

The Fall of the Queen of Nordic Skiing

A comparative analysis of the Swedish and Norwegian media coverage of the Therese Johaug scandal

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Abstract

In 2016, Norwegian cross-country skier Therese Johaug made her positive doping test public. We compare how the Norwegian and Swedish media covered the ensuing scandal with the aim of discovering how constructions of subjectivity, national identity, anti-doping policy and the role of cross-country skiing are interrelated. Drawing on a critical discourse analytical research design, we identify significant differences: the Norwegian media hesitated to call it a doping scandal and occasionally portrayed Johaug as a victim, whereas the Swedish media provided a platform for harsh criticism of the Norwegian's use of medicine and emphasised the individual responsibility of the athlete. Thus, this study elucidates how sport is mediated as part of a national rivalry between two Scandinavian countries that are both heavily engaged in cross-country skiing.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, doping, subjectivity, Scandinavian rivalry, national identity

Introduction

For decades, sport has been a vehicle for the creation of national identity (Boyle & Haynes, 2009) and a very conspicuous way of demonstrating national performance (Bairner, 2015; Li et al., 2016). Historically, the best and perhaps most radical example is the 1936 Berlin Olympics which, under the aegis of Nazism, presented Germany through the works of Leni Riefenstahl. Thus, one can argue that sport is one of many social practices that contributes to the construction of “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1983). More recently, hosting mega-events has been described as part of a nation's soft power strategies (Grix & Houlihan, 2014), and the rivalry inherently embedded in elite sport has been exploited in attempts at portraying a nation's ascendancy (Li et al., 2016). Accordingly, this interdependency makes nations vulnerable once sport is hit by scandals. Striking features of sport scandals are that they lead to intense mass-media coverage (Carstairs, 2003; Hughes & Shank, 2005; Kozman, 2013; Laine, 2006) and,

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subsequently, often to radical political and organisational changes (Amegashie, 2006; Hanstad et al., 2008).

Doping has played a significant role in several sporting scandals. The positive test of Canadian track and field sprinter Ben Johnson shortly after his victory at the 1988 Olympic Games is a hallmark incident (Blackwell, 1991; Wagner & Pedersen, 2014). Ten years later, the Festina drug scandal revealed the systematic abuse and procurement of illegal performance enhancing drugs such as EPO and growth hormones prior to and during the Tour de France (Christiansen, 2005; Mignon, 2003). In some countries, like Germany, national TV broadcasters decided not to follow cycling events such as the Tour de France for a number of years, due to ongoing reports of doping practices. Incidents of doping have regularly been a delicate issue in mass media coverage (BBC, 2015), including doping scandals emerging in Scandinavian countries, which have a strong anti-doping profile (Wagner & Hanstad, 2011).

On October 13, 2016, Norway was shocked by the news that the country's number one cross-country skier had tested positive for the anabolic steroid Clostebol in the previous month. In a short press conference, Therese Johaug gave a brief statement in order to prove her innocence in the matter. The federation's doctor, who accompanied her, supported her story: She had taken medication for her sunburned lips provided by the team doctor on September 3 in Italy. She stressed that she had nothing to hide and she would tell the truth. Then the doctor answered questions on how he could give her this medication.

In brief, from September 4-15, Johaug used the prescribed medication after first checking with the doctor that it was not on any doping lists, and also informing her coach. On September 16, Johaug was tested by Antidoping Norway; she informed them that she had used the medication Trofodermin, containing Clostebol. On October 4, 2016, Johaug was informed that her test was positive, and on October 12, she informed her sponsors before announcing it to the wider public the following day. On October 19, she was suspended for two months while awaiting the decision in the case. On February 10, 2017, she was banned for 13 months. Her sentence (one month shorter than that suggested by prosecutors at Antidoping Norway) gave her the opportunity to compete in the 2018 Olympic Winter Games. However, on March 7, the International Ski Federation (FIS) successfully appealed against the 13-month doping ban because they judged it too short. Accordingly, she could not participate in the Olympic Games in 2018.

