

The Impact of Perfectionism on Career Development: The Mediating Effects of Work Aspirations and Self-Worth

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Abstract. The objective of this study was to investigate the impact of perfectionism on the career development of high-level Chinese university athletes, as well as the mediating roles of self-value and job aspirations. The data was collected from 285 high-level athletes from 12 sports academies across China through CBS and CDS questionnaires. The study employed measurement model evaluation, structural model evaluation, and mediation hypothesis verification to analyze the collected data. The findings revealed that: (1) Chinese university-level athletes' self-value and job aspirations partially mediated the relationship between perfectionism and career development. (2) The research model indicated that job aspirations played the most vital mediating role. (3) Perfectionism had the most significant effect on career development. Therefore, the study recommends that athletes should focus on cultivating and enhancing their self-value, understanding their strengths and values, and improving their self-confidence and self-affirmation to achieve their career goals. Additionally, targeted career development support programs should be developed for athletes, and empirical research should be conducted to understand their effectiveness in promoting athlete career development.

Keywords: Career Development, Work Aspiration, Self-Worth, High-Level Chinese University Athletes

1. Introduction

As high-level Chinese university athletes achieve outstanding performances in international competitions, showcasing their competitive strength and influence on the international sports stage, they have received national attention and policy support. According to research, only 20% of elite athletes in the country pursue further education in colleges (Xu & Yang, 2017). The Chinese government has established three employment paths for these athletes: continuing education, self-employment with one-time economic compensation, and planned placement for outstanding athletes (Li & Huang, 2020). However, due to changes in personnel systems and market structures, the scheduled post has been impacted and cannot meet the needs of these retired high-level athletes, making economic compensation the main form (Li, 2016; Yao, 2013). Therefore, the career development of these high-level university athletes faces challenges, indirectly affecting the growth of universities and national sports.

In recent years, athletes' career development has received international attention, with research mainly focusing on challenges such as retirement transition, career planning, and psychological stress (Gould et al., 2002). Research on university athletes tends to concentrate on the following aspects: retirement transition challenges and needs, career planning, and mental health of university athletes (e.g., Bruner et al., 2010; Knights et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2018; Foskett et al., 2017; Parm et al., 2021; Coleman et al., 2021); balancing sports and academics and developing professional skills to adapt to workplace demands (e.g., Houle, 2015; Sauer et al., 2013; Jayanthi et al., 2021); and examining the impact of social support and resources on career development (e.g., Schafer et al., 1970; Roxas et al., 2016; Gerlach, 2017). In China, existing research on university athletes mainly focuses on balancing sports and academics, developing professional skills (e.g., Wang & Li, 2010; Rong & Yan, 2016), the impact of social support and resources on career development (e.g., Liu, 2007; Lu & Tao, 2022); and career planning and transition (e.g., Wang, 2017; Zhang & Huang, 2007).

Although existing research provides essential references for understanding the career development of university athletes, discussions on how athletes are influenced by beliefs such as self-value, perfectionism, and work aspirations when facing career challenges still need to be improved. Despite the valuable insights from current studies, there is a need to explore further how these beliefs affect the career development of high-level university athletes in China. Therefore, this paper aims to fill this gap by comprehensively examining how these beliefs influence the career development of high-level university athletes in China to provide a solid theoretical basis for further research.

In the athlete population, Perfectionism traits play an essential role in athlete career development. Athletes strive for outstanding performance, and moderate perfectionism can help stimulate the best performance in training and competition (Stoeber & Otto, 2006; Flett & Hewitt, 2005). However, excessive emphasis on perfectionism may have adverse effects. For example, high levels of perfectionism may lead athletes to experience self-doubt and anxiety in the face of setbacks (Frost et al., 1990), affecting mental health, job satisfaction, and career transition adaptation and development (Wylleman et al., 2004). In the long run, excessive perfectionism can cause athletes to experience more pressure, anxiety, and frustration in their careers, impacting their sports performance and career development beyond athletics.

Additionally, perfectionism can cause athletes to focus too much on short-term goals and neglect long-term career planning and development. This can lead to challenges in career transition, such as a lack of transferable skills or uncertainty about future career development, which can be especially difficult for athletes who retire at a young age. Furthermore, self-worth and career aspirations significantly impact athletes' career development. Self-worth concerns an individual's perception of their abilities and value (Marsh, 1990), potentially influencing an athlete's mindset when facing challenges and stress and ultimately affecting career success. Self-worth and career aspirations are also critical factors in athlete career development. Low self-worth can make athletes more susceptible to discouragement in the face of setbacks, hindering their career development (Bandura et al., 1999). Clear career aspirations, on the other hand, help athletes transition into employment, achieve career satisfaction and success, and plan for their future beyond athletics (Wylleman, Lavalley, & Alfermann, 1999; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994).

