**Civilising processes and doping in professional cycling**

**Introduction**

In this paper, drawing from the theoretical approach of Norbert Elias, I argue that over the course of the last 70 years professional cyclists have undergone civilising processes in relation to doping within the sport. It is not my contention that doping has declined amongst professional cyclists over that time period; that would be very difficult to empirically ascertain. However, I contend that the feelings, attitudes and behaviour of professional cyclists in relation to doping did change significantly. The largely unguarded behaviour and candid admissions concerning the practice of doping gradually diminished. Doping was increasingly pushed behind the scenes, and cyclists became more ambivalent in how they discussed the subject. Embarrassment, shame and remorse became a more amplified feature of their accounts. However, this was a gradual, contradictory and fragile process.

The subject of doping within professional cycling has received considerable sociological analysis. Indeed, many of the practices, processes and developments drawn upon in this study – the culture of suffering, the social origins of cyclists, their work conditions, the organisation of cycling, rationales for doping, its stigmatisation and the system of constraints imposed – have previously been identified (see Brewer, 2002; Schneider, 2006; Thompson, 2008; Waddington and Smith, 2009; Dimeo, 2014; Lopez, 2014). However, only limited attention has been directed at the relationship between these processes and the social habitus of professional cyclists. Consequently, in this paper, drawing on Elias’s concept of habitus, I explain how the habitus of professional cyclists became more ‘civilised’ in relation to doping. By civilising, I am referring to an overall advance in the thresholds of repugnance towards doping and the exercise of higher levels of self-restraint in the regulation of behaviour in relation to doping. However, I contend that it has been both an acutely fragile and limited process due to the failure of a comprehensive and effective monopoly apparatus for the control of doping to develop; the specific structure of the wider cycling figuration and the competitive compulsions generated by this; the meaning and function of suffering and the inter and intra generational identification that developed around this.

The amplifying effects of contemporary media coverage (Murphy et al., 1988) surrounding doping within the sport has, I believe, tended to obscure significant changes in the habitus of professional cyclists over the decades. The largely open, benign or ambivalent attitudes often expressed by cyclists in the 1960s and 1970s towards doping faded considerably. Instead, cyclists became more candid in their criticism of the practice, while those cyclists sanctioned for doping became more contrite with the focus of anger directed more at the self. Notwithstanding, doping persisted, ‘behind the scenes’, – as evidenced by recent investigations (see Voet, 2002; Soule and Lestrelin, 2011) and confessions (see Voet, 2001; Millar, 2011; Riis, 2012; Hamilton and Coyle, 2012) – at the same time as an advance in the frontiers of shame and repugnance occurred. Consequently, not only has it been a slow, fractured and ambivalent process, it has also been, at times, contradictory. Indeed, given the interwoven nature of these processes the paper supports Robert van Krieken’s (2003) contention that civilising advances and reversals may occur simultaneously.

By doping I mean the practice of professional cyclists using illegal performance-enhancing drugs and techniques. While the process in which specific social practices that came to be defined, and stigmatised, as doping, and the timing of these, are important, the focus in this paper is more on the emotional responses and reactions of individual cyclists and the changing nature of these. Waddington and Smith (2009: 49–60), in their analysis of the literature, identify a diverse range of theoretical perspectives – ‘technological determinism’, ‘deviant over conformity’, ‘Marxist’, ‘Mertonian’, ‘differential association’; ‘game models’, and ‘sporting careers and biographical risks’ – purporting to explain doping in sport generally. It is not my intention to retrace their comprehensive synthesis, exposition and critique of these. Likewise, they too put forward their own alternative explanation based on figurational theory. They contend the increasing use of doping (they refer to it as drugs in sport), particularly from the 1960s, can be explained by ‘developments in, and changes in the interrelationships between, sport and medicine’ (p.64). They argue that the intertwining of several social processes – the medicalisation of daily life; the medicalisation of sport; the increasing competitiveness of, and seriousness of involvement in, sport; and the politicisation and commercialisation of sport – has meant that the interdependencies between those comprising figurations of sport and medicine tightened, and facilitated the increasing use of drugs, both legal and illegal, in sport. A particularly insightful, and important, contribution is their account of the changing attitudes and social constraints concerning the use of performance-enhancing substances by athletes, and of ‘drugs’ generally in wider society, specifically from the 1960s onwards in Western European nations. Consequently, their contention is that the increased use of drugs in society was to an extent mirrored by the increased uptake within sport and that the ‘moral panic’[[1]](#endnote-1) associated with public concern over drug taking fuelled national, and sporting, authorities’ responses to doping in sport. While my theoretical approach is similar to that of Waddington and Smith, I have sought to examine developments at the level of habitus. More specifically, I focus on how many of the social processes described by Waddington and Smith came to be inscribed in the habitus of professional cyclists, how this changed, and why.

**Elias, habitus and the constraint towards self-restraint**

Although the concept of habitus is more specifically associated with Bourdieu, Elias used the concept as early as the 1930s (Dunning and Hughes, 2013; see also Mennell, 1989), pre-dating Bourdieu. For both Elias and Bourdieu, habitus refers to a form of thinking, behaviour and feeling which is habitual or second nature. It is in the application of the concept within the wider theoretical frameworks associated with either theorist that differences emerge (see Dunning and Hughes, 2013: 199 for a wider discussion of these differences).

