


AN INTERPRETATION OF THE BRAZILIAN LITERATURE ON DOPING IN SPORT

UMA INTERPRETAÇÃO DA LITERATURA BRASILEIRA SOBRE DOPING NO ESPORTE 

UNA INTERPRETACIÓN DE LA LITERATURA BRASILEÑA SOBRE DOPAJE EN EL DEPORTE 

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Abstract: In Brazil, as in many other countries, academic studies on doping in sport initially focused on medical, physiological and pharmacological aspects. However, recently, the scope of these studies has expanded considerably, with the emergence of research on sports doping in the fields of social sciences, public policy, and management. Although doping is widely recognized as one of the central themes in sport ethics, Brazilian literature on the topic from this perspective is still incipient and, to some extent, disconnected from international debates. This article applies Thomas Murray's analytical framework for approaches to doping in the literature – specifically, the categories of antidoping, anti-antidoping, and pro-doping – with the aim of understanding the Brazilian academic literature on doping in sport.

Keywords: Sport. Ethics. Doping. Brazil.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In 2005, the *Revista Brasileira de Ciências do Esporte* (RBCE) [The Brazilian Journal of Sport Science] published the first special issue in a Brazilian sports journal, dedicated to doping in sport and designed to address what was an emerging research field in the country.¹ The editorial reads as an introduction to what has emerged in academia and in the world of sport in the previous 30 years related to doping, namely, the fight against doping remarked as an international preoccupation around the world at the time, and the epistemic consequences of this fight (Soares; Daolio, 2005). Additionally, based on the work of French historian Georges Vigarello, the editors highlight the collective aspects of doping practices in the 21st century, such as social and public health dimensions, and emphasize the need to broaden discussions on the subject beyond its medical and physiological aspects:

A broader understanding of doping practices in sports is imperative; therefore, it is necessary to add, to the medical and/or physiological concerns, those that allow us to identify and reflect on, for example, its historical and social dimensions and, above all, as a collective phenomenon. (Soares; Daolio, 2005, p. 7, our translation).

In Brazil, as in many other countries, academic studies on doping in sport initially concentrated on medical, physiological and pharmacological aspects. Since the late 20th Century, Brazilian researchers have been dedicated to understanding the uses and effects of doping substances on athletes, while also working to develop and refine methods for doping detection and control. The scientific journals of the *Sociedade Brasileira de Exercício e Medicina do Esporte* [Brazilian Society of Exercise and Sports Medicine] and the *Colégio Brasileiro de Ciências do Esporte* [Brazilian College of Sports Science] – responsible for the RBCE – have become primary platforms for discussions on sport doping within the country.

These publications have featured numerous studies on topics such as blood doping (Laudo Pardos *et al.*, 1999), genetic doping (Artoli; Hirata; Lancha Jr., 2007; Dias, 2011), and doping control among Brazilian athletes across various sports (De Rose *et al.*, 2004; Bairos; Revedello; Moraes, 2011). Additionally, research on doping tests and control at competitions, including the South American Games (De Rose *et al.*, 2006) and the Brazilian Youth School Games (Silva *et al.*, 2017), has been published.

Recently, however, the scope of these studies has significantly broadened, with the emergence of research on sport doping in the fields of social sciences, public policy and management. These newer approaches seek to understand the social, cultural, political, and ethical implications of the use of prohibited substances or methods in sport.

Despite these advancements, studies that address doping in sport from an ethical perspective remain relatively scarce in Brazil. There is a growing need for more in-depth reflection in the country on the philosophical and ethical issues involved, as

¹ The RBCE special issue on sport doping is available at: <http://revista.cbce.org.br/index.php/RBCE/issue/view/106/showToc>.

well as an understanding of what has been already published. To that end and to contribute to the development of academic literature on doping in the country, this paper uses Thomas Murray's (2015) analytical framework for approaches to doping in the literature – namely, anti-doping, anti-anti-doping, and pro-doping – in order to understand the rationale of Brazilian sports-doping literature.