Although the effects of perfectionism, self-esteem, and career aspirations on athletes' career development have been explored in existing research, there still needs to be more understanding of the relationships and mechanisms between these variables, especially in the face of career challenges for high-level Chinese university athletes. In particular, research has yet to fully explore how perfectionism traits affect athletes' career development through the potential mediating variables of self-esteem and career aspirations. Understanding these potential relationships and mechanisms is essential for providing targeted interventions and support for this specific group, and current research in this area still needs to be improved. Therefore, this study aims to fill this research gap by exploring the mediating role of self-esteem and career aspirations in the relationship between perfectionism traits and the career development of high-level Chinese university athletes.

This study aims to investigate the impact of perfectionism traits on athletes' career development and to delve into the roles of self-worth and career aspirations as mediating variables, revealing the factors and mechanisms influencing athletes' career development. This will provide a theoretical basis for coaches, counselors, and other relevant personnel, helping to promote the success of athletes' careers more effectively.

The research question of this study is, "Do work aspirations and self-worth mediate between perfectionism traits and athletes' career development?" To answer this question, the study will evaluate the roles of work aspirations and self-worth in the relationship between perfectionism traits and athletes' career development. Specifically, the study will explore how perfectionism traits affect athletes' career development through the two potential mediating variables of work aspirations and self-worth. The hypotheses are as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Self-worth will mediate the relationship between perfectionism traits and career development.

Hypothesis 2: Work aspirations will mediate the relationship between perfectionism traits and career development.

The results of this study will help reveal the mechanisms of the impact of perfectionism traits on athletes' career development, providing theoretical support for relevant intervention strategies.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Participants.

This study conducted a comprehensive analysis of high-level athletes from various provincial sports colleges and universities, covering information on gender, grade, professional training experience, and skill level. Among these participants, males were the majority, totaling 183 (64.2%), while females accounted for 102 (35.8%). In terms of grade distribution, there were 47 first-year students (16.5%), 134 second-year students (47.0%), 67 third-year students (23.5%), and 37 fourth-year students (13.0%). Regarding athletes' professional training experience, 100 (35.1%) started receiving professional training in middle school, 101 (35.4%) in high school, and 84 (28.5%) in primary school. In terms of skill level, there were 243 national second-level athletes (85.3%), 36 national first-level athletes (12.6%), and six international-level athletes (2.1%). Regarding sports specialization, martial arts, and combat sports were the majority, with 133 participants (46.7%). This was followed by ball sports, with 64 participants (22.5%), and track and field events, with 52 participants (18.2%). Other sports included 31 participants (10.9%), gymnastics with 4 participants (1.4%), and ice and snow sports with 1 participant (0.4%).

2.2 Research Design.

The study's principal author contacted professors from sports colleges via email and telephone, explaining the research's purpose, confidentiality, and anonymity, and arranged for data collection. Data collection

included a demographic questionnaire, the Career Belief Scale (CBS), and Career Development Scale (CDS). To reduce social desirability bias, participants were informed that the study aimed to explore college students' life experiences and that there were no right or wrong answers. All responses were kept confidential. Participants who agreed to participate in the study were asked to answer the questionnaire honestly. This study adopted the questionnaire from Chan (2013), "A Study of Social Support, Career Beliefs, Career Self-Efficacy, and Career Development of College Athletes," to examine the ideas and attitudes of high-level Chinese college athletes toward their future career beliefs and career development. This scale has been validated in other international journals (Chan, 2018; Chan, 2020a; Chan, 2020b), and the research instruments are introduced as follows:

CBS (The Career Beliefs Scale) is a questionnaire that measures career beliefs across three dimensions: self-worth, perfectionism, and work aspiration. It contains 13 items and uses a Likert scale for scoring, with higher scores indicating a more significant endorsement of the descriptions in the career beliefs scale. Factor analysis was conducted in the item analysis to retain three dimensions with a total explained variance of 69.76% and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86, demonstrating good construct validity and reliability.

CDS (The Career Development Scale) is a questionnaire that measures career development across two dimensions: career exploration and career commitment. It contains 16 items and uses a Likert scale for scoring, with higher scores indicating a more significant endorsement of the descriptions in the career beliefs scale. Factor analysis was conducted in the item analysis to retain two dimensions with a total explained variance of 65.85% and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.92, demonstrating good construct validity and reliability.

