



Doping use and deviance in Swiss national and international elite cycling



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ABSTRACT

Aim: Based on the theory of labelling, this paper sought to better understand doping norms in Swiss national and international elite cycling.

Methods: The investigation was based on 16 semi-structured interviews conducted in 2007 with eight active Swiss national and international elite cyclists and other people involved in cycling (coaches, physicians, cycling team and individual managers, journalists).

Findings: Doping was considered deviant at the national elite level, but not at the international level. At the national elite level, dopers were considered the 'outsiders', and the 'insiders' were cyclists who did not use performance-enhancing substances. In contrast at the international elite level, dopers were considered the 'insiders'. Nevertheless, some changes were observed in international elite cycling: even if some social pressures to dope persisted at the international elite level, they were less strong. Clean cyclists were not harassed or excluded from international elite cycling. Notably, a personal physician outside the cycling environment emerged as the rule creator and enforcer, and could be considered the moral entrepreneur in this study. Finally, the definition of doping in the cycling environment differed from the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA).

Conclusions and implications: Doping norms in international elite cycling have evolved slowly. It seems important that the WADA continues its effort to develop more efficient preventive and repressive anti-doping actions, and to extend these measures to all persons involved in doping practices, such as personal physicians who play an important role in doping use and norms.

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1. Introduction

Many studies have attempted to investigate the influence of social structure on individual action and identity using sociological and psychological perspectives. Social norms are a widely used concept for explaining human behaviour (Coleman, 1990). As conduct rules, these norms imply that a certain type of behaviour is expected by others and enforced by external sanctions that are social rather than economic in nature. Generally, people who deviate from certain social norms are punished or harassed by 'insiders' (Coleman, 1990; Lindbeck & Snower, 2001). For interactionists, deviance is not considered a pathological act going against consensual norms, but as a social phenomenon that consists of a set of interpretations and social reactions (Macionis & Gerber, 2011; Rubington & Weinberg, 2008). Interactionists work with relative rather than absolute

definitions of deviance: for them, there are no behaviours that are intrinsically deviant (Anderson & Taylor, 2009). Influenced by social constructionism and symbolic interactionism (Macionis & Gerber, 2011), Becker (1963) developed the theory of labelling in the early 1960s and illustrated it with two cases: marijuana users in the United States and Chicago dance musicians. Labelling is an active social process of how particular acts become defined as deviant: "Social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance and by applying those rules to particular people and labelling them as 'outsiders' [...] Deviant behaviour is behaviour that people so label" (Becker, 1963, p. 9). The behaviour that people exhibit may sometimes be labelled deviant by others, but on other occasions it may be regarded as acceptable and even normal. Rules are the products of persons or organisations and "we can think of the people who exhibit such enterprise as *moral entrepreneurs*" (Becker, 1963, p. 147). The moral entrepreneurs act as rule creators by crusading for the passage of rules, laws, and policies against behaviours they find abhorrent, or as rule enforcers by administering and implementing them. Becker (1963) emphasised the need for empirical research: "The most persistent difficulty in

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the scientific study of deviant behaviour is a lack of solid data, a paucity of facts and information on which to base our theories” (Becker, 1963, p. 165).

On the one hand, the theory of labelling presents some limitations and is not adapted for all types of deviance. As underlined by Christiansen (2010), “to say that genocide or high-school massacres are only deviant behaviour because we label them so is not only contra-intuitive but also dangerous” (p. 94). On the other hand, the interactionist view of deviance has proven to be useful when analysing sports doping phenomena (Brissonneau, Aubeil, & Ohl, 2008; Brissonneau, Defrance, Fincoeur, Lentillon-Kaestner, & Ohl, 2009; Christiansen, 2010; Goode, 2011; Peretti-Watel et al., 2004; Smith, 2015; Stokvis, 2003; Waddington, 2000).