2 THE WORLD ANTI-DOPING AGENCY AND THE BRAZILIAN DOPING CONTROL AUTHORITY: THE FIGHT AGAINST DOPING IN SPORT

The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) was created in 1999 with the mission to pull together a doping-free movement in sports worldwide. In its fundamental and universal document, the *World Anti-Doping Code* (Code)², WADA establishes its fundamental rationale. Accordingly, anti-doping programs are founded on the intrinsic value of sport, often referred to as “the spirit of sport” and which the agency defines as ‘the ethical pursuit of human excellence through the dedicated perfection of every *Athlete*’s natural talents’ (WADA, 2021, p. 13). These programs are designed to promote the agency’s purposes, namely, the protection of the fundamental rights of elite athletes to participate in a doping-free sport environment, while ensuring harmonized anti-doping programs (WADA, 2021). One crucial element to secure such an endeavor is testing athletes for substances and methods present on the *International Standard – Prohibited List* (WADA, 2024). Differently from what might be thought, anti-doping program testing procedures are understood more broadly than the abstraction of urine or plasma from athletes. Therefore, WADA defines testing as the ‘parts of the *Doping Control* process involving test distribution planning, *Sample* collection, *Sample* handling, and *Sample* transport to the laboratory’ (WADA, 2021, p. 177).

Brazil, like other nations, has been actively committed to anti-doping efforts. The Brazilian government is a signatory to international anti-doping agreements, having adopted the World Anti-Doping Code from WADA. Additionally, the country is part of the International Convention against Doping in Sport, promoted by UNESCO, which formalizes the commitment of governments worldwide to adopt anti-doping policies and collaborate in investigations and information exchanges on doping practices. Brazil is also a signatory to the Olympic Charter through its Brazilian Olympic Committee (COB), which represents the country within the International Olympic Committee (IOC). The Olympic Charter is a set of principles, rules, and guidelines governing the Olympic movement and the organization of the Olympic Games, as well as establishing the values and responsibilities of national Olympic committees. To support the harmonization of the anti-doping program in the country, both national sports confederations and the COB have adopted WADA’s Code through their commitment to the Olympic Charter.³

2 The World Anti-Doping Code is available at: https://www.wada-ama.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/2021_wada_code.pdf.

3 The Olympic Charter is available at: <https://olympics.com/ioc/olympic-charter>.

Brazil's National Anti-Doping Organization (NADO) is the *Autoridade Brasileira de Controle de Dopagem* (ABCD) [Brazilian Doping Control Authority] which was created in 2011 and began its operations in 2014. ABCD's mission is to:

Consolidate the anti-doping culture at the national level, through education and control actions in all sports manifestations, seeking clean and healthy sports respecting national and international standards and regulations (our translation).⁴

Before ABCD's creation the anti-doping program in the country relied on national sports federations and the extinct *Agência Brasileira Antidoping* [Brazilian Anti-Doping Agency], which ceased operations in 2012. NADOs are defined by WADA as:

The entity(ies) designated by each country as possessing the primary authority and responsibility to adopt and implement anti-doping rules, direct the collection of *Samples*, manage test results and conduct *Results Management* at the national level. If this designation has not been made by the competent public authority(ies), the entity shall be the country's *National Olympic Committee* or its designee. (WADA, 2021, p. 171).

For NADOs, compliance with international anti-doping standards is a dynamic and negotiated process, influenced by political, institutional and cultural factors; and the harmonization process is not only technical but involves complex negotiations between different actors with varied interests. The ABCD had to navigate between WADA's requirements and local realities, including legal adaptations to the *Código Brasileiro Antidopagem* [Brazilian Anti-Doping Code] (Vasques *et al.*, 2021).

The Brazilian academic literature on doping in sports emerged and developed in a context marked by the creation and strengthening of organizations such as WADA and ABCD, as well as the guiding documents and anti-doping policies published and implemented by these institutions. The topics and issues addressed by Brazilian academia largely reflect the concerns arising from this fight against doping. Furthermore, this body of work has been influenced by theories and studies on sports developed in other social contexts, without, however, limiting the emergence of innovative perspectives on the subject, as we will see later in this article.

