

Project Mills (UK)

Dr. John Mills, University of Essex.

Examining the Role of Personal Ethics in Athlete and Stakeholder Perceptions of Anti-Doping

Moral functioning in athletes is a complex issue and dependent upon personal ethics and situational cues, yet research to date on doping behaviour has been based on narrow, binary distinctions (e.g., good vs. bad, right vs. wrong). However, individuals are diverse in how they define their morality. To illustrate this, consider two athletes at the pinnacle of their sport. One uses prohibited substances, but donates all his/her prize money to charitable organisations that seek to provide care. The second does not use prohibited substances, but donates his/her prize money to organisations that seek to profit from causing harm. Which of the two athletes is morally disengaged? Some may argue that the first athlete is morally justified as through his/her donation, the greatest good can be maximised. Others may view the first athlete as contravening the rules and their duty to their fellow competitors/sport. Likewise, some may argue that the second athlete does not contravene any rules or laws and as such, they hold the moral superiority. In contrast, others may see such action – albeit within the rules – as morally abhorrent. A third group may be less interested in the act or outcome and more interested in the character and motive of the person when evaluating the morality of an actions.

The approaches described here broadly represent three ethical theories within normative ethics: (1) Utilitarianism (i.e., maximising good), (2) Deontology (i.e., rules, duties, or obligations constrain action), and (3) Virtue Ethics (i.e., personal motives and character). It is likely that individuals understand their ethics using a varying balance of these different frameworks. We argue that understanding personal ethics and the environment in which they are formed may be key in developing value based anti-doping education programmes. To achieve this aim, the current project has three main objectives. First, to explore the moral development of athletes and stakeholders, a sample of sport (e.g., team, individual) and exercise (e.g., bodybuilding, aerobics) participants (preferably athlete-parent/coach dyads) will be recruited for Moral Judgement Interviews to establish how individuals vary in their ethical frameworks. Second, these data will then be utilised to design and validate a novel measure of personal ethics, which not only assesses the strength of said ethics, but also provides a rank ordering of ethical priorities. Third, to develop a new value based anti-doping training programme that uses the new measure to identify the dominant personal ethic and attempts to use this information to reduce doping intentions. As such, this project will make three major contributions to anti-doping research: First, the project will advance knowledge of the potential sources of doping cognition (e.g., the influence of key events, environment, important others). Second, a valid and reliable measurement tool for use in anti-doping research will be developed. Third, a value based training programme based on established psychological theory that seeks to incorporate personal, behavioural and environmental factors will be developed and piloted (Bandura, 1986, 1991, 2001).