2.3 Statistical Analysis

This study employed two statistical techniques, SPSS 23.0 software and partial least-squares (PLS), to ensure the rigor of the analysis. Descriptive statistics were performed using SPSS 23.0 software to analyze participants' demographic information. Additionally, PLS was used to test the research hypotheses proposed in this study. Following Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) recommendations, this study conducted the following steps for structural equation modeling (SEM): (1) evaluation of the measurement model to determine the research framework and assess reliability and validity; (2) evaluation of the structural model to diagnose collinearity among indicators, evaluate the predictive and explanatory effects of paths, test model fit, and assess causal relationships among paths; and (3) validation of the mediating hypotheses proposed in this study.

3. Results & Discussion

PLS-SEM (Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling) is a statistical analysis technique suitable for small sample sizes, non-normal data, and analyses with multiple indicators and paths. It can handle various independent and dependent variables, address multicollinearity issues, and is robust in handling outliers and missing data. Additionally, PLS-SEM has strong predictive power and can take both reflective and formative measurement models and single-item constructs without concerns of identification/positive definiteness issues. These characteristics make PLS-SEM a vital tool widely used in various research settings (Hair et al., 2011). Hair et al. (2014) suggested that PLS-SEM is a preferable choice when the relationships among variables or the conceptual measurement are not transparent or when the study focuses on exploration rather than confirmation. Given these limitations and the characteristics of the research model, PLS-SEM analysis will be conducted in three stages: measurement model evaluation, structural model evaluation, and multiple mediation analysis.

3.1 Evaluation of the Measurement Model

3.1.1 Research framework model.

As shown in Figure 1, this study has four primary constructs: self-value belief, perfectionism belief, work aspiration belief, and career development, with career development as a second-order construct consisting of two sub-constructs: career exploration and career orientation. The independent variables for each path are perfectionism belief, self-value belief, and work aspiration belief, all of which impact the dependent variable of career development. At the same time, self-value and work aspiration beliefs act as mediators that are also influenced by the perfectionism path.

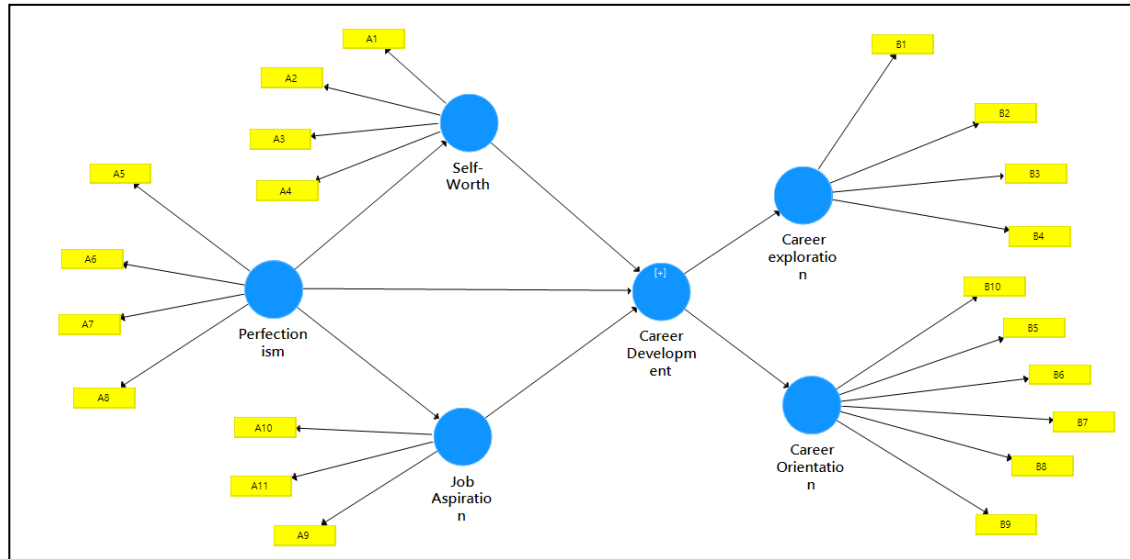


Figure 1: Research Framework Model

At this stage, this study will follow the recommendations of previous researchers to evaluate the reliability and validity of each observed variable and construct to ensure that each structure is reliable and effective (Hulland, 1999; Hair et al., 2014).

3.1.2 Indicator reliability.

To assess the reliability of each indicator of the observed variables, we examined the standardized factor loadings of each item (Figure 2). The range of factor loadings for the Self-Worth indicators was 0.864 to 0.921; for Perfectionism, the range was 0.867 to 0.914; for Job Aspiration, the range was 0.810 to 0.832; for the Career Exploration sub-construct of Career Development, the range was 0.916 to 0.958, and for Career Orientation, the range was 0.885 to 0.926. Therefore, the factor loadings for all five constructs ranged from 0.810 to 0.958 and were all significant and greater than 0.5, indicating good indicator reliability for each item (Hulland, 1999).