In cycling, the Festina scandal at the 1998 Tour de France highlighted the widespread doping in international elite cycling and the involvement of physicians in the doping (Brissonneau et al., 2008; Waddington, 2000). During the period of organised team doping, doping was a common practice among professional cyclists; drug use was a shared practice and contributed to the subculture of doping in cycling (Brissonneau, 2007; Kimmage, 2001; Lê-Germain & Leca, 2005; Lentillon-Kaestner, 2013; Lentillon-Kaestner & Carstairs, 2010; Schneider, 2006; Smith, 2015; Waddington, 2000). The Festina scandal triggered changes in attitudes towards doping; according to Lentillon-Kaestner’s (2013) study, doping use was a part of cycling culture for the cyclists of the “former generation” (i.e., those who stated their cycling career before the 1998 Festina scandal), but not for the cyclists of the “new generation”, who have a new attitude towards doping. Doping use decreased slowly, however, it did not disappear (Bassons, 2000; Lentillon-Kaestner, 2013; Mignon, 2003). Since the Festina scandal, cyclists have started to confess their doping behaviours (e.g., Laurent Brochard and Alex Zülle in 1998; Jérôme Chiotti, Luc Leblanc and Richard Virenque in 2000; Erik Zabel, Bjarne Riss, Johan Museeuw in 2007, Laurent Fignon in 2009, Danilo Di Luca in 2010, Lance Armstrong in 2013). Lentillon-Kaestner and Carstairs (2010) underlined the importance of the transition from the national to international elite levels in the evolution of cyclists’ doping behaviours. Some studies have shown that doping was accepted as a shared practice in the peloton but not at the lower levels of practice (Christiansen, 2010; Lentillon-Kaestner & Carstairs, 2010). A number of studies have underlined the importance of social influences (mostly from other more experienced cyclists and physicians) in doping behaviours (Gucciardi, Jalleh, & Donovan, 2010; Hardie, Shilbury, Ware, & Bozzi, 2012; Lentillon-Kaestner, 2013; Lentillon-Kaestner & Carstairs, 2010; Lentillon-Kaestner, Hagger, & Hardcastle, 2012; Lucidi et al., 2008; Waddington, 2000; Zelli, Mallia, & Lucidi, 2010).

The literature on doping in cycling currently lacks in-depth analyses of how these doping subcultures were built at the national and international elite levels due to the theoretical approaches taken and focus on cyclists’ views. Using Becker’s (1963) labelling theory, the purpose of this paper was to better understand doping norms and subcultures in Swiss national and international elite cycling based on interviews conducted in 2007. Interviews from 2007 represent valuable data in terms of understanding the evolution of doping norms and subcultures in cycling. Firstly, the effects of the Festina scandal were still being felt in international cycling in terms of the increased implementation of anti-doping measures in international elite cycling (Christiansen, 2005; Lentillon-Kaestner, 2013). As underlined by Lentillon-Kaestner (2013), “the Festina scandal highlighted the need for an independent, international agency that would set unified standards for anti-doping policies and coordinate the efforts of sports organisations and public authorities” (p. 189). The Festina scandal was a primary catalyst for the formation of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) established in 1999, that published the first version of the World Anti-Doping Code in 2004 (Wagner, 2010). Revisions to the Code

and evolution of anti-doping practices have seen many other international anti-doping measures implemented since 2004. The Anti-Doping Administration & Management System (ADAMS) was launched in 2005 for the initial pilot phase and implemented in 2009 (WADA, 2009). ADAMS consists of a web-based database management system on which the athletes provide required information about their whereabouts to enable out-of-competition drug testing. The athlete biological passport was proposed in the early 2000s, with cycling the first sport to introduce its use in 2008.¹ The athlete biological passport is an indirect method of doping detection based on the individual and longitudinal monitoring of haematological or urine markers (Saugy, Lundby, & Robinson, 2014). Formal operating guidelines and mandatory standards were published following experience with the passport (WADA, 2013).

Secondly, 2005 saw the introduction of the Union Cycliste International (UCI) Pro Tour (Benijts & Lagae, 2012; Morrow & Idle, 2008). As underlined by Morrow and Idle (2008), “the Pro Tour was a radical change in that it sought to create league in professional road cycling, in which all the best riders and the best events were included (p. 315). These two events make examining interviews about doping with cyclists from 2007 a useful test of Becker’s labelling theory.

2. Methods

This article was based on research financed by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) and was approved by the Ethics Committee at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland.

2.1. Participants

Participants contributed to this research on a voluntary basis. To better understand how the doping subculture was built at the Swiss national and international elite levels, attention was focused on active cyclists and active social actors in the cycling environment in Switzerland at the time. All of the participants who were asked to participate agreed to take part in the study: eight young active cyclists, two coaches, three physicians, two cycling team managers, two individual cycling managers and one cycling journalist were interviewed. All participants were male. It is noteworthy that all of the coaches, team or individual managers interviewed had been international elite cyclists before the Festina scandal. The eight active cyclists were selected from among the best young cyclists of Switzerland. Six were men in the under-23 category (U23) who hoped to find an international elite team in the near future. Two had already found a UCI Pro Tour team (neo-professional), one for just over a year (Pro Tour A) and the other three years (Pro Tour B). All of the cyclists interviewed were or had been on the national team in the junior or under-23 category.²

2.2. Data collection

The data were collected through 16 semi-structured interviews conducted in 2007. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview protocols (i.e., for cyclists, coaches, managers, physicians) were adapted from the guide used by Trabal, Buisine, Brissonneau, and Defrance (2006) in their investigation of doping among professional cyclists. The interviews with cyclists included questions about each step of their career (new team, category, trainer, competition level), their training (type, quantity), the competitions (type, quantity), their business contacts (coach,

¹ <http://www.uci.ch/clean-sport/the-athlete-biological-passport-abp/>.

² An International Cycling Union (UCI) category: the elite racers who are 19–22 years old are classified in the category “U23” (under 23: less than 23 years).

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