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From fighting the bad to protecting the good: Legitimation strategies in WADA’s athlete guides

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ABSTRACT

The global anti-doping effort in sport is based upon perceptions of the system as desirable, proper and appropriate and thus considered legitimate. The legitimacy of the anti-doping system has earlier been studied bottom-up, based on the views of athletes. In order to gain greater understanding of legitimation processes, it is also important to study legitimation strategies top-down, used by decision-making and governing bodies. The aim of this study was to use Fairclough’s critical discourse analytical approach to analyse the social construction of legitimacy in the World Anti-Doping Agency’s three editions of a guide to anti-doping rules aimed at athletes. The analysis was performed based on van Leeuwen’s four specific legitimation strategies: authorization, rationalization, moral evaluation and mythopoiesis. Our analysis shows that the legitimation of the anti-doping discourse as constructed in the athlete guides that has accompanied anti-doping regulations for more than a decade is characterized by continuity as regards an authoritarian attitude, but also by change towards a more rational and athlete-centred stance. A shift can be seen in the construction of legitimacy in the anti-doping discourse from “fighting the bad” to “protecting the good”. We discuss the moral evaluation strategy as a way to construct legitimacy for anti-doping efforts and sport in general towards a wider public. In the light of the results of this study, we conclude that policymaking in relation to doping issues should take into account the dimension of the discursive top-down legitimation, which could affect how the policy is received at the level of the athletes and provide conditions for a sustainable anti-doping system.

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1. Introduction

Language is used to construct legitimacy, although this is often not a conscious process (Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999). The language in policy documents that regulates drug use in sports – anti-doping policy – construct legitimacy for the anti-doping discourse as an explanation for why this particular social practice exist and take the form it does. Earlier studies indicate the importance of legitimacy for anti-doping policy from the athletes’ point of view, i.e. from a bottom-up perspective (Donovan, Egger, Kapernick, & Mendoza, 2002; Efverström, Ahmadi, Hoff, & Bäckström, 2016; Efverström, Bäckström, Ahmadi, & Hoff, 2016; Gleaves & Christiansen, 2019; Jalleh, Donovan, & Jobling, 2014; Macedo, Englar-Carlson, Lehrbach, & Gleaves, 2017). Legitimacy perspectives on anti-doping are also evident in recent studies on the organizational level of the system. For instance, Read, Skinner, Lock, and Houlihan (2019) have used multi-level legitimacy theory to analyse the legitimacy for anti-doping policy in the wake of the 2014 Russian Winter Olympic Games doping scandal and concluded that the current situation “presents a perilous situation for WADA’s legitimacy” (p. 241). In every rule-governed system, legitimacy plays an important role for the functionality of the system. The authorities of an enterprise without legitimacy would depend on massive resources for surveillance and punishment systems (Beetham, 2013). Moreover, legitimacy matters for ethical and democratic reasons, as the creation of a legitimate system involves treating people in a way which is considered desirable, reasonable and appropriate (cf. Suchman, 1995). The study of legitimacy within a system need to be approached from various perspectives and little is known about the top-down construction of legitimacy from anti-doping authorities seeking approval from the athletes. In order to understand the abovementioned problem regarding legitimacy within the anti-doping system, one aspect not yet stud-
ied is the grounds on which top-down claims for legitimacy is constructed. In this article, we will analyse discourses that justify anti-doping policy and discuss its possible implications. We will provide a detailed understanding of how legitimacy is constructed in texts where authorities explain and justify regulations directly to the athletes, who are the main target for the measures taken in the efforts against doping in sports. Discourse analyses of anti-doping efforts based on policy documents have shown that the early work, before 2003, can be viewed as belonging to a “warfare genre” in which the evil of doping was to be fought, and where texts used terms such as “combating doping” and describing anti-doping efforts as an “open war” (Wagner & Pedersen, 2014). More recently, the World Anti-Doping Code (WADC), which governs the global anti-doping effort today, has been found to be constructed of authoritarian and normative discourses that inhibit ideas about what sport can and should be, and has been said to help maintain the World Anti-doping Agency’s (WADA) position of power in international sport (Jedlicka, 2014). Anti-doping efforts have also been described as a “moral crusade” based on strong normative and ideological grounds (see, e.g., Critcher, 2014; Henne, 2015; Hunt, Dimeo, & Jedlicka, 2012; McDermott, 2016).