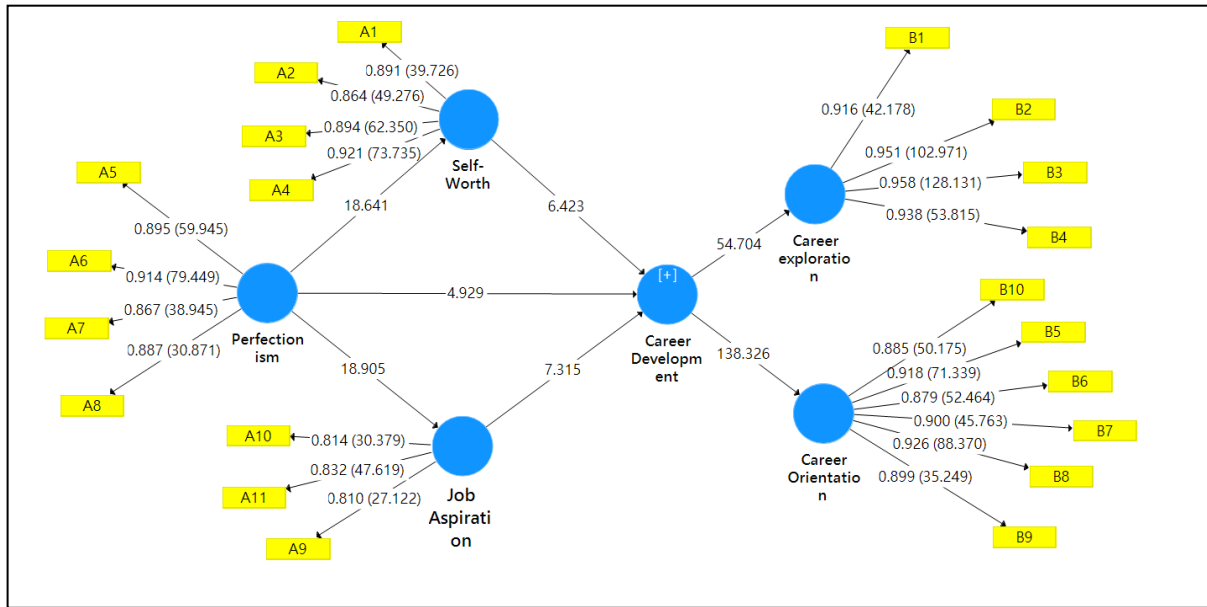


Figure 2: Standardized factor loadings and t-values

3.1.3 Internal consistency.

To assess the internal consistency of each construct, we calculated Cronbach's α and CR values for each set of items (Table 1). The Cronbach's α values for the entire constructs ranged from 0.914 to 0.960, while the CR values ranged from 0.939 to 0.969. All these values were above 0.7, indicating good internal consistency for each item and construct (Nunally & Bernstein, 1994; Gefen et al., 2000; Esposito Vinzi et al., 2010).

3.1.4 Convergent validity.

To assess the convergent validity of each construct, we calculated the average variance extracted (AVE) for each structure (see Table 1). The AVE values ranged from 0.738 to 0.886, all exceeding 0.5, indicating that each indicator in each structure explained more than 50% of the total variance (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Bagozzi & Yi, 1988).

Table 1: Construct Reliability and Validity test

Constructs	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Self-Worth	0.915	0.940	0.797
Perfectionism	0.914	0.939	0.794
Job Aspiration	0.960	0.966	0.738
Career Development	0.960	0.966	0.738
Career Exploration	0.957	0.969	0.886
Career Orientation	0.954	0.963	0.812

3.1.5 Discriminant validity.

This study conducted a discriminant validity assessment for the first-order constructs of self-worth, perfectionism, job aspiration, career exploration, and career orientation (Table 2). The analysis found that the minimum AVE square root was 0.893 for self-worth, more significant than the maximum correlation

coefficient among all the substructures of 0.818. This indicates that all substructures' AVE square root values are more influential than their correlation coefficients with other substructures, which meets the Fomell-Larcker standard for discriminant validity (Fomell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 2: Discriminant Validity test

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5
1.Career Orientation	0.901				
2.Career exploration	0.746	0.941			
3.Job Aspiration	0.746	0.746	0.819		
4.Perfectionism	0.733	0.735	0.700	0.891	
5.Self-Worth	0.818	0.664	0.684	0.717	0.893

3.2 Evaluation of the Structural Model

At this stage, in evaluating the structural model in PLS-SEM, various indicators such as Indicator Collinearity Diagnosis, path coefficients and significance, predictive power, explanatory power, and model fit will be assessed based on the recommendations of previous scholars.

