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Title

Talking doping: a frame analysis of communication about doping among talented, young, Norwegian road cyclists

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Abstract

In everyday communication, participants can critically explore their understanding of morally complex phenomena. There has been little effort within the social sciences to provide insight into whether and how athletes communicate among themselves about morally contested topics. This study attempts to fill this gap in the literature. Through focus group interviews and with the help of Goffman's frame analysis, we explore how a group of young, Norwegian road cyclists communicates about doping. The article demonstrates that this communication is strongly norm-regulated and often appears as brief, assertive, and evasive. We show how the communication reflects a hegemonic discourse of doping as immoral and inexcusable. We conclude that this discourse limits explorative communication and may limit young athletes' preparation for doping-related dilemmas and social pressures.

According to the “fundamental rationale” of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), doping is contrary to “the spirit of sport” which is defined as “the pursuit of human excellence through the dedicated perfection of each person’s natural talents” (WADA, 2015, p. 14). In operational terms, doping is defined as the use of any means or methods on WADA’s Prohibited List (WADA, 2016). The public authorities and sports organizations funding WADA consider doping among the main, ethical challenges to sport.

To many athletes, doping represents a difficult dilemma. On the one hand, doping is banned in sports and widely considered immoral and unhealthy. On the other hand, elite athletes are dependent upon their performances and results. Doping can be an effective means—perhaps the most accessible performance-enhancing shortcut in many elite sports. Although difficult to measure, the prevalence of doping appears considerably high in many sports (de Hon, Kuipers, & van Bottenburg, 2015). Furthermore, doping has a significant presence in the public discourse about elite sports. The media coverage of “doping scandals” can be remarkable in volume and intensity (McDermott, 2016).

Reports on how elite athletes discuss and reflect upon the doping dilemma among themselves, however, are hard to find. This fact is not surprising. Scholars such as Møller (2008), Jedlicka (2014), and Kayser (2015) have identified a predominantly normative framing of doping as immoral and inexcusable in the power structures of sports and in the mass media. In line with this framing, elite athletes speaking in the public sphere tend to condemn doping, express support for anti-doping measures, and describe their own choice not to dope as obvious and simple (McDermott, 2016). This hegemonic discourse makes for a black-and-white picture, in which only immoral persons choose to dope, whereas the rest do not even consider it a possibility.

Arguably, this black-and-white picture influences social science research on doping.

There is ample evidence that athletes' lack of willingness, confidence, or skills to critically and reflectively communicate about doping (anonymously in questionnaires or in face-to-face interviews) influences and limits research (see Backhouse, McKenna, Robinson, & Atkin, 2007; de Hon et al., 2015; and Morente-Sanchez & Zabala, 2013). In a review of research on elite athletes' perspectives towards doping, Morente-Sanchez and Zabala (2013, p. 200) conclude: "It seems that there is a significant difference between what some athletes say and what they really think." The issue is not necessarily dishonesty, but a predominant anti-doping discourse that narrows athletes' opportunity to express conceptions of doping as a morally complex dilemma.

For elite athletes, reflecting on the doping dilemma in one way or another seems unavoidable. This reflection does not necessarily take the form of deep moral quandaries over right and wrong, but perhaps rather of wonderings about how to relate to the challenge of doping and what to expect. Will I have to face doping-related dilemmas during my career and even actively resist doping? Do my competitors dope? Is it possible to win without it? Talking with fellow athletes and friends about such questions could allow athletes to critically explore their understanding of a morally complex phenomenon.

In this background, we investigated how young elite athletes talk about doping. We conducted focus group interviews with talented, young, Norwegian road cyclists. Using focus groups with friends, teammates, and an interviewer with experience as an elite road cyclist, we attempted to create an informal setting of trust. Our intention was to facilitate discussions which the participants could be familiar with as part of their everyday interactions as friends and elite athletes. In the analyses, we paid particular attention to two aspects of the communication. First, we investigated how the participants communicated about doping with their peers. Second, we concentrated on how the participants

communicated about doping as a moral dilemma.