3 WHAT ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK TO USE FOR STUDYING BRAZILIAN LITERATURE ON DOPING?

A fundamental step in studying the literature on doping in Brazil is to define an analytical framework, understood as an organized set of concepts, methods, and approaches that enables the interpretation and examination of ideas, information or data on the topic. We chose the analytical framework developed by Thomas Murray (2015), not only for its interpretative potential but also because it is being used by international authors, fostering a more integrative and comprehensive dialogue with other studies in the field. Murray explains (2015, p. 316):

Anti-doping critics accuse it of a multitude of sins from conceptual confusion in its very foundations to morally unjustifiable paternalism to tactical missteps. The list of complaints is long and varied enough that critics do not

⁴ The ABCD's Mission is available at: <https://www.gov.br/esporte/pt-br/composicao/orgaos-especificos/esporte/ABCD>.

always agree with one another or, on occasion, with themselves. Careful reading reveals a range of attitudes among anti-doping critics toward biomedical technologies in sport ranging from wary acceptance (typically, of those presumed not to endanger health) to warm embrace (of the sort exemplified by transhumanism). On the other side, the primary arguments against doping in sport, and in favor of anti-doping strategies, fall into three main categories: to promote fairness, to protect health (or, alternatively, to prevent harm), and to preserve meaning.

According to Murray (2015) the doping-related literature may be framed in three main approaches: *anti-doping*, *pro-doping* and *anti-anti-doping*. The author examines the principal arguments on the doping debate which, as can be seen, is provided with a more complex scenario than two poles. Although not epistemically absolute, the framework is useful in organizing how academic production has positioned itself toward the “fight against doping in sport”. Indeed, this approach results from the increase of research on doping over the last years, especially in the elite sport. Therefore, it is adequate to assume that Murray’s framework departs from anti-doping as a notion for defending and justifying the combination of activities in the anti-doping program, as defined by WADA in the Code:

Anti-doping *Education* and information, test distribution planning, maintenance of a *Registered Testing Pool*, managing *Athlete Biological Passports*, conducting *Testing*, organizing analysis of *Samples*, gathering of intelligence and conducting investigations, processing of *TUE* applications, *Results Management*, monitoring and enforcing compliance with any *Consequences* imposed, and all other activities related to anti-doping to be carried out by or on behalf of an *Anti-Doping Organization*, as set out in the *Code* and/or the *International Standards*. (WADA, 2021, p. 165).

WADA defines doping control as:

All steps and processes from test distribution planning through to ultimate disposition of any appeal and the enforcement of *Consequences*, including all steps and processes in between, including but not limited to, *Testing*, investigations, whereabouts, *TUEs*, *Sample* collection and handling, laboratory analysis, *Results Management* and investigations or proceedings relating to violations of Article 10.14 (Status During *Ineligibility* or *Provisional Suspension*). (WADA, 2021, p. 168).

Against such an anti-doping scenario, two other approaches can be identified. On the one hand, a more libertarian approach comes from *pro-doping* arguments that consider the use of performance-enhancing drugs both morally faithful to the spirit of the sport, as well as admirable and part of the strategic process that athletes must go through. Savulescu, Foddy and Clayton (2004) demonstrate how optimization of excellence, higher-level athletes’ competitiveness and their individual freedom are important elements for our understanding of the spirit of sport. In order to mitigate sports performance as a “genetic lottery”, the winner should always be an athlete with a combination of genetic potential, training and psychological support. However, numerous critics have attacked this model by focusing on the lack of clarity in what constitutes excellence, the possible growth of illicit markets or the reduction of competition to a pharmacological contest in who creates the better substances.

On the other hand, *anti-anti-doping* arguments, rather than concentrate on the moral justification for doping or for anti-doping, focus on the failures of current anti-

doping programs. Its critiques center on a variety of issues, frequently focusing on conceptual ambiguities, injustices in detection or the cost-effectiveness of anti-doping activities. Murray (2015, p. 317) exemplifies both approaches:

A thought experiment clarifies the distinction between the pro-doping and the anti-antidoping positions. Imagine a simple, cheap and foolproof method for determining whether an athlete had used a banned performance-enhancing technology. It detected all such uses without falsely implicating athletes who had not used them. And it did so without invading athletes' privacy or bodily integrity or causing notable inconvenience. This is at present a fiction, of course. If it ever came to pass, though, the anti-anti-doping arguments would lose their force, as they are premised on the burdens and fallibility of current anti-doping systems. Such arguments often rely on claims that athletes' rights are being infringed or that the consequences of anti-doping programs are negative on the whole. Pro-doping arguments, on the other hand, deny that there is anything wrong with doping; some celebrate it as a positive expression of individual liberty, of the human use of technology, or of a particular idea about the meaning of sport. They are not contingent on the alleged ethical or practical flaws with anti-doping programs, as are the anti-anti-doping arguments now to be considered.