3.2.1 Indicator Collinearity Diagnosis.

Table 3 presents the VIF values of each indicator in the model. The analysis found that although two indicators (B3, B4) had VIF values slightly higher than five, since these indicators had good internal consistency and indicator reliability in the previous evaluation of the measurement model, they were kept in the original construct and were not removed. The VIF values of all other indicators were less than 5, indicating that the model's collinearity problem did not reach a severe level (Hair et al., 2011). Therefore, collinearity problems are not expected to affect the path model in the future adversely.

Table 3: Indicator Collinearity Test (VIF)

Self-Worth		Career exploration	
Indicator	VIF	Indicator	VIF
A1	3.163	B1	3.798
A2	2.834	B2	4.151
A3	3.215	B3	5.409
A4	3.725	B4	5.335
Perfectionism		Career Orientation	
A5	3.211	B5	4.728
A6	3.576	B6	3.679
A7	2.801	B7	3.854
A8	3.014	B8	4.906
Job Aspiration		B9	4.039
A9	1.648	B10	3.744
A10	1.678		
A11	1.383		

3.2.2 Path Relationship Test.

Table 4 presents the results of the path relationship tests. Perfectionism had a significant positive effect on Self-Worth ($t=18.641>1.96$, $p<.05$), Job Aspiration ($t=18.905> 1.96$, $p<.05$), and Career Development ($t=6.423>1.96$, $p<.05$). Self-Worth had a significant positive effect on Career Development ($t=6.423>1.96$, $p<.05$), and Job Aspiration had a significant positive effect on Career Development ($t=7.315>1.96$, $p<.05$). Based on the results of this study, perfectionism is a significant facilitator for an individual's career development, self-worth, and job aspirations. Self-worth and job aspirations may mediate the relationship between perfectionism and career development, but further mediation effect tests are needed to confirm this. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the impact of perfectionism on career development and its mechanisms and have practical implications for career development.

3.2.3 Model Prediction and Explanation Evaluation.

According to Table 4, in terms of predictive power, Perfectionism has a high predictive power on Self-Worth ($R^2=0.514>0.50$) and a moderate predictive power on Job Aspiration ($0.25< R^2=0.514<0.50$). In addition, Self-Worth, Perfectionism, and Job Aspiration all have a high predictive power ($R^2=0.792>0.50$) on Career Development. In terms of explanatory power (Table 4), Perfectionism has solid explanatory power on Self-Worth ($f^2=1.059>0.35$) and Job Aspiration ($f^2=0.961>0.35$); Self-Worth ($0.15< f^2=0.276<0.35$) and Job Aspiration ($0.15< f^2=0.267<0.35$) have a moderate explanatory power on Career Development, and Perfectionism has a weak explanatory power on Career Development ($0.02< f^2=0.141<0.15$). The model constructed in this study has high performance in both prediction and explanation. Mainly, Perfectionism shows a high predictive and explanatory power in predicting Self-Worth and Job Aspiration, while Self-Worth and Job Aspiration have a moderate explanatory power on Career Development. Overall, the model in this study has good predictive and descriptive power and can provide a reference value for related fields in practice.

3.2.4 Model Fit Assessment.

The analysis results (Table 4) indicate that this model has a high level of fit ($Gof =0.586>0.36$), meaning a good match between the theoretical model and the sample data.

Table 4: Path Model Assessment

Path relationship	Path coefficient	t	R ²	f ²	Gof
Perfectionism -> Self-Worth	0.717*	18.641	0.514	1.059	
Perfectionism -> Job Aspiration	0.700*	18.905	0.490	0.961	
Self-Worth -> Career Development	0.369*	6.423		0.276	0.586
Perfectionism -> Career Development	0.270*	4.929	0.792	0.141	
Job Aspiration -> Career Development	0.355*	7.315		0.267	

In summary, this study explored the structural model of the impact of perfectionism on career development. In the measurement model evaluation, all indicators showed acceptable levels of reliability and validity, and the model did not have serious collinearity problems. The structural model evaluation showed that perfectionism positively affected career development, self-worth, and job aspiration. Self-worth and job aspiration may mediate, but further tests of mediation effects are needed. Finally, the results showed that the model had a high fit, indicating a good fit between the theoretical model and the sample data.