Elias’s (2000) theory concerns long-term changes in social habitus and the connection of these developments to changes in the wider structure of society. Elias used the terms social habitus, psychic make-up and personality structure interchangeably, through which he sought to convey the structure of dispositions and characteristics which individuals share in common with other members of various social groups. Individual personality characteristics are also a component of this social habitus (Elias, 2001: 182).

Elias’s concept of social habitus goes hand in hand with his concept of figuration, which he defined as a fluid network of mutually dependent people (Elias, 2000). The habitus is continually shaped through social interdependencies (the various figurations people form with one another). These figurations can vary from that of one’s immediate family to those of higher social integration such as the nation or society. Elias (2000) demonstrated that as the social interdependencies in which people are enmeshed increase, in tandem with expanding functional specialisation and a growing centralised monopoly over violence and taxation, the constraint towards self-control advances and the exercise of self-restraint becomes more even and automatic.

As with other aspects of the social world, Elias conceives of habitus as processual. Indeed, he used phrases such as ‘thresholds of repugnance’ to capture the processual nature of various social standards that come to be expected and demanded at various historical junctures. Elias illustrated and explained how the social habitus of people comes to develop an increasing distaste and intolerance for displays and expressions of violence – the threshold of repugnance advances –, and how bodily practices and emotions become subject to greater and more even self-control. These changes occur as a more pacified social space develops in conjunction with the advancing division of functions. More and more people of different classes, gender and location become increasingly interdependent, and subject to greater reciprocal comparison and judgement. Consequently, a compelling pressure is exerted requiring each individual to apply greater levels of restraint over their emotions and behaviour due to the need to take into consideration more and more people. Gradually these social pressures are internalised and turned into self-restraints to the extent that they are recognised as ‘second nature’ by people – they appear as eternal, emanating from the individual and under the control of conscience. In that regard, ‘conscience’ takes on a stronger role as a regulator of behaviour within the habitus. One manifestation of this is that people develop feelings of guilt, embarrassment, and shame when the prevailing social standards are violated. Furthermore, they are moved behind the scenes. Such feelings of discomfort not only relate to violent acts. Elias illustrated how an advance in the frontier of shame and embarrassment feelings towards various bodily functions, and of sexual relations, led to their increasing displacement behind the scenes.

Central to the establishment, and stability, of this form of self-restraint – conscience – is the formation of effective monopoly institutions and their perceived legitimacy (Elias, 2000: 368–369). Building on Weber’s concept, Elias explained how the monopolisation – the concentration of control over the use – of violence and taxation in a central authority and the stability of this, are essential to a civilising process (Dunning and Hughes, 2013). These two monopolies both compel and propel greater self-demands on the individual through the threat and imposition of sanctions or the withdrawal of resources or privileges (Elias, 2000: 268).

Elias used the concept of a civilising process to convey this specific type of social development. He did not use the concept in any evaluative or normative way or suggest that it was a linear process (see Dunning and Hughes, 2013: 103-108, for a wider discussion). Rather, implicit in his conceptualisation is that counter spurts and contradictions can also emerge, and co-exist, in the context of an overall civilising trend. Indeed, his work pays considerable attention to the difficulties and conflicts experienced by individuals in the course of a civilising process.

**Research method and sources**

My comparative analysis covers the period from the early 1900s, with the emergence of the major cycle sport races in Europe, to the present. The empirical data I draw upon is derived primarily from 18 autobiographies and nine biographies[[2]](#endnote-2) of professional cyclists from France, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Britain, Ireland, Australia, Denmark and the USA, covering the period from 1910 to the present (see Table 1). In that regard, they provide a means to situate the changes in habitus historically. Autobiographies have acted as sources of data for others examining issues within the sociology of sport (see Sparkes, 2004; Thing and Ronglan, 2014) and within figurational studies as part of a broader data set (see Dolan, 2009a).

The auto/biographies were selected primarily to attain temporal variation so that the experiences, attitudes and feelings of cyclists from different generations could be considered. Given that the production of such texts by cyclists[[3]](#endnote-3) has become more popular in the past decade it was easier to gain access to the recalled experiences of current or recently retired professionals. Indeed, I was unable to identify/obtain any autobiography published prior to the 1960s. Here I was more reliant on biographies and other historical manuscripts. Fortunately, several former cyclists have recently published accounts recalling their experiences of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s (See Bobet, 2008; Hewson, 2008). The autobiographies were further supplemented by historical monographs of professional cycling (see Thompson, 2008; Foot, 2011; Ritchie, 2011; Knuts and Delheye, 2015) newspaper accounts, cycling magazines, and articles in online cycle sport news media.

[insert Table 1 here]

Data analysis began by attempting to identify how ‘doping’, or related concepts, were discussed by cyclists (or if it was referred to at all) and how this changed over time. Efforts were made to select data from different time periods and from cyclists from different nations. The general tone and context of their discussions were also considered in an effort to consider if shame, embarrassment, anger or other feelings could be revealed, as was the social purpose of the various texts. The same data was also read to ascertain the network of relationships in which cyclists were embedded. Thus, a central part of this process involved identifying the forms of interdependence in which cyclists were, and are, enmeshed. Here the autobiographies/biographies, combined with other sources, acted as a window in mapping relationships, the interdependencies that flow from these, and as a means to access a very precise reconstruction of the experiences (Elias, 1983: 211) of professional cyclists. The data was also analysed comparatively for both changes and similarities over time. The interpretation of data was informed by figurational theory and involved the ongoing interplay between Elias’s theoretical frame, the data and the emerging explanation. In the course of this process, themes were developed and revised on the basis of further data (see also Dolan, 2009b).