Such insights are important for several reasons. First, evidence suggests that preventive education is more effective when members of the target group actively engage with the topic and come to their own conclusions based on discussion and critical reflection (Backhouse, 2015; Backhouse, McKenna, & Patterson, 2009; Horcajo & de la Vega, 2014). Accordingly, Backhouse (2015) emphasizes the importance of interaction in anti-doping education programs. If athletes are familiar and comfortable with doping as a topic of conversation, such programs are more likely to be effective. Second, previous research on road cycling shows that athletes' decisions to dope should be understood to a considerable extent as a product of socialization (Christiansen, 2005; Lentillon-Kaestner, Hagger, & Hardcastle, 2012; Ohl, Fincoeur, Lentillon-Kaestner, Defrance, & Brissonneau, 2013). For young cyclists, influence and pressure from more experienced riders and support personnel are highly important. In the so-called "blood doping era" of the 1990s and 2000s, many young athletes got the impression doping was necessary, fair, and healthy. Critical reflection on the moral and social complexities of the doping dilemma can empower athletes to face social pressure and make independent and informed decisions. Our study, then, can contribute to the design of more efficient anti-doping strategies emphasizing moral reasoning and empowerment among young athletes.

The article is structured as follows. First, we introduce previous research and the theoretical perspective of Erving Goffman's frame analysis. Then, we discuss the methodological approach of the study before presenting findings and analyses. Finally, we conclude with the main findings and offer thoughts on the possible implications for social science research and preventive anti-doping education.

Previous Research

When considering elite athletes and doping, social scientists have mainly focused on quantitative questions of prevalence (de Hon et al., 2015), athletes' perspectives and attitudes towards doping (Backhouse et al., 2007; Morente-Sanchez & Zabala, 2013), and risk factors for doping behavior (Backhouse et al., 2007; Hauw & McNamee, 2015). Qualitative studies about how athletes interpret and experience the doping phenomenon are less common. However, following several scandals and confessions about doping in professional road cycling in the 1990s and 2000s, cycling has been the subject of some qualitative sociological and social psychological research.

One theme has emerged from both research and insider stories: The socialization of young cyclists into what Waddington (2000, p. 163) describes as road cycling's "internal culture of tolerance." Ohl et al. (2013) interviewed 70 active or retired professional cyclists and team leaders. The authors concluded that the social drama of professional cycling teams shapes "cyclists' bodies and moralities through discourses, training, follow-up, pressure, health-care, [and] competitions" to the extent that the decision to dope takes place in a context where "reasoning on an individual level is not very relevant" (Ohl et al., 2013, pp. 14-15). Similarly, Lentillon-Kaestner et al. (2012) identified a trivialization of doping-related health risks: In professional cycling teams of the 1990s and 2000s, experienced teammates and support personnel convinced many young cyclists that doping was safe, necessary, and even healthy. Several autobiographies by insiders about the culture of tolerance support and expand on this theme (good examples of insightful autobiographies by professional road cyclists are Kimmage, 1990; Hamilton & Coyle, 2012).

One particularly interesting study looked at talented, young cyclists aiming for careers as professional cyclists. Lentillon-Kaestner and Carstairs' (2010, p. 336) interview

study with young Swiss cyclists reported that many participants seemed susceptible to the influence described above: “They were attracted to doping; they were open to using doping substances themselves if it was the key to continuing their cycling career, but only after they became professional.”

By studying doping communication among athletes in what is considered a strict, Norwegian anti-doping culture (Breivik, Hanstad, & Loland, 2009), our study adds to this growing body of qualitative research on road cycling and doping. Whereas previous research has focused on the experiences and attitudes of professional cyclists or the expectations and attitudes of talented, not yet professional cyclists, our concern is the communication context in which such views are expressed and negotiated. In the following section, we explain this particular perspective in more detail.

Theoretical Perspective: Frame Analysis

This study investigates how talented, young, Norwegian road cyclists communicate about doping. A few specifications are necessary. First, we are concerned with communication in face-to-face interactions. The focus group interview is a methodical tool that comes close to such situations and is the main source of data in this study. Second, as Watzlawick, Bavelas, Jackson, and O'Hanlon (1967, p. 51) write, “All behaviour in an interactional situation has message value, i.e. is communication.” In face-to-face interactions, participants communicate by talking, not talking, talking loudly, sighing, whispering, et cetera. Moreover, communication also includes facial expressions and body gestures of many kinds. In the focus group interviews, therefore, we observed both verbal and non-verbal communication.

A useful perspective in the study of communication in face-to-face interactions is *frame analysis*. In line with Goffman (1974), we understand *frame* as the definition of a social interaction. Once in a social interaction, the actors identify the frame by answering the question, “What’s going on here?” (Goffman 1974, p. 8). This process is termed *framing* and is often implicit. Frame analysis considers a specific interaction and examines how the actors frame it. *Social primary frames* denote general frames for specific types of social situations. A situation (e.g. a focus group interview) is framed within and derives meaning from a general framing of situations of this type—perhaps group discussions or interviews. According to Goffman, social primary frames are cultural belongings produced and re-produced by the members of a social group. In other words, these general frames contain social norms and rules for communication.