On the one hand, Scandinavian countries share similarities due to their common social democratic welfare-state legacy (Esping-Andersen, 1990), and, in terms of organised sport, a shared feature is voluntarism anchored in civil society associations (Bairner, 2010). Furthermore, political scandals in Nordic countries have been receiving increased media attention and academic interest in recent years (Allern & Pollack, 2012). On the other hand, the intense rivalry between Sweden and Norway is far from a recent phenomenon (Goksøyr, 2005). Using these similar characteristics and the notion of rivalry, we compare how the Norwegian and Swedish media have covered the Johaug scandal, with the aim of discovering how constructions of subjectivity, national identity, anti-doping policy and the role of cross-country skiing are interrelated. Applying a critical discourse analytical framework (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 1992, 2003), we investigate and compare Norwegian and Swedish media coverage in the period between the press release and the announcement of the appeal by the FIS (October 13, 2016 to March 7, 2017).

A review of skiing, anti-doping policy and national identity

In the pioneering days of TV broadcasting, the death of British cyclist Tom Simpson – assumed to be due to amphetamines – during the 1967 Tour de France was immortalised as he fell off his bike climbing Mont Ventoux (Mignon, 2003). More recently, the wide-ranging doping abuse among Finnish Nordic skiing athletes during the 2001 FIS Nordic World Ski Championship in Lahti has had a direct influence on stricter anti-doping policies (Hanstad, 2008). In 2013, Lance Armstrong confessed to taking banned substances in an Oprah Winfrey interview (Dimeo, 2014). The recent exclusion of Russian athletes from the 2016 Olympic Games drew a picture of a Russian state-sponsored doping program connected with many sports, resembling what used to happen in the former East Germany (Ungerleider, 2001). Thus, doping has caused ongoing scandals for decades.

The most significant political impact of the 1998 Tour de France scandal was the creation of the World Anti-Doping Agency in 1999 (Ferstle, 2001; Houlihan, 2002), and later the introduction of a global and harmonised set of rules known as the World Anti-Doping Code (WADC; Houlihan, 2004), emphasising a common set of rules governing all kinds of elite sport. The first WADC, introduced in 2003, made it clear that the global policy was designed to fit individuals and organisations, not states and governments involved in doping orchestration. One key element since the initiation of the Code has been the *strict liability* paragraph. Unlike other legally binding regulations, this places the burden of responsibility on the athlete, who is held liable for any substance found in the bodily fluids during a test. The responsibility for remaining “clean” is, therefore, up to the athlete:

It is each *Athlete's* personal duty to ensure that no *Prohibited Substance* enters his or her body. *Athletes* are responsible for any *Prohibited Substance* or its *Metabolites* or *Markers* found to be present in their *Samples*. Accordingly, it is not necessary that intent, *Fault*, negligence or knowing *Use* on the *Athlete's* part be demonstrated in order to establish an anti-doping rule violation under Article 2.1. (WADA, World Anti-Doping Code, 2015, § 2.1.1; italics in original).

The policies laid down in the WADC have certainly not been embraced without controversies and conflicts, as a variety of studies have indicated (Efverström et al., 2016; Elbe & Overbye, 2014; Hanstad et al., 2010; Hanstad & Loland, 2009; Houlihan, 2014; McNamee & Tarasti, 2010; Møller, 2009, 2016). Likewise, studies on sport and national identity construction related to mass-media coverage have for years been of academic interest (Bairner, 2015; Boyle & Haynes, 2009), and studies have shown that doping accusations have led to significant differences in media coverage depending on national context (Bie & Billings, 2015).

Doping cases often radically change the image of a sport that is linked to national identity constructions. For instance, the supremacy of the up-and-coming American road cyclists, symbolised by the US Postal team conquering the terrain from European athletes, was destroyed by the exposure of Lance Armstrong's doping (Dimeo, 2014). Russian state-orchestrated doping regimes undermined and de-legitimised President Putin's endeavours to bring Russia back to the top of the global sport scene by being successful in competition, as well as hosting mega events such as the Winter Olympics in Sochi in 2014 and the FIFA World Cup in 2018. Not only have doping scandals discredited the sport disciplines and the sport organisations affiliated to the disciplines,

but they have also had a negative impact on national identity, as exemplified by Laine's notion of "national shame" following two incidents of Finnish skiers testing positive for doping abuse (2006).

