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## **Ant-doping policy and professional cycling: Exploring attitudes, issues and a pathway to a new approach**

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### **Background**

Cycling has a reputation as having an entrenched and institutionalised doping culture existing within a closed community where some bending of the rules has been seen as historically permissible, if not required in order to cope with the exceptional nature of its events (Brewer, 2002). The closed nature of the peloton is regarded as being one of the greatest challenges for any intervention initiated from the outside (Dauncey, 2003; Schneider, 2006). This research into the attitudes of Australia professional cyclists is critical given the current anti-doping policy paradigm, its operation, effectiveness and limitations. This study seeks to identify factors which lead to the current anti-doping regime to be less effective than desired and to propose practical measures to increase that effectiveness.

### **Objective**

This study examines the attitudes of Australian professional cyclists, team managers, staff, coaches, medical and scientific advisors towards the anti-doping legislative and policy framework in which they operate. The aim of this project is to contribute to the development of a positive, practical, preventative and sustainable anti-doping policy for professional cycling by identifying attitudes towards anti-doping policy and by promoting mechanisms for the positive engagement of cyclists in the policy formation process.

### **Method**

Twenty-two semi-structured interviews were conducted in Australia over the period October 2009 to January 2010 coinciding with the Australian Summer Cycling season. The length of each interview ranged between one and two hours. The interviewees included current and former professional cyclists, coaches, team directors and scientists. Semi-structured interviews were supported with embedded field observations of cyclists and teams at training camps and during race weeks. Data were analysed using grounded data techniques which revealed key codes and themes to identify the narratives used to illustrate the attitude of the cyclists and their cohorts to current anti-doping policy. Along with a process of identifying key themes, the narratives were analysed with reference to relevant literature and current anti-doping policy as determined by the Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI).

### **Results**

Results from this study identified education, career structure, job security and sustainability, and the link between them and the extent to which doping is viewed as a problem as the key themes. Other related themes to emerge from this study included the 'whereabouts system' and the administration of anti-doping policy and law, including the biological passport. This study found that rules were in the main complied with by the peloton and teams because of the consequences of non compliance. Although issues of fairness and equity were noted as important in the context of 'cultural change' in professional cycling, members of the peloton were not heavily influenced by the moral basis of the rules. Moreover, a broader social force was identified through the peloton which was viewed as a significant group or community. The social nature of the peloton; the community of professional cyclists and their cohort as a working and living group, was identified as a socialising agent that potentially may have the greatest impact on shaping the peloton's attitude to doping practices. References to the peloton emerging from the coding processes included recognition by respondents that the peloton has its own internal control mechanisms based upon what was described as a feeling of "solidarity", "mateship", "camaraderie" and "brotherhood" whereby actions that were deemed to be unacceptable or inconsistent with the ethics of professional cycling were regulated by other members of the peloton. The peloton as a social force for change in relation to anti-doping policy will be a specific focus of this presentation.

## **Conclusion**

Bird and Wagner (1997) have previously commented on the role of collegiality in enforcing norms in sport and as mechanisms that may be utilised to limit and overcome collective self damage or injury to a sport through rule violations such as doping practices. This study has identified through the peloton, as a form of community, a mechanism which might be the vehicle through which to shape anti-doping attitudes and a new pathway to address education, life and career structure, job security and sustainability in a manner and environment that is conducive to the development of an ethical, effective and sustainable anti-doping policy. The policy implications of these findings and the role of the peloton in shaping norms in relation to doping practices will be discussed in this presentation. The implications for addressing job security, career progression and transition, and education in the peloton will also be discussed.