In social interactions, the frames of different actors must be reasonably compatible for meaningful interaction to take place. Social primary frames give shared answers to some overarching questions (e.g., whether conversation is supposed to take place). Other questions are subject to *frame negotiation*. In informal, conversational interactions, the topic of conversation is a good example. Frame negotiation happens mainly through *metacommunication*: Actors communicate about their communication (Bateson, 1972).

Metacommunication can be both bodily and linguistic. Smiles, laughter, and nods can signal approval, as can long and thorough answers to a question. Moreover, metacommunication can be given (intentional) or given off (spontaneous, often unintentional) (Goffman, 1963): Actors can say outright that they do not want to speak about a certain topic or convey a similar message by speaking in short sentences, looking down, or shaking their head.

In this study, the focus group interviews are the relevant social interactions. The

participants and the interviewer are the actors. Our use of Goffman's frame analysis captures how the actors' frames emerge from the interaction and shape the communication in it. By asking the question, "How do the participants frame the interviews?" our analysis shed light on how the communication in the interviews produces, reproduces, and is an expression of relations, norms, and rules among the participants.

Political sociologists like Benford and Snow (2000) have elaborated on the concept of frame to grasp different actors' interpretation of political and social phenomena. In this perspective, the term *master frames* describes how actors interpret a political or social phenomenon within a broader value-based frame (e.g., a political ideology or philosophy of life) (Benford & Snow, 2000; Seippel & Strandbu, 2012). Similar to how social primary frames function in social interactions, master frames are the first tool an actor utilizes when faced with a phenomenon. To what extent a phenomenon resonates with an actor (i.e. evokes an emotional or even behavioral response), is partly a function of whether it relates to the values of the actor's master frames.

In this article, we construct two ideal types of master frames that influence how athletes frame sports-related phenomena. On the one hand, elite sports are about performance and results, and this focus tends to shape the elite athlete's everyday experience. In idealized terms, we view the quest for performance and results as a philosophy of life for the elite athlete. We term this master frame *results orientation*. On the other hand, sports are built on values of moral constraints and fair play. Some level of fair play can even be seen as a prerequisite for sporting contests to take place in meaningful ways: Athletes have to accept the constitutive rules that define the sport in question (Loland, 2002). Indeed, athletes often appear sensitive to what they consider fair and unfair on the sports field. As an ideal type, we define *fair play orientation* as another master frame

for elite athletes.

When athletes face phenomena that they consider positive for athletic results but unfair, contradictions arise between the results and fair play orientations. For many athletes, doping is such a phenomenon. Hence, we believe that considering the two master frames can be useful in understanding how athletes frame doping.

Data and Methods

To study how young elite athletes communicate about doping, we conducted four focus group interviews with a total of 13 participants (ten men, three women, all Norwegian). Participants were 17 to 21 years old and belonged to the national road cycling elite of their age group. Each group had three or four participants of the same gender and roughly the same age. Two groups consisted of men in the junior category (17 to 18 years old), one of men in the U23 category (18 to 21 years old), and one of women in the junior category (17 to 18 years old).

The ambition to become a professional cyclist was a key criterion for inclusion. All participants stated such ambitions. Our intention was that participants with this ambition, and approaching an age where many cyclists make this career step, would perceive the interview topic as personally relevant to their near future. Hence, initial contact with potential participants was made through the head coaches of teams that competed at the elite national level and frequently took part in international races. The interviews were conducted at team training camps, and all eligible athletes present at the camps took part. According to the interviewer's observations before, during, and after the interviews, *friends* was an appropriate description. We preferred pre-established social relations and

homogeneity in terms of age and sporting level to facilitate an atmosphere of everyday, casual communication.

Recruiting women was challenging. In large part this was due to the relatively small number of young, female, elite road cyclists in Norway. Whereas elite national races typically attract 200 junior and U23 men, the number of junior and U23 women can be 20 to 30ⁱ. In other words, the gender imbalance among participants reflects a gender imbalance in Norwegian road cycling.

Morgan (1997, p. 6) defines the focus group interview as a “research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher.”

Interaction is at the core. The key value of the focus group interview is the development of data that would not be accessible without group interaction (Morgan, 1997).

Communication in a focus group interview provides insight into norms and values in the group, and how these are negotiated (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001). Given the researchers' awareness of the focus group context's influence on communication, such knowledge can shed light on the way participants communicate about the topic in everyday life. In this study, we employ Goffman's frame analysis partly as a means to understand the relationship between the communication in the interviews and everyday informal talk about doping.