Adopting a framework such as Murray's (2015) is challenging. First, the author departs from the elite sport context, in which doping is straightforwardly defined by WADA. Although Brazil, like many other countries, has its NADO, ABCD, this is not to say that the academic literature has followed that conception of doping. It is expected from those researchers a wider conception of what doping entails. Secondly, we can say that Murray's (2015) framework also has its limitations. Doping can be defined by WADA but the implications of the whole anti-doping campaign have historical implications for how the academic community (as a reaction to how Brazilians have understood the concept) will associate the phenomenon with public health, critical theory or social life. In what follows, a sketch of this literature will be presented, without, of course, exhausting it.

4 BRAZILIAN LITERATURE ON DOPING

4.1 A DEFINITION OF DOPING

While WADA defines doping as 'the occurrence of one or more of the antidoping rule violations set forth in Article 2.1 through Article 2.11 of the Code' (WADA, 2021, p. 19), a definition followed by the ABCD which has the same Anti-Doping Rule Violation but in a different numeral order (ABCD, 2021), the spectrum of the word doping (or '*dopagem*' in Portuguese) is broader than what the anti-doping authorities have established. That can be seen in how the concept is used largely in academia when authors refer to the use of image and performance-enhancing drugs (IPEDs) but also when publications refer to specific drugs such as androgenic anabolic steroids and its negative connotations, without providing clarity or definitions.

Our interpretation is that this broad conception of doping does do some good when it comes to the social conception of the spectrum of the use of IPEDs and reflects the interplay between the two poles: a national moral agenda while addressing the pathological aspect of those practices and their psychosocial consequences. Yet, a

wider conception of doping makes it difficult to organize the academic debate as seen in Murray's (2015) framework although allows for approximations. In other words, concepts and definitions are core elements of philosophy work and academia can benefit from their use and their different angles of analysis (Roble; Campos, 2021).

4.2 MEDICALIZATION OF LIFE

A broad picture of the ethical analysis of doping in Brazilian literature – especially in the Physical Education field⁵ – can be determined by the influences the authors have had over time. Campos and Roble (2024) address this topic when noticing that the philosophy of sport in the country has its roots in the philosophy of physical education, in which concepts connected to sport have often been translated into educational goals. While educational theories have been prominent in new understandings of the role of philosophy of physical education and the place of the body in education, the area itself and the notion of sport have been subjected to rigorous scrutiny.

To that end, many theories have been vocal and influential in shaping how academia in the country understands doping in sport. In one sense, doping has been (a) understood as a reproduction of the sporting *achievement principle*. As Vaz (2001, p. 89) points out, Critical Theory of Sport 'seeks to demonstrate the structural correspondence and conceptual identification between sport and work.' (our translation) This notion has straightforward implications for a broader understanding of doping, seen as a component of a more encompassing achievement rationality, of which sport is also a hostage. This highlights the significant role that sport occupies in this correspondence, as the *logic of work* through sport reinforces its commercial nature and its power to perpetuate ideologies through its repressive capacity to compress pulsional energies within class and individual domination (Vaz, 2001, 2005). Therefore, this is one way to understand doping: as a mechanism to fulfill this logic.

If criticism of sport presents a broader way of understanding doping, the same does not hold for the scientific discourse on doping. A second understanding of doping, as a consequence of the first, is (b) the view of doping as a social evil. This understanding resonates with the main justification of WADA for anti-doping, which is: 'promote health, fairness and equality for *Athletes* worldwide' (WADA, 2021, p. 9). Of course, evidence has demonstrated that the abuse of drugs – most primarily developed for therapeutic purposes – can cause collateral effects and harm health. Vaz (2005) identifies in modern society what Herbert Marcuse saw in the industrial society, the *achievement principle* in the distinct guise of medicalization of the use of IPEDs. Via this principle, doping is seen as a social pathology from one side and a way to transcend the limited body we all live in, from the other. While the former is a negative conception of doping, the latter presents a positive conception that can be used for the body and beauty through meritocratic rationality.