The current article is not an extensive review of anti-doping regulations and we do not study the WADC itself. Instead, our focus is on the Athlete Guides, which could be described as concentrated and elaborated versions of the WADC aimed directly to the governed athletes. This guide, which accompanies every edition of the WADC, was first published in 2004 (WADA, 2004) and has since been published in new versions in (2009a) (WADA, 2009b) and (2015a) (WADA, 2015b). The Guides are particularly important to study because they synthesize both content and manner in which legitimating anti-doping is done discursively. Even though the Guides originates from the WADC, they could be presumed as presenting the core messages directed from WADA to athletes. Our purpose is to analyse the discursive construction of legitimacy in the three editions, or versions, of WADA’s anti-doping guide for athletes. This analysis contributes with new empirical findings on the discursive practices used by WADA to legitimate the extensive anti-doping efforts and the existence of a global authority to cater for this work.

1.1. A discursive perspective on legitimation

This study proceeds from a discourse analysis perspective, where we analyse text, and images, as a part of social processes (see Fairclough, 2003) in order to discuss language in relation to context and power relations in our analysis of the construction of legitimacy. According to Fairclough (1992) three-dimensional concept of discourse, a discourse is built up of text, the discursive practice in which the texts are produced and consumed, and the surrounding social practice. The anti-doping discourse can therefore be said to be socially constructed by texts including WADA texts, the sport context in which these texts are produced and used, and the entire surrounding social practice of sport. Language is not separate from other social interaction; it is dialectically linked. Therefore, social analyses must always take the language into consideration (Fairclough, 2003).

From a discursive perspective, we can assume that beliefs about legitimacy are constructed in relation to specific discourses (Vaara & Tienari, 2008). The available discourses limit the opportunities of the specific actors in the creation of meaning. In a sport context, this implies that athletes, as well as those in decision-making positions in a sport context, are limited by the discourse in how they understand and create meaning in specific situations. Legitimation can be understood as the creation of a sense of possible, advantageous, ethical, comprehensible, necessary and otherwise acceptable actions in a specific setting (Rojo & Van Dijk, 1997; Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999). From this point of departure, legitimation is constructed in discourses as explanations for why social practices exist and why they are as they are (Van Leeuwen, 2007). Legitimation always has a top-down and a bottom-up direction; that is, legitimation occurs both via the dominant and the dominated. The dominant group try to get acceptance and approval from the dominated, and by that legitimize themselves. The dominated group confer legitimacy to the dominant by “more or less active agreement, acceptance, compliance or at least tacit consent” (Rojo & Van Dijk, 1997, p. 528). Studying legitimation from a discourse analysis perspective involves regarding legitimacy as a “discursively created sense of acceptance in specific discourses or orders of discourse” (Vaara, Tienari, & Laurila, 2006, p. 793). The discourse is central, but thus interacts with other social practices and material conditions.

Our discourse analytical research design is inspired by critical discourse analysis (CDA) based on Fairclough’s perspective (Fairclough, 1992, 1989; 2003; 2010; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). A point of departure in developing CDA was a quest for combining linguistic and social analysis (Fairclough, 1992) and one of the methodology’s characteristics is the analysis of the relationship between discourse, power and society (Egan Sjölander, 2011). In Fairclough (2010) words, a main focus in CDA is “on dialectical relations between discourse and power, and their effects on other relations within the social process and their elements” (p. 8). The word “critical” in the term “CDA” refers to the aspect of a critique of the present social order and a taken-for-grantedness to open up for new ways of thinking and acting, as well as an analysis of what a social practice (society, organization) claims to be and what it really is (Fairclough, 2010). For the purpose of analysing legitimation in the anti-doping discourse expressed in the three editions of WADA’s anti-doping guide for athletes, we turn to Van Leeuwen (1998). He has identified four discursive strategies for legitimating social practices (see also Fairclough, 2003; Van Leeuwen, 2007; Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999), namely, authorization, rationalization, moral evaluation, and mythopoesis, which are described below.

1.1.1. Authorization

This strategy involves construction of legitimacy by reference to an authority that has power through tradition, law and custom, and persons in whom institutional authority is vested (Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999). The authority may also be impersonal, as in rules, laws, the Bible, etc. One can, for example, reference the regulations (as an autonomous institution) without having to justify or anchor them in some overarching moral order. One form of authoritarian legitimation strategy is to refer to something that “everyone does” or say that “everyone says so”, a strategy known as conformity authorization. Conformity authorization may also involve referencing that which is normal and standard practice (Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999).

1.1.2. Rationalization

Rationalization legitimation is constructed through reference to the utility/functionality of specific actions based on knowledge claims that are accepted in a specific context (Fairclough, 2003). One form of rationalization is instrumental rationalization, which refers to the “functionality” and effectiveness of a social practice. Another form is theoretical rationalization, where something is legitimated in a “truth” about “the way things are”, e.g. by referring to specialists who have “facts”/knowledge and whose arguments are invoked (Van Leeuwen, 2007; Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999).