The focus group interviews were conducted by the first author, who, in addition to being a researcher, is a retired elite cyclist and familiar with the general Norwegian road cycling culture. He is not, however, familiar with the particular milieu from which the participants were recruited. Before the interviews, the interviewer spent some time getting to know the participants. Through informal talk, they learned about his athletic background. In the interviewer's experience, there were differences between the groups regarding the

degree to which he was considered an “outsider” or an “insider” to the cycling community. It is possible that the junior participants perceived the interviewer mainly as a researcher and secondarily as a previous insider to the cycling community. Signs of this perception were present before the interviews in how the participants spoke about their sport and their situation, and during the interviews, as we return to below, in how the participants communicated about doping. Perhaps due to the U23 men being closer to the interviewer in age and possibly knowing him by name, the outsider perception did not seem as strong in that group. In both cases, the interviewers' position as a former insider was a benefit for addressing adequate questions, getting access and interpreting the data (Kersetter 2012).

A semi-structured interview guide organized the interviews, with questions about four themes: (a) everyday talk about doping; (b) experiences with anti-doping education; (c) views and expectations about the state of professional road cycling in terms of doping; and (d) vignettes. Vignettes present participants with a fictional scenario and asks them to imagine how a central character in the scenario would behave (Bloor & Wood, 2006). This is considered a useful, non-threatening way of exploring sensitive topics (Jenkins, Bloor, Fischer, Berney, & Neale, 2010). We used vignettes to shed light on how the participants communicated about doping as a moral dilemma. Each vignette described a dilemma in which acts of doping were balanced with factors that we thought the participants could perceive as justifying the act to some extent.

After each interview, the interviewer summarized immediate impressions. Key themes in these notes were the general atmosphere of the interview (e.g. relaxed, tense), impressions of each participant (e.g. talkative, attentive, bored), and group dynamics. The interview recordings were transcribed verbatim, and the resulting transcriptions were subjected to a two-step analysis. First, we organized the material thematically, with themes

corresponding to the themes of the interview guide. The second step was a theoretically informed analysis applying concepts from frame analysis.

Permission to conduct the study was granted by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services, and all data were handled according to this permission. Our topic is a morally contested one. Hence, we intentionally secured anonymity for the participants, as the number of elite, young, Norwegian cyclists is limited. Pseudonyms are used throughout the article.

Results and Analyses

Based on our analysis, two topics stand out as particularly interesting. The first is how the participants described face-to-face conversations about doping in everyday life. The second is the vignette discussions, where we investigated how the cyclists talked about doping as a moral dilemma. In both cases, we describe the conversations in the focus group interviews and discuss how the cyclists' framings of doping influence communication. Intertwined is the analysis of how the cyclists framed the focus group situation.

Everyday Face-to-Face Talk About Doping

Early in the interviews, the participants were asked whether doping was a frequent topic of conversation in their peer groups. Across the three groups of junior men and women, the response to this question contained reservations. The participants emphasized that even if they talked about doping, they did not talk about it that much. Pete stated, for example, that *“Yes, there’s been some [talk] lately, when... Not frequent, but there’s been some talk, when*

that 18-year-old got caught for EPO. [...] Then there's been some talk, but not that much really." Pete was referring to a road cyclist at a similar level who had recently tested positive for the banned substance Erythropoietin (EPO). The young cyclists talked about it, but *"not that much."*

Throughout the interviews, many of the junior cyclists expressed feelings of indifference towards doping. Seemingly, this indifference influenced how they communicated about doping in everyday life. The main source of indifference was a conception shared by most of the juniors that doping was nearly eradicated from professional cycling. According to Aaron, road cycling was *"one of the cleanest sports today. Cleaner than many other sports."* Martin argued that the considerable presence of team leaders and support personnel with a doping history was unproblematic because *"Most of the people that did it back then are against doping now. They see it as totally not okay."* Moreover, doping was irrational, according to Pete because, *"If you're good they'll test you properly, so then you get caught anyway."* Seemingly, because doping was seen as a marginal phenomenon in their sport, doping talk was rather occasional.

