to any specific cultural or religious system. The measures we used assessed moral perfectionism as an individual psychological construct rather than a culturally specific one, ensuring that the focus remains on the generalizability of the results and their basis in individual psychological processes. The reliance on self-reported data could introduce bias due to social desirability, and the cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causal relationships. Lastly, the study overlooks other factors like resilience or coaching styles and focuses narrowly on student-athletes, limiting its applicability to non-athletic populations.

Practical Applications

The following recommendations are provided for sports managers and coaches to consider, based on the findings of this study on the impact of moral perfectionism and moral identity on the social behaviour and sports success of student-athletes.

1. Creating sports training programs by strengthening moral identity can promote desirable social behaviours and facilitate the development process of this behaviour.
2. Coaches and officials of student sport should teach their charges skills of managing stress and the stress of sports competitions by holding training courses for student-athletes.
3. It is important to maintain a proper balance between moral perfectionism and mental health of athletes to avoid negative emotions and irrational pressures.
4. Coaches can help student-athletes set reasonable and attainable goals and create a proper plan to achieve them.

STATEMENT OF ETHICS

This study was conducted in accordance with the World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki. **The study protocol was reviewed and approved by the Ethical Board of Salgado de Oliveira University and was subsequently approved with the ethics code number 24.030-060 on April 30th, 2023.** All the participants provided written informed consent to participate in this study. It does not require ethics committee approval.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

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