5 In Brazil, Physical Education extends beyond a school subject; it is a comprehensive and multifaceted academic discipline that encompasses the study and practice of sports, games, dance, outdoor recreation, and various other forms of human movement and physical activity. Beyond developing motor skills and physical fitness, Physical Education delves into the social, cultural, psychological, among other dimensions of human movement, highlighting its broader impact on well-being and society.

The 'drugs of happiness' are an important device as we have as a daily requirement good fortune and optimism, conditions associated with success, and whose absence corresponds to the 'incapacity' of the subject. (Vaz, 2005, p. 24, our translation).

Therefore, the author draws a parallel between this rationality and the use of doping to enhance the image (and perhaps less frequently in society achievement *per se*), from which he draws on what Sabino (2002) called "Apollinian drugs", drugs that when associated with training enhance performance and image such as androgenic anabolic steroids. Moreover, a correspondence of this scenario is the stereotypes constructed about women's bodies, the social imaginary of femininity, and the implication of doping and the masculinity of women (Devide; Votre, 2005).

4.3 PUBLIC HEALTH, POLICY AND ETHICAL ARGUMENTS

In addition to reflecting on how critical theorists might understand doping, some authors have focused on the policy and public health implications. Few studies in Brazil deal with the theme of public health or political analysis. It comes as no surprise that an overview of public health publications in Brazil could be deemed anti-doping (Aith, 2013; Vicente-Pedraz, 2013) – as often seen in health-related publications worldwide. Usually, public health publications do not engage with the philosophical or ethical debates about doping in sport, although interdisciplinary initiatives could critically comprehend the roots and mechanisms that perpetuate the very spectrum of the negative connotation of doping in the country.

Policy studies differ in methods, being mostly associated with empirical research and governance studies. In a sense, one might find in such initiatives trends compatible with anti-doping. Following Vasques *et al.* (2021) identification of the conformity policy of ABCD's approach, Kohler (2020) also points out that the agency exhibits very effective compliance and harmonization standards, and the experience of the 2016 Rio Summer Olympics, were crucial for the consolidation of the anti-doping structure in the country; but she also reflects that just adopting and applying anti-doping rules is not enough to consolidate true education on the subject.

The social and political implications of anti-doping actions in the country are many. As previously noted, actions from the Brazilian government to host the 2016 Rio Summer Olympics to meet the requirements of the IOC and WADA represent lasting implications of the anti-doping program in the national political scenario. That can be seen in Vasques *et al.* (2021) ethnographic work on the accreditation of the *Laboratório Brasileiro de Controle de Dopagem* (LBCD) [Brazilian Doping Control Laboratory]. On a different approach, Silveira (2014), mobilizes Michel Foucault's concepts of surveillance, *governmentality* and discipline to broadly understand WADA's anti-doping program as a technology (in Foucaultian terms) in the production of a global discourse for health and exercise.

Few studies, however, have thoroughly explored the arguments for or against anti-doping, particularly in elite sports. Da Costa *et al.* (2005) draw on arguments presented in the 2000s by the *Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport* (CCES). Through

sylogistic analysis, they examine well-known arguments against doping in sports, namely: (a) its use violates the rules, (b) it harms athletes' health, and (c) it creates an unfair advantage, and how these arguments may reflect broader aspects of elite sports. Common questions challenging these arguments include: "What if the rules were changed?", "Is the elite athlete healthy anyway?", and "Do wealthier countries not already hold unfair advantages in various aspects of many Olympic events?", and so on.