Furthermore, the combined data provided an insight into the social origins of cyclists over the generations – a crucial step, as Dunning (1999: 126) notes, in assessing their power resources and the various forms of socio-cultural capital connected to these. This was just one aspect of a broader theoretically informed reading of the texts which helped identify the changing attitudes, values and behaviours of cyclists and the direction of this change in relation to doping. All of the source materials are interdependent in that numerous accounts and sources are interconnected, sometimes overlapping, providing multiple angles from which events and practices are recounted. Through this, and taking consideration of the balance of involvement and detachment (Elias, 1987) in the social production of the source materials, the veracity of events and claims can be assessed.

One drawback I would like to emphasise is that my study is based primarily on English language books and/or translations from other European languages. To that extent the analysis is skewed by material available in this form. As such, it is possible that the particular linguistic nuances and emphases that can betray changing emotional controls, attitudes and feelings may have remained obscured to an extent.

**Thresholds of repugnance**

At the turn of the nineteenth century natural stimulants were both used and advocated within the sport, though as illustrated by Waddington and Smith (2009) such practices had been generally free of moral opprobrium. The late 1950s and 1960s have been identified as the period when this began to change more quickly and overtly (Thompson, 2008; Waddington and Smith, 2009) as part of what might be termed a wider civilising offensive against drugs in society (Waddington and Smith, 2009). My own analysis would tend to corroborate this. However, the stage of stigmatisation was still rather embryonic. Feelings of shame and embarrassment towards practices now categorised as doping had yet to intrude into the habitus of many professional cyclists to any great extent. One indication of this was the tendency amongst professional cyclists to be open and frank about practices which were now being increasingly stigmatised as ‘doping’. For instance, the leading French cyclist Jacque Anquetil stated to the press in 1966: ‘“We have to take stimulants for such a race. Yes, I have taken stimulants today”’ (cited in Fotheringham, 2007: 171). This typified the general candid approach of many professional cyclists of the 1960s. The Spanish cyclist, Julio Jimenez, runner-up in the 1967 Tour de France, openly admitted ‘“All riders in the Tour [de France] take pills”’ (*Irish Times*, 5 August 1967: 1). Similarly, the Irish professional cyclist of the 1950s and 1960s, Shay Elliot, was equally frank, declaring that it wasn’t ethical reasons or guilt which stopped him, but that ‘illegal’ stimulants did not seem to benefit him (Healy, 2011: 160).

As in previous decades, many cyclists remained unperturbed and relatively secure in speaking rather benignly in public of what were becoming increasingly stigmatised practices. Such a sense of security can also be observed from the fact that practices now identified as doping often took place openly. In an interview between a journalist, Philippe Brunel, the chief cycling correspondent for the French newspaper *L’Equipe*, and a cycling historian, and the official physician for the Tour de France in 1950s and 1960s, Pierre Dumas, in 1999, Dumas noted how in the 1960s: ‘Morphine or palfium, which was given to terminal cancer patients to ease their agony, was injected into the riders’ legs to deaden the muscle pain.’ Brunel was shocked by the fact that this took place openly in full view of Dumas, but Dumas remarked: ‘“They weren’t embarrassed”’ (cited in Fotheringham, 2007: 159). It is clear from this that doping had not yet become associated with the sense of shame and embarrassment it would in later years. Here cyclists openly used stimulants, then coming to be categorised as ‘doping’, without any great fear of being either socially ostracised or sanctioned.

From the 1960s the scale and type of social constraints advanced. For instance, anti-doping legislation was passed by national governments in several European countries (Thompson, 2008; Waddington and Smith, 2009: 42–43). In many cases this was carried out in tandem with, or followed by, the imposition of related rules pertaining to the use of stimulants by national cycling administrators. The reaction of cyclists across Europe in the mid-1960s illustrates how the agencies for doping regulation were yet to be conceived as legitimate. Many cyclists refused to partake in official doping tests (Fotheringham, 2007: 170–1) and both threatened (Foot, 2011: 250) and partook in strike action to rescind the new doping regulations (Thompson, 2008). These actions, and the fact that some cyclists sanctioned for doping threatened to ‘give up cycling’ (*Irish Times*, 16 July 1968: 3), reflected not just the reluctance of cyclists to accept civilising pressures but also how the external functionaries connected with this – the regulating functions of state and cycling authorities – were the primary object of their anger.

