



The doping mindset—Part I: Implications of the Functional Use Theory on mental representations of doping



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 20 November 2013
Received in revised form 3 April 2014
Accepted 10 June 2014
Available online 7 August 2014

Keywords:

Attitude
Sport
Performance enhancement
Drug
Measurement
Incremental model of doping behaviour

ABSTRACT

Doping is typically referred to by some legal/moral heuristics, labelling the activity illegal and unfair, and condemning doping users as cheats and rogues. Whilst these heuristics accurately reflect the general social norms and the official stance, qualitative research suggests that they may be in conflict with the way doping user athletes think, seeing doping as a morally questionable but effective means to achieving performance goals. Congruently, quantitative studies show that athletes' mental representations of doping are more closely aligned with substances representing functionality than legality, and they follow the behavioural pathways athletes choose with regard to doping use and revealing information about it. As long as the dominant quantitative research paradigm follows the legal/moral route, the incongruence between reality and the faulty assumptions about reality limits the ecological validity of the research findings. This concept paper argues for progressing quantitative social cognition research with new models, measurement tools and methodologies that shift away from the dominance of moralistic frames. To facilitate this progress, two inter-related conceptual models are proposed. The first is an incremental-functional model of doping to reflect the motivated, goal-driven and progressive nature of athletes' involvement in performance enhancing practices. The second is a model of an athlete doping mindset which conceptualises the link between the goal as performance enhancement and the functional and moral aspects of doping as purposive, goal-driven behaviour to enable empirical testing. Quantitative investigations into doping-related social cognition should capture the moral-functional duality and acknowledge functionality to make meaningful contributions to anti-doping efforts.

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Notwithstanding the reasonable research effort and investment, anti-doping still lacks a reasonable behaviour model with practical relevance that can be used for prevention or intervention. Part of the reason for this hiatus is the limitations inherent to doping research because the behaviour is both socially unaccepted and a punishable activity. In its vicious circle, the more doping became a covert activity, the more difficult conducting meaningful doping behaviour research became, owing to limited access to participants and issues around honesty. The other aspect is equating behaviour with motives, taking for granted that if the behaviour is cheating (and being against the rules, it is cheating) then the motive behind doping is to cheat via gaining unfair advantage. If we strip the layers of fears, hopes and values attached to our mental concept of 'sport' and 'drugs', then doping is just another means to enhance

performance; and only the anti-doping rules imposed on the individual some fifty years ago about how performance enhancement can be achieved separate the good from bad, the cheats from the noble, the acceptable from the non-acceptable. Doping is nothing more or less than a collection of currently unacceptable means among the myriad of performance enhancement practices. In the midst of blurred boundaries between performance enhancement, performance-enhancing substances and the prevailing social representations of sport and drugs (Outram, 2013), it is the Anti-Doping Code condemns the *behaviour* and labels users as 'cheats'. The existing body of quantitative empirical research into doping behaviour automatically transfers this valence attached to the behaviour to the *motives* and thus inadvertently inhibits the view of functionality where the primary motive is not to cheat but to advance.

The existing empirically tested behavioural models (e.g., Barkoukis, Lazuras, Tzorbatzoudis, & Rodafinos, 2011, 2013; Donovan, Egger, Kapernick, & Mendoza, 2002; Jalleh, Donovan, & Jobling, 2013; Lazuras, Barkoukis, Rodafinos, & Tzorbatzoudis, 2010; Lucidi et al., 2008; Petróczi, 2007; Strelan & Boeckmann, 2006; Whitaker, Long, Petróczi, & Backhouse, 2013; Zelli, Mallia,

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& Lucidi, 2010) typically feature combinations of personality traits and social cognitive factors. Whilst informative, they do not translate easily into feasible intervention strategies. Theory-based models, with a few exceptions, typically build on existing theories and tend to follow a well-worn path of health or illicit drug use models. As a consequence, these deductive models are inherently limited by a pre-conceived notion of seeing doping as health risk or deviance (Johnson, 2012); or as a logical and rational profit maximising behaviour (Haugen, Nepusz & Petróczi, 2013).

In disciplines other than social psychology, a growing body of research criticises the dominant legal/moral viewpoint and the resultant anti-doping system on philosophical, political, educational and health grounds (e.g., Camporesi & McNamee, 2014; Houlihan, 2013; Kayser, Mauron, & Miah, 2007; Kayser & Smith, 2008; Lippi, Banfi, & Franchini, 2009; Lippi, Franchini, & Guidi, 2008; Loland & Hoppeler, 2012; Mazanov & Connor, 2010; Pitsch, 2009; Smith & Stewart, 2008; Tamburini, 2006; Wagner, 2009). Their arguments are underpinned by the discrepancy between the detected and known cases, the permanent lag between drug development and testing methods and the investment necessary for a single positive result. In addition, employment and privacy law issues arising from the need for constant surveillance (e.g., Hanstad & Loland, 2009) or conflicting roles of the physicians (e.g., Griffith et al., 2011). Captured in phrases such as 'war on drugs – war on doping', or 'zero tolerance', the current approach to anti-doping plays strongly on social fear of drugs (Coomber, 2013; Kayser & Broers, 2012; López, 2013), including its preventive education, and is characterised by a strong moral/ethical approach that overwrites legality (Kreft, 2011). A comprehensive review on critiques of the moralistic view of doping is beyond the limit and scope of this paper, but interested reader should consult Kayser and Broers (2012) editorial for an overview, and the broader pertinent literature to appreciate the full extent of the limitations the moral/legal standpoint places on finding feasible solutions for the doping problem in sport.