An important collateral effect of the increase of doping technology in sport – and an element embedded in the argument for unfair advantage – is that sport might be thought to be reduced to a laboratory competition, an example closely related to the pharmaceutical one made by Savulescu, Foddy and Clayton (2004). That is a point made by Tavares (2002), for whom that very same argument (of unfair advantage) is inconsistent once the reallocation of the competition's protagonism could be directed to many other well-accepted technologies in the elite sports landscape, such as the development of new training sessions protocols or new equipment. The author also explores other arguments such as the already mentioned harming health, in addition to the performance characteristics of performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs) and their "naturalness". After all, it is not difficult to notice that those characteristics cannot be considered exclusive attributes of PEDs, and elite sport is completely surrounded by them.

Although not in total disagreement with the arguments raised, one cannot avoid noticing that their radical criticism does not necessarily help in understanding the nuances of the anti-doping program. Yet, that is not to agree with Murray's (2015, p. 317) view on them:

It is not uncommon to find several of these arguments cobbled together in a single broadside against sports' efforts to curtail doping. Indeed, although one can find nearly pure examples of the pro-doping position, in many cases, the pro-doping and anti-doping arguments are piled upon one another in the manner of throwing mud against the wall in the hope that something might stick.

5 CONCLUSION

The analysis of Brazilian literature on sports doping reveals that, despite significant advances in combating doping in the country – particularly in terms of control policies and alignment with international standards – considerable challenges remain. One of the main challenges is the insufficient exploration of the ethical debate on the topic, especially in the Brazilian context, where various philosophical, social, and political perspectives coexist.

The analytical framework developed by Murray (2015) provides a useful basis for organizing and deepening these discussions by categorizing antidoping, anti-antidoping, and pro-doping approaches, which allows for a more detailed understanding of the multiple dimensions related to the use of substances and doping methods in sports. However, this framework also highlights the complexity and specificities of the Brazilian sports context, emphasizing the need for these particularities to be

appropriately considered. Although adopting this analytical framework is not essential for ethical studies on doping in Brazil, it offers a solid analytical foundation for researchers interested in the subject.

Finally, it is important to highlight that this article focuses on a limited number of publications, selected for their relevance to the subject at hand. Although carefully chosen, this selection does not cover the full scope of the existing literature on doping in sports in Brazil. As a result, a vast area remains open for future research, which may explore different perspectives not included in this work. It is hoped, therefore, that the gaps left here will inspire new studies, contributing to the advancement and deepening of the field of Sports Ethics in the Brazilian context.

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Resumo: No Brasil, assim como em muitos outros países, os estudos acadêmicos sobre doping no esporte concentraram-se inicialmente em aspectos médicos, fisiológicos e farmacológicos. No entanto, recentemente, o alcance desses estudos expandiu-se consideravelmente, com o surgimento de pesquisas sobre doping esportivo nas áreas de ciências sociais, políticas públicas e gestão. Embora o doping seja amplamente reconhecido como um dos temas centrais na ética esportiva, a literatura brasileira sobre o tema a partir dessa perspectiva ainda é incipiente e, em certa medida, desconectada dos debates internacionais. Este artigo aplica a estrutura analítica de Thomas Murray para abordagens ao doping na literatura – especificamente, as categorias de antidoping, anti-antidoping e pró-doping – com o objetivo de compreender a literatura acadêmica brasileira sobre doping no esporte.

Palavras-chave: Esporte. Ética. Doping. Brasil.

Resumen: En Brasil, al igual que en muchos otros países, los estudios académicos sobre el dopaje en el deporte se concentraron inicialmente en aspectos médicos, fisiológicos y farmacológicos. Sin embargo, recientemente, el alcance de estos estudios se ha ampliado considerablemente, con la aparición de investigaciones sobre el dopaje deportivo en las áreas de ciencias sociales, políticas públicas y gestión. Aunque el dopaje es ampliamente reconocido como uno de los temas centrales en la ética deportiva, la literatura brasileña sobre el tema desde esta perspectiva aún es incipiente y está, en cierta medida, desconectada de los debates internacionales. Este artículo aplica el marco analítico de Thomas Murray para los enfoques sobre el dopaje en la literatura – específicamente, las categorías de antidopaje, anti-antidopaje y pro-dopaje – con el propósito de comprender la literatura académica brasileña sobre el dopaje en el deporte.

Palabras clave: Deporte. Ética. Dopaje. Brasil.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that this work involves no conflict of interest.

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