Such feelings, and their open declaration, remained a recurring feature of later decades also. Dutch cyclist, Joop Zoetemelk, following a positive test for a banned substance in 1983, stated, ‘“It’s medicine I took before the season to help build up my system...The test leaves me puzzled. I haven’t taken the hormone for over three months’”. He also threatened to quit the race (cited in Moore, 2007: 132). Similarly, French cyclist, Patric Clerc, who also tested positive at the same event, declared: ‘“I plead guilty, but I had to look after myself after riding the Dauphine Libere and Bordeaux-Paris [cycle races], which left me exhausted. If I hadn’t done so, I would not have ridden the Tour [de France]”’(cited in Moore, 2007: 132). Within these justifications there is little sense of wrongdoing, or remorse, on the part of the cyclists in question, reflective of relatively low levels of embarrassment and shame. By the mid-1980s doping controls became stricter, more methodical (McKay, 2013) and, as Voet[[4]](#endnote-4) (2002: 49) admits, harder for cyclists and their support functionaries to circumvent. Yet these social constraints were slow in being internalised by many cyclists. In his autobiography *Fall from Grace*, published in 1988, the Belgian cyclist Freddy Maertens explains why he felt he and other Belgian cyclists were caught and banned for doping in 1974.

When a doctor discovered a new product in a urine sample in Italy, all teams were informed about it. A rider who carried on using it knew that he was making a mistake. In Belgium, however, they did things rather differently. They would keep quiet about a new discovery, let the riders carry on racing, and then out of the blue they would issue a list of the names of the riders who had been found using it. To me, that is typical of the BWB [Belgian cycling authorities] who have never failed to do things in a completely underhand way (p. 48).

He adds,

If you are taking strange things every day, of course you will never finish the Tour de France. But anyone who says they can do it *naturally* [original emphasis] is a liar. You have to be medically treated so that you don’t do anything stupid off your own back (p.49).

Again, there is little indication of any wrong-doing, rather anger directed at the Belgian cycling authorities for sanctioning them; an indication too that their regulatory function for doping was not yet accepted as entirely legitimate by some cyclists.

However, an advance in the threshold of repugnance towards doping was occurring. One indication of this was that some cyclists were becoming more circumspect and reluctant to offer the open declarations as they had in the past and, perhaps when they did, they remained hidden from public view. This advance in the privatisation of their feelings towards doping was increasingly accompanied by a more ambivalent and, in some instances, critical tone. In his 1988 memoir *Memories of the peloton* French cyclist, Bernard Hinault, in a short reference to the efforts of the race leader at the 1978 Tour de France to deceive a doping control writes:

He wasn’t the first to try this trick, in fact some riders have even been discovered to be pregnant! – they had used a specimen provided by their wives. But this farce conceals a sordid truth and the riders concerned are more to be pitied than mocked (pp.78–9).

Here both the discourse and tone are less sympathetic and a more critical stance is evident. What is unsaid within the wider text is also of significance. There are no expressed attempts to defend such action. On the other hand, there is only limited discussion of the topic (doping) generally, while Hinault does not feel compelled to explicitly distance himself from such practices, a feature of later autobiographies.

By the 1990s cyclists had become far more reluctant to admit to partaking in doping and it became increasingly pushed ‘behind the scenes’. Several cyclists were now openly critical of doping within the sport. For instance, the Irish cyclist, Paul Kimmage, in his autobiography *Rough Ride* first published in 1990 declared:

Thank God we don’t we don’t see any of this on television. Thank God we don’t hear about the nastiness, the dealing, the dirt. The champions deserve our applause. They merit our encouragement. They are not to blame […] Should I remain silent? No, I can’t because it’s what *they* [original emphasis] want, the people who profit from the rule of silence […] Well, I’m questioning (p.238).

Open displays of ambivalence, even boasting, became increasingly tabooed and where they did occur, ‘removed behind the scenes’ (Elias, 2000: 103). However, although thresholds of shame were advancing it was a fractured and slow process reflecting different habitus formation processes. Thresholds had advanced more quickly for some, having become internalised and more solidified from a young age. For instance, Willy Voet recounts how the French cyclist Charly Mottet in the early 1990s quickly rejected any doping programme and was embarrassed by the boasting of former riders when they recounted events involving doping (Voet, 2002: 75). On the other hand, for others, echoing cyclists of a previous era, anger at regulating agents was often the primary emotive reaction to their implication in doping. By the late 1990s, the social constraints on cyclists had intensified through a more expansive system of controls. For example, in 1994 the governing body for international cycling increased the period of suspension for those caught doping, and in 1998 they introduced random blood testing for cyclists and what was known as a haematocrit test (*Cycling Weekly*, 22 August, 1998: 4–5; see also Walsh, 2008). Similarly, state interventions in the form of police searches and the arrest of cyclists intensified (see Waddington and Smith, 2009: 132).

The extent that shame feelings were now permeating the habitus of particular cyclists now deemed to have doped was more acute than in the past, as indeed were the psychological consequences of this for some cyclists. The Italian cyclist Marco Pantani struggled in his personal and professional life to deal with a positive drug test in 1999 and the subsequent accusations and insinuations that flowed from this (see Rendell, 2007)[[5]](#endnote-5). Although the habitus is always in process, during civilising spurts it can lag behind emerging social standards. Consequently, some individual cyclists faced the difficulty of trying to reconcile a self-image and set of values now in conflict with wider civilising standards that had come to pertain in relation to doping.