1.1.3. Moral evaluation

In this strategy, legitimation is constructed by referring to specific value systems and moral principles (Van Leeuwen, 2007).
1.1.4. Mythopoiesis

Storytelling or narrative structures can also constitute a discursive legitimation strategy, according to Van Leeuwen (2007). How an issue relates to the past and the future can be shown through mythopoiesis, for example (Vaara & Tienari, 2008). Storytelling can provide a sense and creation of meaning for, e.g., the past, present and future of an organization.

In order to carry out a systematic analysis of how discursive strategies are formed in the guides to construct legitimacy, we use the framework described above. Throughout the analysis we put the texts in relation to the discursive practice where they are produced and consumed. In conclusion, we draw from our analysis to discuss implications for the overarching social practice of elite-level sport in society.

2. Material and method

The empirical material in focus for the analysis are the Athlete Guide (WADA, 2004), The Guide (WADA, 2009b) and Athlete Reference Guide to the 2015 World Anti-Doping Code (WADA, 2015b). They contain a selection of the provisions of the WADC that are aimed directly at athletes, including parts of the terminology and phrasing from the underlying document. As a basis for the analytical process, the three versions of the athlete’s guide were read repeatedly in relation to the aim of the study to gain an overall picture of the content and structure of the texts. Bryman (2012) description of analysis within the CDA tradition was followed in the continued procedure. The first step consisted of the text dimension of the analysis, which involved a structuring of the content, form and use of language in the respective texts. This step was based on matrices developed for the content (what is described) and form (how it is described: pictures, language, specific terms and word choice) of the three guides. The second step of the process was the discursive practice dimension, in which the forms of communicating opinions and beliefs were analysed (cf. Bryman, 2012). In this step, focus was directed at the discursive interaction through analysis of content, layout, descriptions, word choice and pictures in relation to the analytical model using the four legitimation strategies. A third matrix was developed in connection with the identification of legitimation strategies, in which comparison over time was explored. In the iterative process of repeated close reading and analysis, there was also consistent focus on critically reviewing the model by seeking to identify legitimation strategies other than or in addition to those in the model. In our text material, we identified building blocks that could be attributed to three of Van Leeuwen (1996) four strategies. We have chosen to call these building blocks “elements”. In Fig. 1, we illustrate our analytical work. Like in all qualitative research processes, a visualization of the analysis is tidier than the actual process per se, not least in terms of direction. Given this reservation, the figure provides an overview of how our thinking was structured. The strategies on the left, comes from Van Leeuwen (1996). The second column describes the main features constructing legitimacy (cf. Fairclough, 2003; Van Leeuwen, 1996; Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999). The third column consists of the analytical elements in our empirical material, which we have found to be relevant for each strategy. The fourth column shows examples from the empirical material, which constitutes the element in the third column.

To sum up, the discourse analysis methodology we have applied means that the three guides, with focus on comparisons between them and the discursive practice in which the texts were produced and consumed, were analysed together in order to be further discussed in relation to the overarching social practice of elite-level sport in society. This approach allowed the texts to become infused with meaning within a particular context (cf. Fairclough, 2003).

3. Analysis and discussion

We have identified a number of elements in the different versions of the athlete’s guides, which form the three strategies of authorization, rationalization and moral evaluation. Interestingly, we found that mythopoiesis, the fourth legitimation strategy in our analytical framework, is functional within the framework of the other three strategies. In the following, we will analyse and discuss these strategies.

3.1. Authorization - the continuous powerful authority

Elements of authoritative legitimation of the anti-doping system have been identified through all three versions of the athlete’s guide. The legitimation strategy authorization can be termed the dominant way of linguistically justify anti-doping activities. We found four elements that construct the discursive strategy: the intangible authority; the imperative authority; normalization; and the story of authority.

3.1.1. The intangible authority

The first element that construct the authorization strategy refers to a powerful supervisory authority which is vested with institutional power, and which is “intangible” and “unassailable”. In the text material, the authority is either an anti-doping organization, WADA foremost, or a document, such as the WADC. The most prominent authority in the first athlete’s guide from 2004 (WADA, 2004) is WADA while the WADC later itself assumes the role of central authority. A distant writing style is continuous in the guides, describing the authority in third person, and the fact that no individual author can be identified as responsible for the text gives signals of an intangible and thus unassailable organization. The athletes are directly addressed as individuals with wording to imply that no one is safe anywhere: “You can be selected for doping control at any time and any place” (WADA, 2004, p. 14; 2009b, p. 20; 2015b, p. 22). This type of phrasing can give the reader the feeling that the authority can be anywhere and that the athletes are constantly under a watchful eye. To refer in this way to something intangible, and yet institutionalized, becomes a way to authorize and discursively construct legitimacy for the system.

