

MORAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS DOPING – WHAT DO ATHLETES ON THE VERGE OF MATURITY VALUE?

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Abstract. The aim of the present study was twofold: a) to verify the previously detected regularities in a group of subjects larger than the one employed in a pilot study, and b) to define the internal structure of the hierarchy of values that can be squandered as a result of doping. For the study, eighty-nine 16-18-year-old students from the fencing, athletics, martial arts, and football classes of the School of Championship in Sports were recruited. Experimental technique developed by Mroczkowska called “Perception of the risk of doping” was employed to individually rank the highly regarded values (e.g., health, medals won, physical appeal, mental balance, financial bonuses, and social respect) that can be lost as a consequence of the use of illegal stimulants. It appears that young athletes would declaratively resign themselves from the loss of a financial bonus rather than from the loss of the social respect and attributes of self-integrity, such as physical and mental health. The detected correlations suggest that the rewarding value of a medal has an internal dimension: it externalizes a sense of self-confidence and confirms high self-esteem. The results indicate that, as perceived by the young, winning a medal with the help of doping is an illusion that does not allow to verify one’s own skills and limitations.

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Introduction

A series of studies was designed at the Department of Psychology, Institute of Sport, to define psychological mechanisms responsible for the risky decisions of athletes to use drugs or blood products in order to improve performance. A survey of the subject literature gives an impression that the phenomenon of doping has been analysed mainly with the anticipation of gaining insights into the nature of the doping agents and developing educational programmes to extend these insights. Indeed, investigators have been less interested in the underlying causes of this

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phenomenon as well as in the psychological processes that may possibly account for the risky decisions made by the athletes [10-12].

A few relevant reports have demonstrated that, from the point of view of both the user of a prohibited agent and the witnesses thereof, "exposure" of such an illegal stimulation is a random risk depending predominantly on chance or coincidence and only rarely on the actual perpetrator of the "exposure" [9].

According to the psychological theory of decision-making it may be assumed that taking advantage of or refraining from the use of a doping agent is a classic example of choosing between alternatives which lead to arriving at the anticipated, highly valued effects, but are also associated with a threat of losing important goods. By definition, a situation of choosing contains an element of risk – a decision-maker is not always able to properly balance the costs and benefits resulting from the choice he or she is making [1,13].

According to the theory of decision-making, the choice of an alternative is affected by estimation of the profitability of risk as well as by the probability of failure and losing the valued goods. The risk seems to be greatest when the probability of losing is high and when we most value something we can lose as a result of making the decision.

In every risky situation an individual is confronted by the problem of decision-making in which a set of alternatives is given and the decision consists in picking one of them. Thus, it may be assumed that an athlete who decides to use prohibited substances expects that if they are not detected, the benefits resulting from this decision will outweigh the losses of the valued goods when the use is "exposed" [2].

The first phase of the study had demonstrated high levels of the cohesion of judgement of the importance of things valued by the young athletes and of the explicitness in their understanding of what really matters in life. Moreover, the previously obtained results suggested that young novices in sports perceived a loss of values with immediate consequences as more acceptable than the loss that had delayed effects, when the delay was long enough for the adverse symptoms to become elusive or directly imperceptible [7]. The objective of the present study was to extend the above observations by, firstly, verifying and corroborating the initial conclusions through examination of a markedly larger experimental group and, secondly, seizing the essence and internal structure of the hierarchy of values as goods that can be squandered when the use of illegal stimulants has been uncovered.



Materials and Methods

Eighty-nine students from the fencing, truck and field, combat sports, and football classes of the School of Championship in Sports were recruited for the study. The subjects aged between 16 and 18 years (mean = 17.2 years) and their training periods in a given sport ranged between 2 and 11 years (mean = 5.8 years).

In the study, experimental version of the technique developed at the Department of Psychology, Institute of Sport by Mroczkowska [7], called "Perception of the risk of doping", was employed to control the risk. The scale allows to recognize the following values selected in the pilot surveys as those that can be lost by an athlete as a consequence of the use of drugs or blood products for non-medical purposes:

- loss of health;
- loss of a medal or a score;
- loss of the physical attractiveness;
- loss of the mental balance;
- loss of a financial bonus;
- loss of respect of the people around.

The data obtained using the Scale spanned three cognitive areas as follows:

1. Individual ranking of the respected values, which determines the magnitude of a possible loss as a consequence of the use of illegal stimulants: a tested subject is asked to rank the above values according to the difficulty-ease of the acceptance of their loss. For this purpose, a six-point scale was employed in which the higher the number the stronger the weight attributed to the given value.
2. Objective probability of the loss of the value as a consequence of doping: a tested subject is to rank from 0 to 100% the real risk of a loss of each of the six values, irrespectively of each other, as a result of doping.
3. Subjective probability of a loss of a value as a result of doping: a tested subject is to estimate, on a scale from 0 to 100%, how big a risk of the loss of each value he or she would be willing to take and accept.