Concerning the present paper, it is notable that this critical viewpoint has not yet been captured in quantitative psychosocial investigations of doping behaviour beyond athletes' attitudes towards anti-doping measures (e.g., De Hon, Eijs, & Havenga, 2011; Dunn, Thomas, Swift, Burns, & Mattick, 2010; Elbe & Overbye, 2013; Hanstad, Skille, & Thurston, 2009; Overbye & Wagner, 2013). One very plausible reason for this is that incorporating such a view into empirical quantitative research into social cognition, and within the existing research frameworks using the available assessment tools, is close to impossible. This paper aims to address this issue at the conceptual level.

Research conducted to date aiming to understand and change doping behaviour, and hypothesis-driven investigations in particular (for a meta-analysis, see Ntoumanis, Ng, Barkoukis, & Backhouse, 2013), has been predominantly carried out within an ethical/moral framework, reflecting the official stance of protecting the idealistic view of the gentleman's sport and fair play. The implications of the myopic view in ignoring the complexity of doping and today's reality of high performance sport has had a severe debilitating effect on social psychology research into distal and proximal factors of doping behaviour. Studies failing to find strong differences and lacking predictive power of commonly accepted risk factors, highlighted the sensitivity of the questions, social desirability, sample characteristics and general methodological issues such as effect size and insufficient sample size (Ntoumanis et al., 2013), but fell short of questioning the relevance of the moral framework within which investigations were carried out. Research evidenced the role (or lack of) attitudes, norms, sportspersonship, risk taking and moral disengagement (reviewed by Backhouse, McKenna, & Atkin, 2007; and since e.g., Barkoukis et al., 2011, 2013; Diehl, Thiel, Zipfel, Mayer, & Schneider, 2014; Jalleh et al., 2013; Lazuras et al., 2010;

Sas-Nowosielski & Swiatkowska, 2008; Thiel et al., 2011; Uvacsek et al., 2011; Whitaker et al., 2013; Zelli et al., 2010) overlooked alternative possible explanations such as instrumental or functional use, rationalisation and normalisation. Discordant results from triangulations with objective behavioural measures (Petróczi et al., 2010; Petróczi, Uvacsek, et al., 2011) highlighted another important element in evidencing discriminative and predictive power of any psychological measures, namely the way by which doping behaviour is established.

In social psychology doping research reported to date, doping attitude – as one of the key elements of doping behaviour models – has been considered as a single construct with its 'orientation' determined by the attitude measure items. Leaving the hard-to-interpret classic 'good/bad' connotation aside, these attitude measures typically represent a mix of the legislative (e.g., 'legal/illegal', 'sport would benefit from doping being allowed'), moral (e.g. 'fair/unfair'; 'doping is not cheating if everyone does it') and functional (e.g., 'beneficial/detrimental', 'doping is necessary to perform at the highest level'). Measurements taken through these items inevitably result in a somewhat fuzzy doping attitude concept that inherently includes, but does not explicitly consider, the degree of cognitive consistency/inconsistency between the doping related cognitive elements, including cognitions about the performance enhancing behaviours. The latter may put limitations on the predictive power of doping attitudes in the existing doping models.

1. Aims

This conceptual paper challenges the prevailing moralistic view of doping and argues for the need for 'grassroots' models that are inductively built on information accurately reflecting athletes' explicit and implicit doping-related thoughts, feelings and motivations. The key tenet of my proposition is that the decision to dope is not ad hoc or made on the spur of the moment. Doping requires dedication and adherence to both pharmacological intervention and the accompanying physical training to make it work. For the sake of argument, let me set the moral aspect of doping behaviour aside for a moment. Then we are left with the fact that the physical aspects of doping are not more pleasant than undergoing a prolonged medical treatment that may be unpleasant but necessary for achieving the goal. The literature on self-managed care in chronic medical conditions readily acknowledges the difficulty and the critical role of self-regulation in sustained adherence (Clark, 2003; Williams, Rodin, Ryan, Grolnick, & Deci, 1998). Naturally, the goal of any anti-doping effort is not to help but to prevent the sustained effort for doping. Having but having an understanding about the way athletes cope with social and normative realities of high performance sport is just as fundamental to progressing anti-doping in the future as striving for clean sport. Equally, doping research, quantitative investigations in particular, should aim to capture how doping is represented in athletes' conscious or unconscious mind.

1.1. Objectives

With this paper, I aim to draw attention to the self-imposed limits of working rigidly within this moralistic framework and to propose a plausible alternative approach to consider in future quantitative investigations. Breaking away from the moralistic view, I argue that doping is a goal-driven and effortful behaviour, which incrementally grows out from habitual involvement in acceptable assisted performance enhancing practices. As such, the proposed Functional Use Theory sees doping as a learned, goal-oriented but not deterministic behaviour that develops over time. In connection with the functional-incremental approach, I posit that the way athletes think about doping is a function of the behaviour

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