3.1.2. The imperative authority

The imperative authority, construct legitimacy for the system in an authoritarian way through control and the exercise of power, is related to the intangible authority. The overall arrangement and form of the 2004 and 2008 versions of the guide are formal, with an authoritative tone, and give the impression of a legal text. This was changed in the 2015 version of the athlete’s guide, however, which seems more oriented towards the athletes’ perspective with casual language. The images in the three guides also produce authoritarian signals, especially in the 2004 and 2009 versions. There are a number of ominous “signs” in the 2004 guide that are reminiscent of traffic signs either requiring an action or prohibiting one. The 2009 version shows a picture to describe all parties involved under the heading “Who’s Who in Anti-Doping” (see Fig. 2).

The organization is depicted as a hierarchy and can be likened to a house, where WADA is the superstructure and the athletes and their entourages are at the bottom. There is also a separate picture depicting the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) building which looks like a courthouse, and can be regarded as representing the specialist legal expertise of the organization. The medical expertise in the form of doping labs is also mentioned, and as a symbol a lab flask is used. These outside expert institutions indicate an imperative authority but may also be interpreted as an element of theoretical rationalization (Van Leeuwen, 2007; Van Leeuwen 2009; bzw 2009).

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no other way to relate to the anti-doping field and that this is an “all-powerful” document. Likewise, the list of substances and methods prohibited by WADA is called “The List”, which also indicates all-encompassing authority. In the 2009 version, the document also calls itself “The Guide” (WADA, 2009b). The reader is meant to understand that these are the only Code, the only List and the only Guide that matter, which reinforces the image of imperative authority.

Specific word choices and expressions in the guides also contribute to the imperative authority element. The 2004 and 2009 versions of the guide talk about “the fight against doping” in several places, which says something about the view on anti-doping efforts. The phrase “the fight” may lead people to think about a fight between different parties with diametrically opposing viewpoints. This may be seen as an expression of the language of power and create an antagonistic relationship between the doped or potentially doped athlete and the imperative authority. Notably, this expression does not appear in the 2015 version (WADA, 2015b), even though the phrase is used in the underlying WAD 2015 (WADA, 2015a). Another example of how this element is constructed is the rule on mandatory public disclosure of doping violations, described in the 2015 version of the guide: “If you are found to have committed an anti-doping rule violation, that fact will be made public. The idea is that this serves as an important deterrent to doping” (WADA, 2015b, p. 19). This can be interpreted to mean that potential feelings of shame and guilt will have a normative effect on the behaviour of athletes. The picture of how the authority is able to publicly expose and hang rule breakers out to dry adds to the element of the imperative authority. Although this rule was found in earlier versions of the WADC, the aim of the rule is more explicitly written in the later version of the athlete’s guide. The wording signals power and control and a potential threat if the athlete should make the “wrong” decision. As a whole, it can be said that the imperative authority element is clearly apparent in all three versions of the athlete’s guide, and particularly so in the 2004 and 2009 versions. Terminology and word choice referencing the controlling and powerful role vested in the authority become a way to discursively legitimate anti-doping efforts.

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3.1.3. Normalization

Another element that builds up the authorization strategy is normalization of anti-doping procedures, especially those for collection of urine samples that, in other social settings, would be considered abnormal. Standardized procedures for urine sample collection are described step by step and in detail in all three versions of the guide, indicating that this is normal and making it difficult to challenge the procedure and the authority. This can be interpreted as a way to normalize, through language, a procedure that many, perhaps most, people would consider embarrassing and possibly an invasion of privacy. For example, the 2004 and 2015 versions of the guide describe how athletes should undress so that the Doping Control Officer will be able to observe the provision of a urine sample. The 2004 version states that the athlete is obliged to “...[r]emove all clothing between the waist and mid-thigh to give an unrestricted view of sample provision” (WADA, 2004, p. 17). Even though the description has an informative aim, the referencing of these standardized procedures in detail can be regarded as a kind of conformity authorization. The implication is that the procedure is something normal that everyone in the sporting world does, thus constructing legitimacy for an approach that would seem untenable in many other contexts.

