

Project Stanger

The interactive effects of moral identity and moral disengagement on doping: An experimental investigation.

Doping is a moral issue and widely considered as a form of cheating because of the purpose to gain an unfair advantage over others, which ultimately challenges the integrity of those involved. This project aims to investigate the joint influences of moral disengagement (justifications people provide to commit an immoral act without experiencing the usual negative emotional consequences) and moral identity (the importance one places on being a moral person, such as being honest, kind and fair) on athletes' likelihood to dope. Moreover, this project aims to investigate the impact that these factors have on athletes' emotions (e.g., guilt) and moral judgments that usually help refrain us from engaging in morally questionable acts, such as doping.

Cross-sectional and qualitative studies have highlighted that moral disengagement is linked with higher susceptibility to dope. However, these studies do not enable us to determine the direction of this relationship. To this end, this study will investigate the effects of manipulating moral disengagement to see whether this increases athletes' likelihood to dope and overrides the usual self-regulatory role of emotion and judgment. In addition, this study will also determine whether athletes with a high moral identity are less susceptible to morally disengage and justify doping and thus, protect athletes from situations that may make them more likely to dope. As such, this project has three main research questions. First, to determine whether moral disengagement is associated with doping by blunting emotions and perceiving such behavior as less morally wrong. Second, to investigate the effects of manipulating moral disengagement on athletes' likelihood to dope. Third, to determine whether any effects of moral disengagement on doping are moderated by moral identity.

To address these objectives, this project will recruit team sport players who will complete questionnaires to assess their moral identity, moral disengagement and doping. Then athletes will view a range of pictures representing doping (e.g., athletes injecting a performance enhancing drug) and rate their emotional reactions and moral judgments to each picture. Next, athletes will read two sets of scenarios to elicit low and high moral disengagement and indicate their likelihood to dope, their moral judgments and their anticipated emotions. In addition, the study will examine whether such effects are undermined when athletes are high in moral identity in comparison to low in moral identity. This will be tested by measuring athletes' general moral identity as well as by manipulating athletes' moral identity.

The findings of this project will strengthen the evidence base to inform anti-doping programmes. Specifically, the pre-dominant experimental approach adopted will help to determine the direction of relationships as well as highlight that moral identity and moral disengagement are amenable (can change) and this in turn, can help reduce athletes' likelihood to dope. Thus, greatly strengthening the evidence base in understanding effective deterrence strategies for coaches and support personnel in the fight against doping.