Among most of the participants in the junior groups, doping had little resonance and was framed as an unimportant and uninteresting topic of conversation. The U23 men reported different experiences about everyday doping talk:

Interviewer: *Is doping a topic of conversation among cyclists like yourselves?*

Eric: *Yes it is. Like, it's often mentioned after a good performance from a rider, whether he's doping or not, you know. Yes, if a rider appears from nowhere and rides fast as lightning, there can be questions about whether he's doping or not.*

Vincent: *Yes, there's been a lot of doping before, so it's only natural that it's a topic of conversation.*

Sean: *And that's probably what we talk about the most, the doping that happened before. And of course, some of our competitors have been caught. So it still happens. Those times haven't come to an end.*

To these participants, doping certainly resonated and prompted discussion. They emphasized two aspects of doping as salient topics of conversation: The "*doping that happened before*" and doping, as well as suspected doping, among their current competitors. They defined "before" as the 1990s and early 2000s, which corresponds with what is widely considered a period when doping was pervasive in professional road cycling (Marty, Nicholas, & Haas, 2015). Sean explained how, when considering doping among competitors, good performances caused speculation among him and his peers:

The latest example must be the winner of [a stage race]. Of course, you always check previous results and stuff, look at what he's done before. And there's nothing. Simply nothing. Then you start to wonder. We talked about that during [the race]. Like, 'how is it possible?'

Doping resonated, but not in a good way. When the riders speculated about doping among competitors, it was because they were against it. In our understanding, the cyclists interpreted doping within a fair play-oriented master frame. The resonance

was strong and negative, most evident when Sean pointed out that he did not enjoy talking about doping:

It's not like it's fun to talk about doping, it's not. You get a bad feeling when you talk about it. So it's not a big topic. [...] You just get this insanely bad feeling, because you think that you may have been cheated or something like that. You get a damn bad feeling because it's so damn unfair. For us who do the job and stay clean.

Values of fair play were important to Sean. Doping resonated because it came in conflict with these values. However, there was also a results-oriented master frame at work. Sean said that talking about doping felt uncomfortable because it reminded him that doping users might have cheated him during his career. In a way, the notion that doping may have jeopardized his results reinforced the negative resonance. When a results-oriented master frame coincided with a fair play-oriented master frame, fair play breaches were magnified. The result was a markedly negative resonance that made Sean feel sick.

Arguably, this interplay between fair play and results orientations can throw light on the U23 men's speculations about doping among competitors. They talk about doping because, if any unfair play happened, they were the victims. Furthermore, the interplay may help explain why most of the junior cyclists spoke so little about doping. As Sean's comment illustrates, doping resonates negatively to the extent that thinking and talking about it is highly demotivating and energy draining. It seems rational for the fair play and results-oriented athlete to avoid thinking and talking much about doping.

When asked about everyday peer-to-peer communication, the group of U23 riders

differed from the other groups on another level as well. The topic of conversation is an important aspect of frame negotiation. When the interviewer asked if doping was a frequent topic of conversation in their peer groups, the participants were implicitly invited to offer their views on the frame for the interview. Hence, the participants' answers could contain metacommunicative messages about the relevance of the interview topic. Answers in the U23 men's group were filled with examples of what they talked about and why. This engagement signified dedication to and interest in the interview topic.

In contrast, the reservations many junior participants expressed when it came to talking about doping contained a metacommunicative message about the interview topic's irrelevance. The metacommunication was present partly in the content of the reservations and partly in how the participants emphasized it: with quick and brief answers as well as body gestures and facial expressions that the interviewer interpreted as facetious and somewhat dismissive. All these elements were present in the sequence below. Following a relatively lively discussion with a group of junior men, the interviewer asked whether they discussed doping in the same way *“when you’re out training or hanging out in a hotel room?”*

Aaron: *No. [Laughter]*

John: *No. [Laughter]*

Pete: *No. [Laughter]*

Aaron: *Then, it's more like 'how do you train?' and 'how do you train?'*

Pete: Yes, it's more about training than doping to put it like that. Actually, nothing about doping and a lot about training.

The interviewer referred to a discussion in which the participants introduced the topic: altitude tents. They appeared interested in and knowledgeable about the performance-enhancing method, which is banned in Norway but permitted in most other countries. The interviewer's question suggested that this enthusiasm could mirror how they discussed the topic elsewhere. The response (laughter, brief negative answers, and the assertion that they did not talk about doping) appeared somewhat defensive, indicating that the interviewer had read too much into the sequence. In our interpretation, the participants felt it was important to emphasize that they did not commonly discuss doping and, as in this case, not leave the opposite impression.