3.1.4. The story of authority

A story with features of the legitimation strategy of mythopoeisis runs through the three versions of the athlete’s guide, which contributes to the construction of legitimacy through authorization. The 2004 guide emphasizes that the WADC was unanimously accepted by sports organizations and governments. A relatively long narrative paragraph is devoted to the formation of WADA and how it resulted in, for the first time, rules and regulations being the same in all countries. The focus is on both WADA and the WADC as authorities. The story of authority is also told in the 2009 version, where gravitas is given to both the organization and the rules by stating that WADA is supported by “all sports”, “all countries” and “governments of the world” (WADA, 2009b, p. 3) and that decisions made concerning anti-doping work have been unanimous. Another example illustrating global support and, hence, authorization of the system is the world map that is prominently shown on the cover of the 2015 version of the athlete’s guide (see Fig. 3) and thereafter a bit more discreetly on each spread. The map illustrates the story of the global authority that unites “all the countries of the world”.

As previously mentioned, it is interesting to note that WADA, the organization behind the WADC, is not described at all in 2015. This story of the development of the authority, WADC in the first stage with the focus later shifting to the global “code”, describes a temporal and spatial perspective that may contribute to a sense and creation of meaning in relation to the system.

Hence, the legitimation strategy of authorization is constructed by elements including the intangible authority and the imperative authority. The central authority has been gradually changed from WADA, the organization, to the WADC, the document; the latest (2015b) version of the guide does not mention WADA at all, while the WADC has assumed its role as the dominant authority. The normalization of potentially problematic procedures and a narrativization of authority also contribute to legitimation through authorization. Although authorization seems to be the predominant legitimation strategy in the guides, we can discern a tendency over time to tone it down. A discourse of authority in anti-doping efforts, as formulated in the WADC, has previously been identified by Jedlicka (2014), who found that this discourse, along with a normative discourse of sport, consolidates and expands WADA’s organizational power. According to Van Leeuwen (2007), an authoritarian form of legitimation is often connected to the argument that something should be done in a particular way, because the authority has so decided. The answer to the implied question “Why is it so? Why should we do it this way?” becomes “Because I say so”, from someone in whom institutionalized authority is vested.

This begs the question: who is this authority in the anti-doping context? WADA was an obvious authority in the first guide (2004), while the emphasis was subsequently shifted to the WADC as the most prominent authority. It seems that it would be easier to criticize an organization than to challenge a document that “the countries and governments of the world” have agreed on. This shift within the authorization strategy could entail greater legitimacy for the anti-doping discourse. Van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999) argue that legitimation through laws and regulations as autonomous institutions requires no anchoring in an overarching moral order. It would therefore suffice to say, “Because it has been decided thus” to justify anti-doping rules. However, this authoritarian justification may also be seen as an instrumental way to construct legitimacy for the work, where a language of power and underlying threats of punishment become a means to control behaviour. A system based on instrumental legitimation indicates an adversarial position between the governors and the governed and requires vast resources to maintain the rules through controls and sanctions (cf. Macedo et al., 2017; Tyler, 2006). The CDA approach we apply leads us to look at the present social order and taken-for-grantedness (Fairclough, 2010) and ask whether there are other paths to approach the athletes, that might lead to alternative ways to answer the questions “Why is it so?” and “Why should we do it this way?” For instance, could proceeding from the perceptions of fairness and responsibility among the governed athletes give more relevant, rational and ethically grounded answers to these questions? This is relevant, not least considering that athletes increasingly have been found to raise serious concerns on how the anti-doping system is implemented (see, e.g. Gleaves & Christiansen, 2019), and that the legitimacy for anti-doping policy has been found not to rest on a solid foundation (Read et al., 2019).

Concepts such as “the fight against doping” and “deterrence” are formulations in the text material that also underpin the legitimation strategy of authorization. Depicting anti-doping efforts as a fight on a battlefield where deterrent methods are necessary can make it easier to justify powerful weapons in this fight. This can be a way to discursively construct legitimacy for methods that are, for the athletes, relatively intrusive. Wagner and Pedersen (2014) have determined that early anti-doping efforts were largely formulated within a “warfare genre”. This metaphorical way of describing efforts against doping can therefore be said to have lingered on in the discourse to some extent, although this seems to be changing, as “the fight against doping”, for example, is not a concept found in the latest document addressed to the athletes.

3.2. Rationalization - the change towards rationality

Along with the continuous and dominant authoritative legitimation discourse, the anti-doping work is further legitimated through language of rationalization by referencing the practical and functional aspects of running activities in a particular way. We have in our analysis mainly been able to discern a strategy of instrumental rationalization, which is built up of three elements: serious work; athlete-centred work; and an organization open to change. The latter two are connected and are therefore analysed under the same heading below.

3.2.1. Serious work

All three versions of the athlete’s guide describe how WADA and/or the WADC are the basis for a broad effort against doping that includes education, advocacy, research and leadership (WADA, 2004). It is made clear that this is a serious and global effort which is of such importance that governments all over the world are
allocating large sums of money to it. Rational, carefully designed processes and procedures are described in detail in the three documents. Descriptions of the doping control process and the “chain of custody” with storage, transport and analysis of test results, for example, are characterized by linguistic expressions indicating high degree of gravity and functionality. The referencing to the functional, reassuring and rational aspects of the work contributes to the construction of legitimacy for the global anti-doping system.