Post 2000, doping continued though it was now more than ever ‘behind the scenes’. In the sense that such practices were further privatised, hidden from social observance, it too reflects the growing culture of shame surrounding such activities. Indeed, as doping came to be considered more shameful, and felt to be so, cyclists became more vocal in denying, denouncing and in distancing themselves from such practices. Such declarations were not necessarily a manifestation of a habitus in which doping was strongly rejected – the internalisation of such shame feelings for many was weak. Rather, a wider civilising process[[6]](#endnote-6), and the increasing constraints and interdependencies through which cyclists had to navigate within the sport also produced a more calculating and circumspect social habitus. In his 2003 autobiography *Every Second Counts* the American cyclist Lance Armstrong wrote: ‘I would never take a substance like EPO or human growth hormone and jeopardize my health after what I’d been through … The innocent, I said, could never prove their innocence. How could you prove a negative?’ (p.120). In light of his recent confession some ten years later, his denial at a time when he was clearly involved in planned and organised doping practices illustrates that not only was it ‘pushed behind the scenes’, but that the compulsion to deny and denounce was strong. Neither was Armstrong unique in this regard. So although the tolerance of doping was declining amongst many of those in regulatory, commercial, and media positions, and in society more broadly, the internalisation of greater shame feelings was slower amongst many professional cyclists illustrating the complex and contradictory nature of the process.

Proclamations of innocence clearly acted at a level of strategic discourse – openly admitting it would have involved a ban from the sport and possibly other sanctions and forms of social loss. Quite understandably, denials or criticism of doping could be perceived as a strategy to avoid suspicion. On the other hand, it can also be considered indicative of a wider civilising advance for it involves greater calculation of external constraints reflecting greater levels of rationalisation and foresight (Elias, 2000). Increased self-restraint can manifest itself in more calculated and rationalised behaviour. There are symmetries here with Brewer (2002) in relation to his study on professional cycling. Drawing from Weber, he suggests a more formal rationality was imposed on the sport post the 1990s, however, following Elias, I contend the advance in rationalisation was more processual and part of a wider civilising process.

Advances in the frontier of shame became even more marked in the habitus of cyclists from the mid-2000s. More cyclists became openly critical and less tolerant of fellow cyclists caught doping. In David Millar’s autobiography *Racing Through the Dark* he reflects on an incident in which fellow cyclists were arrested for suspected doping: ‘There was little joy in watching their downfall, only satisfaction in knowing they’d been caught’ (p.306).This too reflects the growing acceptance of the legitimacy of the agents for the control and regulation of doping. Nonetheless, it was not a linear development. Cyclists continued to contest and resist the activities of regulating agents.

Millar’s autobiography is also illustrative of another pattern indicative of a civilising process. Although outbursts of anger, denials and claims of victimisation have not entirely dissipated amongst those caught doping, there is an increasing tendency since the mid-2000s, in particular, for such cyclists to be more contrite. One manifestation of this is the confessional tone pervading a host of autobiographies, such as Millar’s, published post 2000. Such expressions of remorse are, to some extent, indicative of a social habitus in which doping is experienced as more shameful – as Millar recalled, ‘I was a doper, a cheat – why did I deserve to come back’ (p.245). Furthermore, they illustrate how the object of anger has shifted. The reaction of cyclists implicated in doping in recent years tends to be shorn of the anger directed at external functionaries which was more palpable in earlier decades. Though anger and proclamations of innocence did not completely disappear, it was increasingly replaced by a more self-critical tenor; anger became directed more at the self. That the self is brought more to the fore indicates the greater role of conscience in the generation of shame feelings, embarrassment and overall in the regulation of behaviour (Elias, 2000). However, it is difficult to be absolutely certain of the extent that shame feelings were internalised in the case of all cyclists. Again, denunciations of doping, and dopers, may primarily be a discursive strategy. Yet even here they suggest some advance in shame thresholds for they express a compulsion to overtly distance oneself from such practices. As such, the degree of automaticity and the strength of internalisation within the habitus of individual cyclists vary. Equally, the contradictory nature of this process is also reflected by the fact that the display of shame feelings could also be accompanied by justifications for doping. For example, the Danish Cyclist, of the 1980s and 1990s, Bjarne Riis, confessed to ‘doping’ in his 2012 autobiography[[7]](#endnote-7), *Riis.* *Stages of Light and Dark*. On the one hand he is contrite and regretful and on the other he is rather ambivalent: ‘It was an option that had become a necessity, but perhaps things had gone too far. Even so, it didn’t justify the police’s heavy handed methods’ (p.172). In that regard, there are variations in the level of shame felt by cyclists reflecting the different mix of interdependencies in which individuals have been enmeshed over the course of their lives and the habitus formation processes that follow from this for each individual.

The advance in the threshold of repugnance is also evident in the increasingly unsympathetic, if not hostile, approach by the cycling media towards those caught for doping violations. Moreover, social observance and critical commentary by the media are also constitutive of increasing social constraints as are the actions of cycling team owners and sponsors who integrated expulsion clauses into employment contracts (see Thompson, 2008). National governments and national, and international, sporting regulators also expanded the scale and type of external constraints imposed on cyclists since the 1960s. Further functional specialisation in the form of new anti-doping agencies such as the World Anti-Doping Agency, which was created in 1999 (Waddington and Smith, 2009), also increased the social constraints on cyclists. While these external constraints certainly helped advance the threshold of repugnance, the moulding of the social habitus of professional cyclists in which doping was experienced as more shameful and subject to greater regulation by conscience, was facilitated by wider a social constraint towards self-restraint occurring across many Western nations since the 1960s (see Dolan, 2009a; Wouters, 2007). The formation of a habitus with a more developed self-steering mechanism, capable of greater self-control was propelled by this growing social constraint for self-restraint. Cyclists were not ‘outside’ of this. However, despite this greater capacity for the exercise of self-restraint, for many cyclists, the internalisation of greater shame thresholds was a slow and fragile process subject to discontinuities. I argue that other elements of the social habitus of professional cyclists served to moderate the civilising pressures directed at doping.