When it comes to the interrelations between sport and national identity construction, Scandinavia is no exception and the immense rivalry between Norway and Sweden started with the sportification of skiing (Goksøyr, 2005). The annual 50km in Holmenkollen, Norway, was hosted for the first time in 1888, and from the first race, it was a Nordic battle. In both Sweden and Finland, cross-country skiing was a major sport *before* ice hockey. Worldwide, cross-country skiing is a minor sport; hence, the rivalries between the Nordic countries are also rooted in the fact that not many nations focus as seriously on cross-country skiing as the Nordic countries do (Gotaas, 2013). Whereas cross-country skiing is the national sport of Norway (albeit with fewer members of clubs than football; see Kristiansen, 2017) it plays a less conspicuous, but still very important, role in Sweden.

The two Scandinavian countries share more than their love of the same sports. From 1380 until 1814, Norway had formed a union with Denmark. In 1814, in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, Norway was ceded to Sweden, as Denmark had sided with the French in the wars. The union with Sweden lasted until 1905. During this period, opposition to Swedish control grew in Norway, and Norwegian romantic nationalism was part of this cultural outlook. Hence, what was considered uniquely Norwegian culture was found among the farmers and peasants in rural districts in Norway.

Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson was one of the most prominent figures of his time, and received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1903. His peasants' tales support the idea of the *bonde*, or peasant, as the backbone of the Norwegian nation, as he was a lineal descendant of the man of the sagas. The first one was *Synnøve Solbakken* (the family name translates literally as "sunny hill"), published in 1857 (published in English in 1858 under the title *Trust and Trial*). In many ways, Synnøve, with her light hair, big blue eyes and role as a symbol of the good in people, has become the ideal of the *true* Norwegian woman. Therese Johaug, as we will argue, fits very well into this description of the archetypal Norwegian woman due to her rural upbringing.

Critical discourse analysis as methodological point of departure

A scandal can be defined as an act of transgression that is mediated and observed by a wider audience (Adut, 2005; Thomson, 2000; Storm & Wagner, 2015). The mass media, including the proliferation of various social media, seem to speed up the number and extent of scandals due to the fact that acts of transgression gain immediate momentum, reaching an audience at a hitherto unknown speed (Allern & Pollack, 2012). Referring explicitly to sport scandals, Rowe (1997) argues that scandals are events which contradict audiences' expectations of celebrities and/or athletic role models. Also, by drawing attention to imbalanced expectations, Storm and Wagner (2015) argue that a second phase of a sport scandal occurs when its appearance reaches a wider audience, followed by a third phase of intense moral discussion and crisis communication. In this way, scandals can be perceived as social dramas in which society's codes are negotiated (Kantola & Vesa, 2013). Having these characteristics in mind, we argue that critical discourse analysis is a fruitful theoretical approach for a comparative study dealing with

the phase following immediately after the transgression itself. The act of transgression – Therese Johaug testing positive – only became a scandal when it was mediated to a wider audience at the press conference. Subsequently, it initiated a process in which additional discourses challenged the hitherto stable order of discourse that formerly ascribed meaning to a successful female Norwegian cross-country skier.