What we term defensive frame negotiation, characterized by this type of metacommunication, was visible in the groups of junior cyclists throughout the interviews. Arguably, this defensiveness related to how they talked about doping with outsiders to the cycling community in their everyday lives. Whereas everyday doping talk among the cyclists seemed somewhat sporadic, all the participants reported that they often talked about doping with outsiders (e.g. friends, relatives) who did not have the same inside knowledge of road cycling as themselves. Nina explained:

I almost feel like it's more of a topic when I talk to people outside cycling.

Because there've been so many [doping] cases, they're caught up with this idea that doping and cycling is a 'thing.' I try to say it's very bad that there's a lot of doping in cycling, but that it's not the only aspect, and not everyone dopes.

U23 rider Sean told that he experienced such encounters as near accusations on a personal level: *“Talking to them, it’s just as [if] everyone dopes. Almost as [if] they say you dope. It’s almost that bad. Many people have a very bad perception of cycling.”*

Unequivocally, the young cyclists said that when facing claims about a connection between doping and road cycling, they argued in defense of their sport. They cared about road cycling, reacted to negative remarks, and did their best to put forward a more optimistic view about their sport. As Nina explained, *“you feel you can contribute in correcting their view if you tell how you think it is.”*

In our understanding, many participants framed the focus group interviews along the lines of such everyday encounters. Interestingly, the participants' experience of being included in a research project about doping was perhaps not very different from being confronted about the connection between doping and road cycling in everyday life. Why not athletes from other sports? Why not a topic other than doping? Similar to everyday life, when cycling was linked to doping, a norm of defending their sport occupied an important position in the cyclists' frames. This norm contributed to a defensive frame negotiation that manifested itself many times and in different ways but always explicitly or implicitly as a refusal of the idea that there was something particularly relevant about road cycling and doping.

Vignette Discussions: Communication About Doping as a Moral Dilemma

For insight into how the participants communicated about doping as a moral dilemma, we used vignettes. One vignette described a scenario in which a rider used a banned drug to recover from an injury during an important race. The vignette accentuated several factors that could be seen to rationalize the drug use. The purpose of the drug use

was not performance enhancement, but therapy. The rider went on to win the race. The participants were told that the rider was a fellow Norwegian, a good friend, and that they raced on the same team. In other words, the victory would have had many positive effects—for Norwegian cycling, the team, and the friendship—that would affect the participants themselves. How would they react? The response was strikingly similar across the four groups. Pete expressed it like this:

You have to draw the line somewhere. Perhaps it wasn't performance enhancing, and perhaps it just took him to the level the others were at. However, when it's forbidden, it's forbidden. There's something in that. That when it says it's forbidden, it's forbidden too.

Similarly, in the other group of junior men:

Martin: As long as it's forbidden, it's forbidden. [...] If it was legal, it would've been okay.

Harold: That goes back to what we talked about earlier. What's forbidden is forbidden. What's legal is legal.

For one single reason, the young cyclists viewed the act as morally wrong: "If it is forbidden, it is forbidden." Variations of this sentence were mentioned in the immediate reaction to the vignette in all groups, and all participants supported it vocally. U23 rider Eric was the only participant to challenge this view:

I think we would get a reasonably good explanation for it, you know. We would've been a good teammate, and we would get a good explanation of the situation. Even if we say now that 'no, it's not okay,' we would face a good attempt at persuasion to put it like that.

"As long as it's not legal, it's not legal," Richard interrupted, reflecting the majority view. Eric continued: *"I don't think I would do anything. [...] He's your teammate, you know. If he's caught, it's a problem for you as well. Should do something, but honestly, I don't think I would."* Eric's framing of the vignette gave room for several factors including, the teammate or trustworthy team leaders could try to persuade him, and it would affect him if the teammate was caught cheating. Taking into account the factors that made the situation a dilemma, Eric recognized its complexity and suggested a difference between what he should do and what he would do.

The other participants did not seem to view the dilemma as complex. In their frames, one factor—rules—occupied the all-important position, to the extent that they rarely mentioned other factors. Arguably, this framing can be seen as another example of the interplay between fair play and results orientation. In instances like this vignette, rules offer black-and-white answers to dilemmas. As talking about doping can be demotivating and energy draining, recognizing doping as a complex dilemma can be tiresome. Simple, clarifying answers are welcome.

In a complementary interpretation, the vignettes encouraged frame negotiation. Arguably, inviting the participants to discuss doping as a moral dilemma challenged their boundaries regarding what to discuss in a focus group interview. From this perspective, referring solely to the rules as a definite answer contained a metacommunicative message.

The vignette factors that could provide some justification for drug use were not within the boundaries and hence were left out of the participants' frames.