**Habitus, suffering and mutual identification**

The need for professional cyclists to endure suffering was, and remains, deeply embedded in the habitus of cyclists. Despite considerable changes to the figuration of cycling over the course of the last 100 years, several characteristics pertaining to its structure have remained remarkably consistent – the social strata from which cyclists are drawn from and the persistence of monetary and contractual insecurity. Cyclists have been, and continue to be, generally drawn from lower social class groupings – the working and lower middle classes (see Brewer, 2002; Foot, 2011; Knuts and Delheye, 2015; Thompson, 2008). My own analysis of the autobiographies would also confirm this. In the early 1900s, the sport offered a means to circumvent a life of poverty and/or subsistence living, and for a minority of successful cyclists substantial monetary rewards. While conditions improved in a relative sense, a similar pattern emerges up to more recent times. Aside from the few who achieved celebrity status, and the material benefits generated by this, for most insecurity was the order of the day – a common thread throughout most, if not all, the autobiographies. For instance, in his autobiography *Tomorrow, we ride...* the French cyclist Jean Bobet claimed that in 1952 half of all professional cyclists had only daily contracts: ‘[it was] no exaggeration to say that there were still wage slaves on the road – a good quarter of the peloton – decent blokes who toiled in vain to keep themselves above the breadline’(p.68). Similar sentiments are echoed in the autobiography of British cyclist Tony Hewson, *In Pursuit of Stardom*. Speaking about the life of the professional cyclist in the 1950s and 1960s he writes: ‘he marketed himself with exhausting frequency, and rarely turned down the offer of a “job” because he could not afford to, especially with a family to support. It was a debilitating penal treadmill, as I know from personal experience’ (p.232).

The ability to endure suffering was closely bound up with these insecurities. Because of the nature of the sport, physical endurance and stamina expressly embodied through cyclists capacity to endure suffering, and push the boundaries of this, became increasingly intertwined with success in the sport – a cyclist’s socio-economic conditions could be improved through the capacity to endure greater suffering. In this context, it came to represent something of value and pride, and as such both an essential, and celebrated, facet of a cyclist’s identity to the extent that professional cycling was viewed as the embodiment of suffering (see Thompson, 2008). One indication of this is that cycling competitions were caricatured as the devil, hell, fire and by other symbols of pain, suffering and terror and discursively presented in this way (see Sergent, 1999; Thompson, 2008). It became a central aspect in the symbolic expression of the sport’s, and cyclists, identity and one which transcended national boundaries. Tony Hewson recalls that the capacity to suffer was considered ‘a badge of honour amongst British cyclists’ of the 1950s (p.231). Indeed, the suffering embodied by cyclists served to advance the level of mutual identification between cyclists transcending competitive, generational, national and ethnic boundaries. Indicative of this is an incident during one of the mountain stages at the Tour de France in the early 1990s recalled by the Australian cyclist Allan Pieper in his autobiography, *A Pieper’s Tale*:

A few kilometres from the top I cracked completely, and tears began to stream down my face [...] the hopelessness of the situation shattered my spirit.

Then there was a hand on my back and a push. Then another, and another [...] I made it to the finish, but only because of the pushes from those men, some of them the same ones who, earlier in the day, had chased me with such spite to end my escape (p.106)

Media representations of cycling as extreme suffering and their mobilisation were not merely symbolic; the structure of cycling competitions inflicted incredible physical hardship on cyclists. Indeed, while an overall civilising pattern can be observed in this regard too, there were, and remain, brutalising elements in the design of races. This pressure to survive and succeed within the sport – the capacity to suffer physically essential to this – underpinned the motivation for, and recourse to, pain-reducing or stamina-enhancing supplements. For instance, at the 1924 Tour de France, the French cyclist Henri Pélissier claimed in an interview with the journalist Albert Londres[[8]](#endnote-8):

‘“We suffer from start to finish. You want to know how we keep going?” He pulled a phial from his bag. “That’s cocaine for the eyes. This is chloroform for the gums.” “This,” said Ville, emptying his musette, “is liniment to put some warmth in our knees”’ (in Fife, 1999:16).

From the early 1900s with the expansion of professional competitive cycling (See Ritchie, 2011) a code of behaviour and feeling characterised by a felt need to suffer developed and, over time, became deeply sedimented in the habitus of professional cyclists. It was sustained in part by a structure of interdependencies that generated continuous socio-material anxieties for generations of cyclists. Moreover, in a social environment in which the taking of stimulants had yet to become stigmatised to any great extent and where no effective monopoly apparatus for regulating it had emerged, it produced a social habitus in which the use of stimulants came to be perceived as a legitimate aspect of professional cycling – though this differed in time and space. Despite relative improvements in the social conditions of cyclists over the decades (see Brewer, 2002), the contractual pressures felt by cyclists in the 1950s and the socio-psychological insecurities it generated for individual cyclists continued. The Scottish cyclist Robert Millar speaking in 1985 of his time as a young apprentice in France in the late 1970s recalled:

It was a jungle [...] you either made it or you didn’t. You got the impression that the roads were going to be paved with gold, and they weren’t. It was shit. They put you up in an apartment with two or three other guys and for the first two or three months I got very depressed. There were a lot who could not take it, living in a strange country, and just went home. Your life came down to that ten or fifteen seconds at the end of the race, when you either won or lost and you either had something to live for or not. If I had not been good enough then I would be back in the factory, being just another number in a box at this time (cited in Moore, 2007: 81).