3.2.2. Athlete-centred work and an organization open to change

Compared with the earlier editions the 2015 edition of the athlete’s guide describes the anti-doping effort as more athlete-centred, modulated and balanced. The design and general tone of this guide are informal and aimed more at the individual, where the point of departure is often the questions that athletes are likely to ask. This informal tone is seen in the example in Fig. 4 from the first heading, “The right stuff”, and the question highlighted in green, “What, exactly, is the World Anti-Doping Code?”

Another change in the 2015 edition is the focus on doping prevention. No preventive purpose was mentioned in the first two versions of the guide, while the 2015 document states that the main aim of the anti-doping system is to “prevent the intentional or unintentional use of prohibited substances or methods, or the commission of any other anti-doping rule violation” (WADA, 2015b, p. 3). The work is presented as modulated and balanced; it is emphasized that there is no resort to coercive methods, and that the system is instead rational and therefore legitimate. The Anti-Doping Administration & Management System (ADAMS) database is described as having been developed to “make your life easier” (WADA, 2015b, p. 15). Once again, the anti-doping control system is described as balanced and rational, with reference made to the functionality of the measures, while showing that things are not taken to extremes. That the rules are fair and functional is also inferred in the “Hearings and Appeals” section, which states that all athletes are entitled to a fair hearing before an impartial panel (as also explained in the 2004 and 2009 editions) and are entitled to have their cases heard in a timely fashion. This focus on susceptibility to the athletes’ situations signals, objectivity and purposefulness through language that can build up a sense of rationality that discursively legitimates the system.

A new element also appears in the 2015 version, namely, the aim to change and “clean” athletes, which contributes to the rational legitimation of the anti-doping effort, although it also has features of authorization strategies of legitimation, as previously described. Towards the end of this version of the guide, the athletes of the world are described in a visionary way:

The 2015 version of the Code brings new changes. It also brings a new chance for the athletes of the world – and the overwhelming majority of athletes do, in fact, choose to compete clean – to lead the way in promoting ensuring clean athletes. (WADA, 2015b, p. 20).

The descriptions of change and of a clean athlete is not found in the previous editions, which may be interpreted as a signal of awareness of the need for change and to focus on the athletes. This can also be regarded as a story with an element of mythopoiesis that contributes to the construction of legitimacy, in this case within the framework of the rationalization strategy.

Rationalization seems therefore to be a legitimation strategy that is gaining ground in the anti-doping discourse. In the 2015 athlete’s guide in particular, there are several features that contribute to the elements of serious work, athlete-centred work and an organization open to change, which may indicate a change in the discourse for legitimating the anti-doping system (WADA, 2015b). The rational legitimation strategy constitutes a turn away from the earlier focus on prohibition, suspicion and fighting, and towards protecting the clean athlete, in a seemingly carefully considered way. This is in line with Mazanov and McDermott (2009) discussion, which highlights a shift in anti-doping policy from detection-based deterrence to a more prevention-based approach. In somewhat simplified terms, one could say that the emphasis was previously on “scaring/threatening the cheaters” while it is now on “looking out for the good and clean” athletes. From this emerges a picture of a benevolent organization that is helping and protecting athletes through measures including preventive efforts.

Legitimation for the system is constructed by showing how anti-doping efforts are being made in a balanced and rational way. This could be a reaction to past criticism of the effect of anti-doping efforts on athletes’ lives, both from the athletes in the discursive practice (the sport context) where the regulatory documents are “consumed” (cf. Fairclough, 1992) and from scholars in the surrounding social scientific practice (see, e.g., Elfverström, Ahmadi et al., 2016; Möller, 2011; Overbye & Wagner, 2013b; Waddington, 2010). As elite-level athletes have become subject to increasingly intrusive measures, such as mandatory whereabouts reporting and
PART 1 THE RIGHT STUFF

The World Anti-Doping Code sets out rules that you, as an athlete, must follow. The point of this guide is to help you understand the rules.

This document is merely a guide. It is no substitute for the language of the Code. To emphasize: the language of the Code is always the primary source. This guide is thus provided purely for the purpose of understanding and is in no way a binding legal document.

The Code, in its first few pages, speaks of the intrinsic value of the “spirit of sport.” That spirit is what drives forward the primary goal of any anti-doping program: prevention.

That is, to prevent the intentional or unintentional use of prohibited substances or methods, or the commission of any other anti-doping rule violation.