3.3 Evaluation of Mediation Hypotheses

This study explores the mediating effects of job aspiration and self-worth on the relationship between perfectionism and athlete career development. Two hypotheses were proposed: (1) self-worth plays a mediating role in the relationship between perfectionism and career development, and (2) job aspiration plays a mediating role in the relationship between perfectionism and career development.

Based on the statistical analysis of the results (Table 5), it was found that Self-Worth ($t=7.225>1.96$, $p<.05$) and Job Aspiration ($t=6.637>1.96$, $p<.05$) both had significant mediating effects in the relationship between perfectionism and career development. Therefore, hypotheses H1 and H2 were both supported. Further examination of the variance accounted for (VAF) revealed that Self-Worth (VAF=31.7%) and Job Aspiration (VAF=33.8%) were both partial mediators, with Job Aspiration having a more powerful mediating effect. This suggests that the relationship between perfectionism and career development is mainly realized through the construct of Job Aspiration. Finally, the total effect of perfectionism on career development was 0.783, consisting of both direct (0.270) and indirect effects from Self-Worth (0.248) and Job Aspiration (0.265). Despite the partial mediating effects of Self-Worth and Job Aspiration, the direct effect of perfectionism remained the strongest predictor of career development.

The results of this study indicate that self-worth and job aspiration play significant mediating roles between perfectionism and athlete career development, with job aspiration showing a more powerful mediating effect. Overall, the influence of perfectionism on athlete career development is complex, involving both direct and indirect effects. This study provides important insights into the mediating mechanisms underlying the effects of perfectionism on athlete career development, furthering our understanding of this relationship.

Table 5: Multiple Mediation Effect Test

Independent Variable	Mediator Variable	Dependent Variable	Direct Effects	Indirect Effects	Total Effects	VAF
Perfectionism	Self-Worth	Career Development	0.270* (4.929)	0.248* (7.225)	0.783* (25.033)	31.7%
	Job Aspiration			0.265* (6.637)		33.8%

3.4 Discussion

3.4.1 Hypothesis 1: Self-worth will mediate the relationship between perfectionism traits and career development.

According to our study results, self-worth mediated the relationship between perfectionism and career development among Chinese university elite athletes. This finding is consistent with Neumeister's (2004) study, which found that self-esteem and self-efficacy mediate the relationship between perfectionism and achievement motivation. Similarly, Cheng et al. (1999) found that self-esteem mediates the relationship between perfectionism and psychological distress. These study results support our findings that self-worth is vital in mediating the relationship between perfectionism and career development.

In addition, our study results are consistent with Limburg et al.'s (2017) meta-analysis study, which discussed the relationship between perfectionism and psychopathology and mentioned related factors such as self-esteem and self-efficacy. Moreover, Son and Park's (2022) study indicated that individuals with high self-esteem are more likely to evaluate themselves positively and take proactive action, while those with low self-esteem tend to approach problems defensively. Although these studies did not directly involve athletes, they provide theoretical support for the mediating role of self-worth in the relationship between perfectionism and other related variables.

From this literature, we can speculate that for Chinese university elite athletes, the mediating role of self-worth in the relationship between perfectionism and career development may be related to how they perceive themselves and evaluate their abilities and values when facing challenges. Athletes with high self-worth may be better able to cope with the pressures of perfectionism and therefore achieve better career development. Conversely, athletes with low self-worth may be more prone to negative emotions and difficulties coping with challenges, which may affect their career development.

This study found that self-worth played a significant role as a partial mediator in the relationship between perfectionism and career development among high-level university athletes in China. This finding is consistent with Neumeister's (2004) study, which found that self-esteem and self-efficacy mediate the relationship between perfectionism and achievement motivation. Similarly, Cheng et al.'s (1999) study found that self-esteem mediated the relationship between perfectionism and psychological distress. These studies support our finding that self-worth is an essential mediator in the relationship between perfectionism and career development. Furthermore, our results are consistent with Limburg et al.'s (2017) meta-analysis study, which discussed the relationship between perfectionism and psychopathology, and highlighted the role of self-esteem and self-efficacy as relevant factors. Although these studies did not directly involve athletes, they provide theoretical support for the mediating role of self-worth in the relationship between perfectionism and other related variables. From these studies, the mediating role of self-worth in the relationship between perfectionism and career development among high-level university athletes in China may be related to how they perceive and evaluate their abilities and values when facing challenges. Athletes with high self-worth may be better equipped to cope with the pressure of perfectionism, thus achieving better career development.