In the present study, the data from the first cognitive area (point 1) were used to seize the internal structure of the values that can be lost.

For statistical analysis of the results, means, standard deviations (SD), and the Pearson's linear correlation coefficients [8] were calculated. Because of the weak correlation between the declared moral attitude and moral conduct (which explains about 10% of the variances), examinations with use of the above Scale were carried out anonymously.



Results

The obtained data on the priority of the values that can be lost as a result of doping define the average structure of the values esteemed by the examined group of the subjects. Table 1 shows the estimated weights attributed to each of the examined values.

Table 1

Estimated weights (means and SD) attributed to the values that can be lost by an athlete as a consequence of doping

Values N-89	Loss of health	Loss of a medal	Loss of physical attractiveness	Loss of social respect	Loss of financial remuneration	Loss of mental balance
Mean	5.08	2.92	2.73	4.37	2.08	3.80
SD	1.19	1.58	1.31	1.21	1.12	1.71

The three most respected values, i.e. those whose loss is the least acceptable by the young athletes, include health (mean=5.08), social respect (mean=4.37), and mental balance (mean=3.80).

In the opinion of the tested subjects, the most acceptable losses resulting from the use of illegal stimulants included the loss of a financial bonus (mean=2.08), the loss of the physical attractiveness (mean=2.73), and the loss of a scored medal (mean=2.92).

The examined values were arbitrarily diversified according to a temporal criterion defining the time – immediate or delayed – to manifestation of the consequences of their loss. The loss of such values as medals or scores, financial bonuses, and social respect may be regarded as the immediate (direct) consequences which unfold as soon as the positive results of the anti-doping control are revealed. In turn, the loss of health, physical attractiveness, and mental balance to a varying extent manifest themselves within a prolonged periods of time which can be long enough for that the consequences to become directly indiscernible or elusive. Based on the above temporal criterion, it appears that young athletes less readily accept the loss of the delayed-consequence values than those of the immediate outcome. On a 18-point scale, the former and the latter values were attributed, on average, 11.61 and 9.37 points, respectively.



The above presented distribution averaged the frequency of typing of each of the tested values. To illustrate the phenomenon of the perception of values as an individual choice, the frequency of typing of the highest and lowest ranks for each value are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Frequency of typing of the highest and lowest ranks for each value that can be lost as a result of doping

Values frequency of typing	Loss of health	Loss of a medal	Loss of physical appeal	Loss of social respect	Loss of a financial bonus	Loss of mental balance	Σ
Highest rank (6 points)	45 50.6%	13 14.6%	4.5%	14 15.7%	0 0%	13 14.6%	89
Lowest Rank (1 point)	0 0%	16 17.9%	10 11.2%	3 3.4%	43 48.3%	17 19.1%	89

The data presented in Table 2 show the level of the intragroup cohesion regarding the ranking of the values. As indicated, the values that most consistently and coherently obtained the highest and the lowest weights, respectively, were the loss of health and the loss of a financial bonus. Health, as an individual value, was ranked the highest in more than 50% of the cases and never obtained the lowest rank (0%). By analogy, a financial bonus – the loss of which was most acceptable – never (0% of the cases) obtained the highest rank and in 48% of the cases was attributed the lowest rank.

The least coherent attitude in the examined group was demonstrated with respect to the loss of the mental balance and the loss of a medal or a score. The young novices in sports ranked these values as the highest and the lowest in 14.6% and 19.1% of the cases, and in 14.6% and 17.9% of the cases, respectively.

The above rankings and estimated weights attributed to the values can be arranged pyramidally and describe the external structure of the values that can be lost. To seize the nature of this structure, i.e., the internal relations between the examined values, the analysis of correlation was carried out. The statistically significant correlations are presented in Table 3.



Table 3

Statistically significant correlations between values that can be lost as a consequence of doping

Correlated values	Pearson's correlation coefficient
Loss of health vs. Loss of medals or the medal scores	-0.39
Loss of physical attractiveness vs. Loss of medals or the medal scores	-0.25
Loss of mental balance vs. Loss of medals and or the medal scores	-0.37
Loss of physical attractiveness vs. Loss of social respect	-0.38
Loss of financial remuneration vs. Loss of mental balance	-0.49

In the internal structure of the values that can be lost owing to doping, the loss of a medal appears to be the value most often entangled in the correlations. The obtained data demonstrate that the more acceptable is the loss of a medal, the more difficult it is to accept the losses of health, emotional balance, and the physical appeal. This regularity suggests that the attitude of an athlete towards the possibility of losing a medal to a large extent determines and defines his or her emotional bias towards the remaining values.