PART 2 THE CODE

What, exactly, is the World Anti-Doping Code?

The Code is the anti-doping system framework. It has been accepted by the entire Olympic movement as well as by various sports bodies and National Anti-Doping Organizations throughout the entire world. It also has been recognized by more than 170 governments, through the UNESCO Convention against Doping in Sport.


The full text of the Code can be found on the World Anti-Doping Agency’s website.

In support of the Code, WADA has also developed “International Standards” for different technical and operational areas, including the List of Prohibited Substances and Methods, Testing and Investigations, Therapeutic Use Exemptions, Laboratories and the Protection of Privacy and Personal Information.

References in this Guide to “Articles” are primarily to Articles in the Code; references to other documents, such as the International Standards will be so specified.

3.3. Moral evaluation - the athletes as moral agents

In addition to the two authoritative and rational legitimation strategy, our analysis shows that there are elements in all three versions of the athlete’s guide that construct the legitimation strategy of moral evaluation. This strategy legitimizes the anti-doping effort by referencing specific value systems and by emphasis on certain moral positions that athletes are expected to take. The elements have been categorized as: the spirit of sport; you should not be ignorant; and you should tell.

3.3.1. The spirit of sport

The concept of “the spirit of sport” is a distinct element in the 2004 and 2015 guides. In describing the purpose of the anti-doping effort in the 2004 version of the guide, it is said, in relatively normative wording, that “[t]he spirit of sport is the celebration of the human spirit, the body and the mind. Doping is contrary to the spirit of sport, erodes public confidence and jeopardizes the health and well-being of athletes” (WADA, 2004, p. 3). The concept is also brought to the fore in 2015, as an important justification for the anti-doping effort: “The Code, in its first few pages, speaks of the intrinsic value of the ‘spirit of sport.’ That spirit is what drives forward the primary goal of any anti-doping program: prevention.” (WADA, 2015b, p. 3). Sport is thus assumed to have a specific value system with moral principles that are jeopardized when athletes use prohibited substances and methods, which justifies the anti-

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doping effort. It is also mentioned, in the 2004 version of the guide, that WADA was formed “with a vision for a world that values and encourages a doping-free culture” (WADA, 2004, p. 4). The language strongly expresses that these norms apply throughout the world and it is emphasized in the text that WADA was formed on the initiative of countries and governments worldwide, further reinforcing the image of a whole world that shares moral principles and should hence value the work of the organization. Through its narrative nature, the element of the spirit of sport can also be seen as a feature of a construction of legitimacy through mythopoiesis.

3.3.2. You should not be ignorant

The three athlete’s guides state in an admonitory way that athletes are personally responsible for acquiring knowledge about doping and anti-doping issues. The 2009 version, for example, explains that the athlete is responsible for finding out and knowing what substances and methods are prohibited, adding that: “Ignorance is never an excuse.” (WADA, 2009b, p. 8). In all versions of the guide, “the doped athlete” is depicted as ignorant and negligent. By language, this constructs normative values around athletes, which discursively can legitimate harsh measures against those who do not assume the responsibility made incumbent upon them.

3.3.3. You should tell

The 2004 and 2015 version of the guide contain descriptions of the particular responsibility of athletes to turn in others who are violating anti-doping rules. At the end of the 2004 version, there is the following message from WADA: “We would also encourage you to contact us with any information or leads on those you feel may be cheating within your sport or procedures that are being used to manipulate the system.” (WADA, 2004, p. 28). This can be regarded as a normative admonition to athletes to take the ethically “right position” on anti-doping and turn in opponents or co-competitors who do not. Likewise, the “Consequences of Anti-Doping Rule Violations” section of the 2015 version describes how athletes found guilty of doping can have their punishment reduced if they confess and provide substantial assistance in convicting others. This can be interpreted to mean that the athletes demonstrate some form of moral principles, through acknowledging their mistakes and turning in others, doing the right thing, and being rewarded with a lesser punishment. To discursively construct the morally acceptable action in this way provides scope for and legitimation of sanctions against those who do not hold the right moral principles.

