

Project Ntoumanis

A cross-cultural investigation of the effects of coach motivational strategies on athlete doping behaviors: Direct and indirect relations

Our recent statistical review of the literature (Ntoumanis et al., 2012) showed that relatively little research on doping in sport has examined the contributing role of social environments. Further, the research that has been conducted to date has been limited in that it has focused on perceptions of social norms for and against doping, but has failed to identify specific coach motivational strategies that support or undermine athlete motivation to engage in doping behavior, as well as the mechanisms via which such strategies might be influential. There is extensive evidence in the sport psychology literature regarding the positive effects of adaptive coach motivational strategies (e.g., allowing athlete input, providing rationales for task engagement) on athlete motivation and psychological/physical well-being (e.g., Ntoumanis, 2012). However, comparatively less is known about maladaptive coach motivational strategies (e.g., threat of punishment, using pressuring techniques that focus on results at the expense of athletes' well-being). Recent research by the primary applicant (e.g., Bartholomew et al., 2011a) has utilized the self-determination theoretical framework (Deci & Ryan, 2002) to show how adaptive and maladaptive coach motivational strategies predict a number of indices of athlete psychological and physical functioning (e.g., disordered eating, burnout, depression, and physical symptoms). However, it is unknown how coach adaptive and maladaptive motivational strategies can influence athletes' intention and engagement in doping behavior.

This project proposes two studies that draw from self-determination theory to examine adaptive and maladaptive coach motivational strategies, and their positive/negative effects on athletes' psychological needs, life goals, prosocial and antisocial moral attitudes, doping intention and use. The first study will utilize individual and focus group interviews with adult athletes and their coaches from a variety of sports. The second study will utilize a longitudinal quantitative methodology assessing, via validated questionnaires, the temporal relations among the aforementioned variables at the beginning and end of a sport season. We aim to conduct both studies in two countries (UK and Greece) in which there is accumulated research evidence on the psychological predictors of doping use in sport. The cross-cultural comparisons we will carry out aim to identify differences and similarities both in the mean levels of the variables under investigation as well as the processes via which coach motivational strategies predict doping behaviors in sport.

The project fits well with the third research category of the 2013 WADA Program, as it tests a comprehensive cross-cultural process model of doping behavior. It has the endorsement of sports coach UK and the only official athletics coaching organization in Greece. Both organizations are committing to promote the project within the two countries and facilitate the dissemination of its findings. Aligned with the WADA's Education Committee aims, the findings from this project can inform the development of more efficient and evidence-based campaigns and coach educational programs that prevent doping in sport. The project is timely given the rise in coach educational programs worldwide that aim to support sustained and healthy athlete engagement in sport.