This sort of defensive frame negotiation characterized the vignette discussions in the junior groups. It was particularly noticeable in the response to the second vignette, describing a professional rider who struggled to achieve satisfactory results as the speed of the *peloton*ⁱⁱ increased. The rider was offered a medically safe, undetectable, performance-enhancing drug that was already used by the majority of the peloton. Apart from the health aspect, perhaps, the situation was reminiscent of the spread of EPO in professional cycling in the 1990s. The participants were asked to list the rider's alternatives. None of the junior men or women mentioned taking the drug as an alternative. This excerpt is illustrative:

John: *Retire.*

Pete: *Retire, yes. That's just what I was thinking. [Everyone laughs].*

John: *Train better. [Everyone laughs].*

Interviewer: *Yes. What do you think the rider will do?*

John: *Train better. [Everyone laughs].*

Aaron: *Drop down a level, maybe.*

None of the cyclists offered the alternative of taking the drug. Loud, unanimous laughter followed three of the comments. The laughter could have been an expression of discomfort, perhaps due to the vignette's invitation to discuss doping as an alternative. Expressing anti-

doping attitudes seemed important to the participants. Hence, they may have reacted with uncomfortable laughter to the experience of being “tricked” into a discussion about potentially justifying factors. At the same time, there was a pattern to the laughter. It built for every comment and culminated with a burst of laughter when John repeated the mantra of “training better.” In a complementary interpretation, they laughed because they did not mention taking the drug. In our understanding of the situation, the participants were aware of the importance this alternative held for the discussion and found it funny that it was unanimously excluded. The exclusion contained a strong metacommunicative message: Discussing doping as a moral dilemma in which doping is an actual possibility was not within the boundaries of their frames for the interview. This instance is one of the clearest examples of defensive frame negotiation across the groups.

The other group of junior men answered the question about alternatives like this:

Liam: *He believed, he could feel [that the majority of riders used the drug]... So he wasn't sure, and he didn't have any...*

Harold: *[Interrupts] He didn't have any evidence to say they were doped? [...]*

Martin: *In that case, it may be that he's gotten slower. [...] I think... This happened in the 90s, but it won't happen again.*

These participants also seemed unwilling to discuss the vignette as an actual dilemma and seemingly searched for reasons to avoid introducing taking the drug as an alternative. Liam and Harold's question related to their conception of the state of professional road cycling today. The idea that the rider knew that the majority of competitors used the drug did not

coincide with their image of a sport where doping is nearly eradicated. Hence, the questions contained a metacommunicative message about the irrelevance of the vignette, expressed explicitly by Martin: *"This happened in the 90s, but it won't happen again."* The interviewer asked the junior women why they did not mention taking the drug as an alternative. Their responses indicated that not only the scenario but also the discussion of doping as an actual possibility were irrelevant to them:

Beth: *I thought about it, but I thought I didn't have to say it. [Laughter]*

Tina: *It's an alternative, but it isn't an acceptable alternative. Therefore, perhaps, rule it out then.*

Arguably, the exclusion of the doping alternative is an example of how a hegemonic anti-doping discourse can narrow athletes' opportunity to express conceptions of doping as a morally complex dilemma. When asked at the end of the interview whether it feels uncomfortable to talk about doping, Tina answered, *"Yes. You don't want people to think anything bad about yourself."* This statement is illustrative of a strict anti-doping culture in which there are social sanctions related to expressing permissible attitudes about doping. Within a discourse where "doping is bad, period" (Kayser 2015, p. 168), not conveying permissible attitudes can be important to the extent that athletes avoid the topic due to fear of misunderstanding.

This is not necessarily the case with all athletes, however. There is an interesting contrast in Lentillon-Kaestner and Carstairs' (2010) interview study with talented, young Swiss cyclists. The Swiss participants were aware of the existence of doping among professional road cyclists, and some expressed expectations about having to take drugs

themselves to prolong a professional career. In other words, they were open to a scenario similar to the one described in the vignette. In our study, the U23 men's response to the question of alternatives differed from the juniors' defensive frame negotiation:

Eric: Either take it or continue at this level and perhaps retire after a while because he isn't good enough.

Richard: That's probably how many felt in the 1990s. [...] Then it's either retire or take it, like they've said. But that's maybe something they say to defend themselves too.

Eric: It depends on how important it is to you. [...] If you've got options besides cycling, or if you've spent so much time cycling and have such great passion for it, that you have to do it. It is difficult for us to fully understand that situation. Retiring is the ethical choice, but you never know. How pressure and stuff work. [...] I think, realistically, he'll take it. It depends on where he's from and how it is. But, no, it's possible he doesn't take it as well. It fully depends on the situation and where he's from.