The anti-doping discourse is thus constructed as legitimate through moral evaluation in a relatively similar way in the first and the most recent version of the guide, but there is no mention in the 2009 edition of “the spirit of sport” or of athletes sharing information with anti-doping authorities or turning in others. For this reason, it becomes difficult to see any enduring pattern in the analysis of development over time. We can say, however, that the strategy seems to be relevant to the construction of legitimacy for the anti-doping work in sport towards a wider public through its “morally instructive” language. The referencing of specific value systems and moral principles may be interpreted as a way of creating legitimacy in the social surrounding (cf. Fairclough, 1992) for the measures (the anti-doping work) that are intended to protect the special function of sport in society (Dimeo, 2010; Hoff, 2004; Stewart & Smith, 2010). The use of the concept of the “spirit of sport” implies that sport has a value system that embraces more than merely athletic performance. The elements of “you should not be ignorant” and “you should tell” also have bearing on the overarching social practice of elite-level sport in society, where the athlete becomes a moral agent. Sport is meant to mould the athletes into individuals who do the “right thing” based on moral and ethical principles. This can be put in relation to the status of sport in society and the legitimacy of sport in the eyes of the public, as sport is seen as contributing to society by fostering good citizens (cf. Dimeo, 2010; Henne, 2015). If the legitimacy of the anti-doping effort were not maintained, it would in all likelihood result in great changes as regards sport in society as we know it today. However, when it is shown that people in the anti-doping effort act morally and ethically, this can contribute to acceptance of the anti-doping effort and to the legitimacy of the overarching social practice of elite-level sport in society.

4. Conclusion

Our purpose with this study was to take a discourse analytic approach to study legitimation strategies used in WADA’s three editions of the athlete’s guide to the anti-doping system. This also gave us the opportunity to analyse continuity and change in relation to the legitimation strategies over time. The construction of legitimacy in the anti-doping discourse, as expressed in the various editions of the athlete’s guide that have accompanied anti-doping regulations for more than a decade, is characterized by continuity as regards an authoritarian attitude, combined with a change towards a more rational and athlete-centred stance. The legitimation of the anti-doping discourse includes as well referencing to specific value systems by the emphasis of athletes as moral agents. In every social order, legitimacy is constructed in relation to the available discourses (Vaara & Tienari, 2008) and the discourses have influence over the opportunities for specific actors to create meaning. In this study, we explored how the anti-doping effort is constructed as legitimate through language in texts addressed to, and consumed by, elite athletes. Here, the specific actors creating meaning are those who affect the texts in the elite-level sport setting that constitutes the discursive practice (cf. Fairclough, 2003). The creation and editing of the WADC, the underlying document for the texts analysed here, are processes involving institutions such as WADA, interests of stakeholders and the ideas of the actors (cf. Fairclough, 1992; Shearer, Abelson, Lavis, Kouyate, & Walt, 2016). It is reasonable to believe that these institutions, interests and ideas constitute part of the anti-doping discourse with shared perceptions of how anti-doping is talked about and understood. Those who have influence and power over the discursive practice are limited by the discourses with regard to how they understand and create meaning in specific situations, and legitimacy is constructed in relation to the specific, available anti-doping discourse. In addition, the discursive practice is also governed and constrained by the surrounding social practice of sport and society and the prevailing power relations and power structures within it (Fairclough, 1992, 2010). Consequently, the prevailing anti-doping discourse and surrounding social practice affect how the system is legitimated; and vice versa. The discourse is at once constitutive and constituted. The change we were able to see in this study towards a more rational attitude might indicate a movement away from the authoritarian approach to the construction of legitimacy in the anti-doping system. As abovementioned, authorization can, to a certain extent, be regarded as a power-oriented, instrumental form of legitimation that is unlikely to produce the optimal conditions for a long-term, legitimate effort (cf. Tyler, 2006). Whether greater focus on rational legitimation or, for that matter, some other strategy, would provide a better basis for a sustainable anti-doping effort is a question that governing bodies should consider in future policy-making processes.

This study sheds light on discursive legitimation aspects of anti-doping work from a top-down perspective, and contributes with new knowledge relevant to policy in the area. With the methodology applied, we aimed to analyse what the text and images are an expression of, what is held to be true and what is taken for granted in the discourse (cf. Fairclough, 2003). We have tried to move the
attention to how legitimacy is discursively constructed. Our empirical material is not a representation of the creation of the legitimacy of the entire anti-doping discourse, but a section of it. Other parts constituting the discourse are for instance the WADC itself, additional information material, education programmes for athletes etc., all of which would be relevant to include in an extended analysis. However, the section we have paid attention to – the legitimacy strategies in texts aimed at athletes – is vital for the understanding of the grounds for anti-doping authorities claim for legitimacy from the athletes. We have shed light on how legitimation is constructed as explanations of why the system exists and why this social practice looks the way it does. In addition, we have also been able to observe an interesting change, in spite of the relatively short interval between the first version of the athlete’s guide and the latest one. Our study contributes theoretically and methodologically to the field of anti-doping by a combination of discourse analysis and the legitimacy approach. The top-down perspective on legitimation used here could have practical implications for policymakers, including those who communicate regulations to athletes, as well as for the athletes themselves.

**Declaration of Competing Interest**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

**References**