Such a scenario was also painted by other apprentice and established professional cyclists during the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. Economic imperatives overlapped with other motivations and imbued a mix of compulsions and desires. For instance, to ride the Tour de France was, and remains, the pinnacle for many cyclists. Kimmage recalls, ‘Riding it [the Tour de France], being part of the glorious circus, made the hardship and sacrifice of the pro life worthwhile.’ He then adds:

Always the same old questions. What future have I in the game? [...] Will they sack me at the end of the year? Will anyone else give me a job? What else can I do but cycle? The conclusion was always the same – I had no choice. Bills had to be paid and riding my bike was the only way of paying them (p.178).

Throughout the autobiographies, narratives of insecurity, suffering, and the capacity to endure pain overlap and interweave with narratives of success or failure. Suffering, and what it came to symbolise, enhanced the level of mutual identification between cyclists and anchored a relatively sympathetic attitude towards the use of stimulants in the habitus of professional cyclists, and within the habitus of many of those comprising the wider cycling figuration. It found expression, initially, in the rationale for doping, and significantly in intra and inter-generational identification between cyclists. Such has been persistence of this culture of suffering, its deep imprint, and the social pressures connected with it, in the social habitus of cyclists that it re-emerges in feelings and expressions of sympathy for cyclists found doping across temporal and spatial boundaries. The following example from the autobiography of the 1950s cyclist Jean Bobet is indicative of this. Reflecting on the issue of contemporary doping he notes:

[…] though I do not condone their actions, I have been able to understand all those professionals for whom cycling is the only trade they know. And who, confronted with the dilemma “to take it or not to take it?” end up taking it because “it goes with the job” (p.158).

In recent times, as illustrated, the sympathy expressed by cyclists towards their fellow cyclists implicated in doping has tended to dissipate somewhat, suggestive too that mutual identification surrounding this is also being eroded and becoming more nuanced. For instance, there is a tendency within many of the autobiographies of retired cyclists to differentiate between the distant past and the recent past and the types and nature of doping. Yet, here also, the residue of sympathy owing to what cyclists must endure remains. The late French cyclist Laurent Fignon in his autobiography *We were young and carefree* openly admits to the use of amphetamines in the 1980s, and although keen to stress his distaste for the more advanced doping products of the 1990s, and his ability to resist the pressure to take it, writes:

But I can just imagine the damage that kind of thing [pressure from managers to dope] could cause to riders who were psychologically weaker or less secure, or simply more desperate to get on in life […] But most often, who were the real “cheating bastards”? (pp. 254–5).

Here Fignon, despite seeking to distance himself from specific forms of doping, also positions those cyclists who did partake as victims. In that sense, it too is an example of how the social origins and social conditions of professional cyclists and culture of suffering had fused within the social habitus of cyclists acting as a kind of intra and intergenerational glue which sustained strong feelings of solidarity and, in many instances, an unwillingness to strongly condemn those who succumbed to doping.

#### Social constraints, fractures and reversals

While professional cyclists have undergone a civilising process in relation to doping it has been interwoven with reversals and breakdowns. Doping violations persisted, as did denials and claims of innocence by professional cyclists caught or implicated in doping. That this occurred in tandem with an overall civilising trajectory requires explanation. As illustrated, the growing social constraint towards self-restraint, and related stigmatisation of doping, propelled civilising advances. However, this process was moderated by several interconnected processes that served to push against it, including; the structure of the cycling figuration and the position of cyclists within this; the cementing of the importance and necessity for suffering and the mutual identification that emerged around this; and, crucially, a monopoly apparatus for the control of doping which was incomplete and its legitimacy only slowly and partially accepted by cyclists. By monopoly apparatus, I mean a central authority with the functional power and legitimacy, and a comprehensive and effective administrative apparatus connected with this, to impose sanctions. One of the central conditions for a civilising process according to Elias is the monopolisation of legitimate violence by the state. For civilising advances to occur in relation to specific stigmatised social practices a corresponding central and effective monopoly apparatus – in this case an effective and central monopoly to enforce controls on doping – is also required.