Conversely, athletes with low self-worth may be more prone to negative emotions and difficulties coping with challenges, thus affecting their career development. Moreover, studies have shown that the influence of perfectionism on career development may be more significant, surpassing the mediating role of self-worth. For example, Hill et al.'s (2013) study found that perfectionism may positively affect career development in the early stages of a career. However, it may become a later-stage risk factor for career burnout. Additionally, perfectionism may lead to more negative emotions and difficulties coping with challenges, thus affecting career development (Flett & Hewitt, 2005). Therefore, although self-worth plays an essential role in the relationship between perfectionism and career development, other psychological factors must be considered for a more comprehensive understanding.

In conclusion, our study confirmed Hypothesis 1: Self-worth mediates the relationship between perfectionism and career development among high-level university athletes in China. This finding is supported by previous research, which demonstrates the importance of self-worth in coping with the pressure and challenges brought by perfectionism. Although the influence of perfectionism on career development may be more significant, the partial mediating role of self-worth cannot be ignored. Improving athletes' self-worth can help them cope with the pressure of perfectionism and achieve better career development. However, to fully understand the relationship between perfectionism and career development, other psychological factors, such as coping strategies and emotion regulation, must be considered. Finally, this study provides a new perspective on the relationship between perfectionism, self-worth, and career development among athletes and provides a theoretical foundation for future research.

3.4.2 Hypothesis 2: Work aspirations will mediate the relationship between perfectionism traits and career development.

Research has shown that job aspirations mediate the relationship between perfectionism and career development. Specifically, when individuals display perfectionist traits, having high job aspirations can help them better cope with the challenges of perfectionism and improve their career development. Many relevant studies have supported this finding. For example, although Elliot and McGregor's (2001) study did not mention job aspirations specifically, it demonstrated that an individual's beliefs and abilities could influence the selection and pursuit of goals. High job aspirations can help individuals achieve their goals and aspirations, promoting career development. In particular, job aspirations are an essential factor affecting

an individual's tendency to pursue performance goals to achieve career success and gain recognition from others. Conversely, an individual with low job aspirations may be more likely to pursue mastery goals, focusing on self-development and skill improvement.

Furthermore, Briscoe et al. (2006) found a positive correlation between job aspirations and career development, which the mediating variables can explain. Specifically, job aspirations can stimulate intrinsic motivation and promote personal and career development. When individuals have high job aspirations, they tend to be more engaged in their work and strive for higher job performance and achievements, thereby increasing the likelihood of career development. Additionally, career commitment and job satisfaction reflect an individual's level of identification and participation in their work, which further promotes career development. Lent et al. (1994) found that job aspirations are essential in individual career planning and implementation. Job aspirations help individuals recognize their interests and values and develop specific career plans to achieve their goals. This is particularly important for young athletes seeking personal career growth and development. By clarifying their job aspirations, athletes can better understand their career interests and values and develop feasible goals and plans for their career development. This can help them maintain confidence and achieve their career aspirations in a competitive environment.

In these studies, job aspirations are considered a positive psychological factor that can stimulate an individual's intrinsic motivation and drive them toward their goals and aspirations. While perfectionist traits can also drive individuals to pursue excellence, the excessive pursuit and high expectations associated with perfectionism can adversely affect an individual's career development. Therefore, job aspirations mediate the relationship between perfectionism and career development, helping individuals better cope with the challenges of perfectionism and achieve their career development goals.

This study also found that perfectionism has a slightly more substantial direct impact on career development than job aspirations. Specifically, perfectionism traits have a more substantial direct influence on career development than job aspirations. Other related studies have also supported this finding. For example, Stoeber and Otto's (2006) research indicated that perfectionism traits positively correlate with career development. Specifically, compared to job aspirations, perfectionism tendencies have a more direct and significant impact on an individual's career development. This means individuals with higher perfectionism tendencies are more likely to pursue career excellence and achievement. However, they may also hinder their career development due to their excessively high-performance expectations. However, job aspirations can still provide direction and support for an individual's career development, helping them recognize their interests and values and develop specific plans and actions to achieve their career goals.

In summary, this study investigated the relationships among perfectionism, work aspirations, self-worth, and career development and validated two research hypotheses. The results showed that perfectionism tendencies positively impact career development, but the excessive pursuit of perfectionism may have adverse effects. Notably, perfectionism tendencies' impact on career development is stronger than the mediating effects of self-worth and work aspirations. Moreover, compared to perfectionism tendencies, work aspirations play a more critical role in career development and can serve as a mitigating factor for the adverse effects of perfectionism tendencies. Additionally, the study found that self-worth and work aspirations mediate the relationship between perfectionism and career development, with work aspirations showing a more powerful mediating effect. These findings provide important insights for athletes' career development practice, highlighting the importance of cultivating work aspirations and self-worth to fully leverage their positive impact while appropriately adjusting the expression of perfectionism tendencies.