Richard: It depends on age and stuff as well. If he [has family] and [is] over 30, he might give up, accepting that he's had a good career. Or just train harder and give it a last shot with training.

Taking the drug was the first alternative to be mentioned, and Eric considered it in detail. A thorough and nuanced discussion followed, stressing the importance of the social context.

The metacommunicative aspect of this thoroughness—emphasized by body gestures and facial expressions—signaled enthusiasm and interest. Obviously, the U23 men's frames for the interview were more compatible with the interviewer's frame and therefore they did not feel that their boundaries were being challenged. One possible reason for this, as mentioned in the methods section, is that the U23 men to a larger degree accepted the interviewer as a previous cyclist with inside knowledge of the sport. In this case, perhaps, the participants were more confident about being interpreted correctly and did not share the juniors' concern about defending the sport and conveying anti-doping attitudes. This interpretation suggests that trust plays an important role in communication about doping, and that the cyclists' framings of the interview as a setting of trust varied according to their perceptions of the interviewer.

Conclusions

Through focus group interviews, this study analyzes how talented, young, Norwegian road cyclists communicate about doping. We have examined the contours of this communication through analysis of the participants' everyday face-to-face conversations and how they, during the interviews, talked about doping dilemmas.

In general, the communication in the interviews was regulated by a norm of defending the sport against doping-related claims and concern with conveying anti-doping attitudes. Defensive frame negotiation was most clearly visible in how the junior men, through brief, assertive, and evasive talk, framed doping as an irrelevant topic of conversation and a non-dilemma. The frame negotiation related to how the participants talked about doping in everyday life. In conversations with outsiders to the cycling

community, defensiveness was normal. Peer-to-peer communication about doping seemed brief and sporadic, marked by perceptions of doping as irrelevant and uncomplicated. Certain aspects of being an elite athlete can contribute to understanding this type of communication. For the fair play and results oriented athlete, doping can be an energy draining and demotivating topic. Thinking and talking about doping as a marginal phenomenon and non-dilemma can be clarifying.

Some could see the participants' rejection of doping as a morally complex issue as a sign of the success of the anti-doping campaign. However, we have demonstrated how this zero tolerance plays out in conversation as brief and evasive talk rather than reflective discussion signifying critical understandings of doping. In our view, this defensiveness reflects a hegemonic framing of doping as immoral and inexcusable, which narrows athletes' opportunities to express conceptions of doping as a morally complex issue. This finding raises questions about young athletes' skills and self-efficacy in the face of doping-related challenges in real life. Previous research on road cycling indicates that turning professional can involve entering a milieu where fellow athletes and support personnel communicate an understanding of doping as fair, necessary, and healthy. We have limited knowledge about the state of professional road cycling today (see Marty, Nicholas & Haas, 2015). In this sport as in many others, however, it seems reasonable to suggest that an international career can involve contact with milieux where doping is understood differently.

Anti-doping education can have an important role in preparing young athletes for such challenges. Research on anti-doping education highlights interaction, discussion, and problem-solving activities as crucial components (Backhouse, 2015; Backhouse et al., 2009). Communicating about the moral and social complexities of doping allows young athletes to reflect on what to expect and how to resolve potential situations. In light of this observation,

the seemingly narrow opportunity in strong anti-doping cultures for athletes to engage in such talk is a less optimistic finding. Accordingly, to encourage interaction and discussion among athletes in strong anti-doping cultures, it seems critical to mitigate the hegemonic framing of doping. This is both a specific point, relating to the design of anti-doping education programs, and a more general one, concerning how doping is framed and discussed in the public sphere.

Finally, the study's theoretical and methodological approach to young athletes' communication about morally contested issues in sport has proved promising. As described in previous research, there are considerable challenges involved when engaging athletes in discussions about doping (Morente-Sanchez & Zabala, 2013). This article has contributed by demonstrating and analyzing some of these challenges. Furthermore, frame analysis has enabled us to explore how the talented, young cyclists frame doping in conversation. We suggest that the combination of frame analysis and focus group methodology can be useful to elicit athletes' views on morally contested issues, whilst at the same time highlighting the communication context in which those views are negotiated.

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ⁱ The gender imbalance appears more or less consistent from race to race, as shown by the start lists of national cup races (Norwegian Cycling Federation, 2016).

ⁱⁱ Term used a) during races, referring to the main group of riders, or b) outside races, meaning riders at a certain sporting level as a whole, for example "the professional peloton."