Although an expansion of rules, doping controls and sanctions began to be instigated in the 1960s, the toleration of doping remained ambivalent. When penalties were imposed on cyclists following positive tests they were more often than not reduced to rather innocuous sanctions (Foot, 2011: 257; Fotheringham, 2007: 171). In the following decades, the social constraints gradually expanded though they remained relatively easy to evade. Indeed, as Dimeo (2014) has suggested, anti-doping polices for sport generally were a ‘fragmented, disorganised state of affairs through the 1980s and 1990s’ (p. 958). By the end of the 1990s state interventions intensified in the form of police raids, exemplified by the searches of the hotel rooms of cyclists during the 1998 tour de France and the questioning and arrest of cyclists both during and after the tour (see *Cycling Weekly*, 3 October 1998: 6). Interestingly, it is the interventions of the state rather than those of cycling’s governing authorities that have tended to be more effective (Waddington and Smith, 2009: 149; see also Dimeo, 2014: 957). Though, it should be noted that here too there were differences in the level and scale of state legislation and interventions across Europe (see *Cycling Weekly*, 27 March, 1999: 5). The fractured nature of the apparatus is reflected by the multitude of organisations administering functions for the prevention of doping (see Dimeo, 2014). Equally, intra and inter-organisational contests for control of the monopoly apparatus for doping prevention have also served to militate against its effectiveness (see Waddington and Smith, 2009; Wagner, 2010). So while the compulsions on cyclists to resist doping have become more varied and expansive since the 1960s – national legislation and the criminalisation of doping, an expansion in the range and scale of interventions by cycling and state authorities and sanctions connected with these, and the amplifying role of the media in the increasing stigmatisation of cyclists for doping – no stable and comprehensive monopoly of control developed. However, gradually, the social constrains have become more extensive and cohesive since the 1960s (Dimeo, 2014).

#### Conclusion

The main contention of this paper is that a civilising process is evident in relation to doping within the sport of professional cycling. Over time, the social habitus of increasing numbers of cyclists came to display higher levels of shame and embarrassment towards doping. Expanding social constraints had the effect of instilling greater shame feelings within the habitus of professional cyclists. However, this penetration of the habitus by civilising pressures was neither a complete nor even process and many cyclists struggled with the coming together of conflicting processes within the habitus. For many, the internalisation of greater shame feelings has been acutely fragile and limited. Indeed, the tendency for some cyclists to denounce and deny doping while involved in such practices needs to be given considerable weight in accessing the narratives of individual cyclists. Despite this, I argue that directional change is observable though the process has been punctuated by contradictions and breakdowns.

The social habitus of professional cyclists was, and to some extent still is, ill-suited to internalising the social constraints that emerged in the 1960s to prevent doping. The social strata cyclists were drawn from, the insecurities generated by the cycling figuration, the physical environment in which their work was performed and its social organisation crystallised to form an acceptance for suffering within the habitus. These processes had a continuity over the decades that served to sustain the deeply ingrained value and function of suffering within the social habitus of cyclists. Moreover, the use of stimulants to traverse or sustain suffering carried little or no social stigma within the sport up to the 1960s. It was this habitus which now functioned to push against the social constraints directed at doping post the 1960s, one manifestation of which was a marked reluctance to accept the legitimacy of institutions for the prevention of doping. The combination of a social habitus with deeply ingrained characteristics that pushed against civilising offensives, the failure of a more comprehensive and effective monopoly apparatus to emerge, and the competitive pressure exercised by cyclists on each other explains why the advances in the inculcation of greater shame feelings that did occur were slow and fractured in nature. Consequently, at a theoretical level, echoing van Krieken (2003), this paper illustrates and explains how civilising advances, counter spurts and contradictions can occur simultaneously.

Previous work by Waddington and Smith (2009) and Thompson (2008) have noted how cyclists discussed doping, while the growing system of social constraints, the social origins of cyclists, the competitive pressures, and culture of suffering were also identified by them and others (see Brewer, 2002). In this paper, I connect these processes to the level of the individual cyclist and explain how these social developments are interrelated with the changing habitus of professional cyclists. Moreover, in placing the opinions and responses of cyclists to doping in a more processual, socio-historical context, a central advantage of Elias’s long-term developmental approach to explaining social change, it is possible to observe a change in the personality structures of professional cyclists in respect of doping. That being said, there were significant variations in both the extent and structure of change in the habitus of individual cyclists. National differences, that is national habitus, may also have served, to varying degrees, to have moderated the pace and structure of the changes. This requires further social scientific investigation.

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**Notes**

1. For Rohloff and Wright (2010) the concept of moral panic refers to a ‘particular type of overreaction to a perceived social problem’ (p.404). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. This includes both an autobiography and a biography for Tom Simpson (see Table 1). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Such texts were often co-written with professional journalists. This was a factor considered in the analysis of such texts. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Belgian Willy Voet was involved in cycling as both a soigneur, and initially as an amateur cyclist, and was arrested for transporting a large consignment of doping products for the Festina team in 1998. He was subsequently jailed and wrote a book on his experiences. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Marco Pantani died in 2004 alone in a hotel room from a cocaine overdose (see Rendell 2007) [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. While a civilising process cannot assumed there is evidence to suggest such developments occurred (see Dolan, 2009a; Wouters, 2007). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. It was first published in Danish in 2010. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Albert Londres was a journalist for *Le Petit Parisien*. He followed the 1924 Tour de France and wrote a series of articles on the event. His interview with brothers Henri (then the defending Champion) and Francis Pélissiers occurred after they had abandoned the tour over a dispute with the organisers. Londres’ reports and his labelling of tour cyclists as forçats de la route (convicts of the road) not only caused considerable controversy at the time but would later become iconic accounts of the tour. The reports were translated and reproduced by Graeme Fife in 1999 (see also Thompson 2008). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)