The above relations illustrate the phenomenon of polarisation or contrasting of the examined values. It does not, however, apply to the other two values: the one of the social dimension i.e. social respect, and the other of the definitely external dimension, i.e., financial rewarding. The first relation demonstrates that the more we care about social prestige, the less important becomes the outward appearance. The second relation shows that the more we respect our emotional balance, the less important is financial remuneration. It appears that social respect motivationally counter-weighs physical attractiveness, whereas material possessions seem to counter-weigh mental health.

The above relations describe the two faces of competition in sport and point, firstly, to the source of temptation to breach ethical norms and, secondly, to the strength that enables doing the "clean sport." Generally, the obtained results reveal the high level of the intragroup coherence and explicitness in knowing what really matters in life. Hence, these results corroborate the regularities detected earlier in a study performed on the markedly smaller experimental group.



Thus, it may be generalized that young athletes are declaratively more prone to accept the loss of a financial bonus than the loss of attributes of personal integrity (mental and physical health) or social respect. Health, as an individual value, never obtained the lowest rank, whereas financial rewarding never achieved the highest rank.

The above observations supplement the study on motivations in sport which demonstrated that bonuses do matter, but internal motivation, personal development, and affiliation needs are the more fundamental conditions of personal sense of success. Similar conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of the hierarchies of values attainable through competition and those that can be lost because of doping [4,6].

Secondly, the present data suggest that the better protection of personal compared to material values implies that young athletes perceive their own lives in a longer perspective. Hypothetically, they tend to more readily accept the loss of values when the effects of this loss are immediate (i.e., loss of a medal, position in the ranking, financial bonus) than the loss of values with delayed consequences (health, mental balance), even if the delay is long enough for the adverse effects to become elusive or barely noticeable.

Thirdly, the internal structure of the values (i.e., their interrelations) triggers deliberations on the problem of needs satisfied by competition in sport and on the sources of frustration when such needs cannot be met because the use of a illegal stimulant has been "exposed". According to the theory of motivational it can be argued that medals, positions in ranking, and financial bonuses constitute the external attributes of winning and championship in sports [5].

Discussion

The obtained data suggest that a young athlete's attitude towards a possibility of losing a medal because of doping defines and determines his or her moral, emotional, and cognitive bias for other values which can possibly be lost too. The less readily young athletes accept the loss of attributes of personal integrity (health, mental balance, physical appeal), the more easily they tend to accept their being deprived of the medal. Probably, the attitude towards the two completely different sets of the values, i.e., personal integrity and a medal, directly affects arriving at or abandoning a risky decision about the use of a doping.

Fourthly, it appears that young athletes view the loss of a medal and the loss of a financial bonus associated with the medal as two unrelated events. Hence, contrary to the theory of motivation, this observation suggests that the rewarding



value of a medal has, in fact, an internal dimension – it externalizes the athlete's self-assessment as a champion. The obtained correlations suggest that experiencing a loss of this value disturbs one's high self-esteem and one's belief in one's abilities as a champion and generally decreases one's own pride and self-esteem. It may be concluded that, as suggested by the lack of its relations with the other values, the loss of various financial bonuses is of minor importance for young athletes.

Therefore, it can be assumed that, similarly to the loss of health, emotional balance, and physical attractiveness, the loss of a medal disturbs the most inner, intimate part of a human being, the one that determines his or her personal integrity. Nevertheless, the detected regularity demonstrating that the more one's psychophysical health is valued, the less important is to win a medal and gain the related sense of pride indicates that young athletes are aware of the illegitimacy and distortion of a sense of pride and prestige when doping had been used.

The above system of relations suggests that, from an athlete's perspective, winning a medal with the assistance of a prohibited stimulant is, in the first place, self-deception. In such circumstances, feeling proud of winning a medal or becoming a champion, being self-confident or holding high self-esteem becomes, *de facto*, an illusion given, as it were, "on credit." Probably, an athlete cannot be sure to what extent the success has been affected by the prohibited support or by his or her own abilities.

Noteworthy, the above results, suggestions, and conclusions refer to the very young athletes, on the verge of maturity. Therefore, these results, suggestions, and conclusions may serve as recommendations guiding the development of motivations for achieving and of competitive personalities as well as for teaching how to satisfy the need of self-confidence so that it is not only an illusion of being competent and good. The use of drugs or blood products for non-medical purposes creates a falsified, unreal situation which allows of neither the self-assessment nor verification of one's own abilities and limitations.

Psychological theories emphasize individual perception of a risk as a basic factor defining the behaviour of a person in uncertainty. Individual attitude towards risk, i.e. towards its acceptable level, is affected by both the size of the loss – a topic of the present study – and the probability of the loss. Relations between the actual and individually acceptable risk, as perceived by young athletes, will be presented in a future report.



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