4. Conclusion & Suggestions

4.1 The Challenges of Perfectionism: The Dual Effects on Career Development Perfectionism tendencies can have dual effects on an athlete's career development.

On the one hand, it can drive individuals to pursue excellence and enhance their career achievements. On the other hand, it may lead to negative emotions such as excessive anxiety, disappointment, and

dissatisfaction. On the other hand, in career development, an individual's work ambition and self-worth mediate, which can alleviate and regulate the impact of perfectionism tendencies. Therefore, for young athletes, emphasizing personal development, avoiding the excessive pursuit of perfectionism, and strengthening work ambition and self-worth cultivation are critical factors in promoting career development. Moreover, strengthening career psychological counseling and training, and guiding individuals to better cope with the challenges and issues of career development, can enhance the level and quality of career development.

4.2 Mastering work ambition: alleviating the impact of perfectionism on career development.

In career development, work ambition plays an important intermediary role. Studies have found that an excessive pursuit of perfectionism may adversely affect career development, while a strong work ambition can help individuals better cope with the challenges of perfectionism. Individuals can better understand their career direction and objectives by setting specific career goals and plans, enhancing self-confidence and motivation, and promoting career development. Compared to a perfectionist tendency, work ambition plays a more significant role in career development. It can serve as a factor in alleviating the adverse effects of perfectionism on career development. Therefore, in career planning and development, focusing on work ambition and goal setting can help individuals alleviate the negative impact of perfectionism and improve their level of career development.

4.3 The Power of Self-Affirmation: The Key Role of Self-Worth in Career Development.

Self-worth is an individual's evaluation and perception of value and significance, which plays a crucial role in psychological functioning. In career development, self-worth can act as a mediator, enhancing an individual's self-affirmation and confidence and facilitating career advancement. Particularly in the face of perfectionistic tendencies, the role of self-worth becomes more apparent. Pursuing perfectionism excessively can lead to undervaluing and self-denial, negatively impacting career development. By fostering and strengthening self-worth, individuals can better cope with the challenges of perfectionism, facilitating smoother career development.

Therefore, it is recommended that athletes focus on cultivating and strengthening their self-worth in their careers, understanding their strengths and values, recognizing their abilities and potentials, and enhancing their self-affirmation and confidence to achieve their career goals better. In addition, career counseling and training can provide athletes with relevant skills and strategies to help them address various challenges and issues in their career development, achieving career growth and success.

4.4 Supporting Athlete Career Development: Coaching, Policy Recommendations, and Combating Perfectionism

In response to the challenges presented by perfectionism, we propose the following practical recommendations to support athlete career development and mitigate its negative impact:

(1) Strengthen athletes' mental training to enhance their ability to cope with the pressures of perfectionism. This can be achieved by providing psychological counselling and mental skills training to improve athletes' self-confidence, stress-coping abilities, and resilience in facing challenges. (2) Include the topic of perfectionism in coach training to increase their awareness of its impact on athlete career development. In addition, coaches can learn how to balance the pursuit of perfection with realistic goals in training and competition, providing better guidance for athletes. (3) Establish athlete career planning and development programs to assist athletes in developing diverse skills and interests beyond their sporting careers. These programs may include education, internships, and career development support, facilitating a smooth transition for athletes to the next stage of their careers. (4) Policymakers should consider implementing relevant policies and measures to provide more resources and support to help athletes cope with the pressures of perfectionism. This may involve providing mental health services for athletes, promoting communication between athletes and coaches, and creating a more humane competitive environment.

By adopting these recommendations, we hope to contribute to a more supportive environment that fosters athletes' well-being and career development while addressing the challenges posed by perfectionism.

4.5 Future Research Recommendations

Future research suggestions include further exploration of factors affecting perfectionism's impact on career development, such as individual personality traits, mental health status, and social support, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of perfectionism's role in career development. Additionally, it is necessary to investigate how to balance the influence of perfectionism and career aspirations, examining their interaction and their impact on individual career development. Furthermore, it is recommended to investigate the role and mechanisms of self-worth in career development and explore ways to enhance individuals' sense of self-worth, promoting their career development. Lastly, it is suggested to develop career development support programs specifically for athletes and conduct empirical research to gain a deeper understanding of the impact and effectiveness of these programs on athletes' career development. To address the current study's limitations, future research may consider expanding the sample scope to investigate other types of college students or athletes, increasing the generalizability of the study. These research efforts will provide a deeper understanding and guidance for career development, contributing to promoting athletes' career development and success.

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