A fundamental assumption within critical discourse analysis is that we can distinguish between three layers of analysis: text, discourse, and social practice (Fairclough, 1992, 2003). These layers are interconnected in a dialectical interplay. Text, our empirical unit of analysis, is part of a discourse practice as media texts draw upon, modify, mirror, and/or transform various discourses. Fairclough (2003) provides a comprehensive analytical set-up when conducting a critical discourse analysis. For practical reasons our approach is more selective: we adopt the concept of “style” as we analyse our media texts. Among other aspects, the concept is here used in discussions on “how people identify themselves and are identified by others” (Fairclough, 2003: 159). In particular, our analysis dwells upon the latter, outlining and comparing the identification by others through media representations of Johaug. Inspired by Li (2009), we link this representation to constructions of national identity – for instance, by looking at *us/them* distinctions (see also Bie & Billings, 2015). The power of a certain discourse is linked to notions of subjectivity, which is another key feature of our analysis: on the one hand, we investigate *who* is granted the right to speak in and through the texts and to distinguish between morally acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. This idea is related to Foucault’s notion of the subject as a dispersion of positions (1972). On the other hand, subjectivity also refers to *how* Johaug is created as an object (e.g., whether she is represented as an individual actor or as a victim of circumstances). In this discursive process, where style intersects with constructions of national identity and perceptions of subjectivity, intertextuality refers to an understanding of a text not as something that occurs or is created in isolation, but as an entity in dialogue with, or composed of snatches of, previous texts. Accordingly, style promotes certain national identity constructions and ascribes subjectivity to Johaug. Thus, we adopt a three-layer analytical framework through which we see the discursive articulations related to the Johaug scandal as parts of a wider social practice that revolves around a practice that tries to fix meaning frames in the intersection between doping, Nordic skiing, and national identity construction.

Research design

Our research design is inspired by the framework suggested by Carvalho (2008). Unlike several studies setting out from a critical discourse analytical perspective, we do not intend to conduct an analysis focusing narrowly on text composition (e.g. applying a toolkit from sociolinguistics). Moreover, time plays an important role as we investigate how a scandal developed over a period of nearly five months; thus, we go beyond the narrow timespan often reflected in critical discourse analytical studies (Carvalho, 2008).

Our textual analysis has subjectivity as its pivotal point. We identify who is represented as a subject in the texts (i.e. who is given a voice during the early phase of a scandal). In particular, Therese Johaug is created as an object; texts talk about her, but simultaneously she can be ascribed subjectivity – she “does” things. We combine our focus on subjectivity with representations of national identity and style (e.g. how Nordic

skiing is linked to nationality). This procedure resembles the textual and discursive levels of analysis found in the framework drawn up by Fairclough (1992, 2003). We link this to the contextual level suggested by Carvalho (2008) in order to understand these two first levels as parts of a wider social practice. The comparative-synchronic analysis seeks to compare texts within a similar period of time with other texts from the same period but from a different national context, which we finally link to a historical-diachronic analysis, as our aim is to explain the similarities and differences identified in the previous steps. Here the historical conditions of Nordic skiing and anti-doping policies will be taken into consideration.

The procedure used is as follows: All texts used in the study were published between October 13, 2016, and March 7, 2017. We collected online texts only. Each text was copied and converted into Word files. We used the search term “Therese Johaug”, thus avoiding narrow search criteria. For both countries, a public service channel and a tabloid press were selected to illustrate the distinctiveness of each medium (e.g., tabloids often favour flashy, sensational stories, whereas tax-funded public service providers often are less inclined towards sensationalism). In addition, and because we departed from a Norwegian context, we included texts from a traditional newspaper as a third Norwegian media source. The reading of the texts went through two rounds: the first round took place simultaneously with the collection of texts, in order to get an immediate and broad overview. The second round was a more systematic reading, based on a theory-driven approach following a template for reading (see Appendix A). Texts were read in their original language (Norwegian and Swedish), but direct quotes appearing in the following sections are translated into English by the authors. Our analysis set out by first exploring the Norwegian coverage, which was subsequently compared with the Swedish coverage. Despite having gathered 940 texts, our analysis is qualitative and interpretive in nature: we do not strictly compare by numbers (e.g., number of articles in each media or number of appearances by certain actors). Texts used for the empirical basis of this study are from Norway *Aftenposten*, AP ($n = 176$), *VG* ($n = 249$) and *nrk.no* ($n = 196$); and, from Sweden, *Expressen* ($n = 235$) and *svt.se* ($n = 84$). Norwegian texts were accessed using Retriever, while Swedish texts were accessed directly via the media’s webpages. Short references (to source and date) are mentioned in the analytical section; complete references are listed in Appendix B.

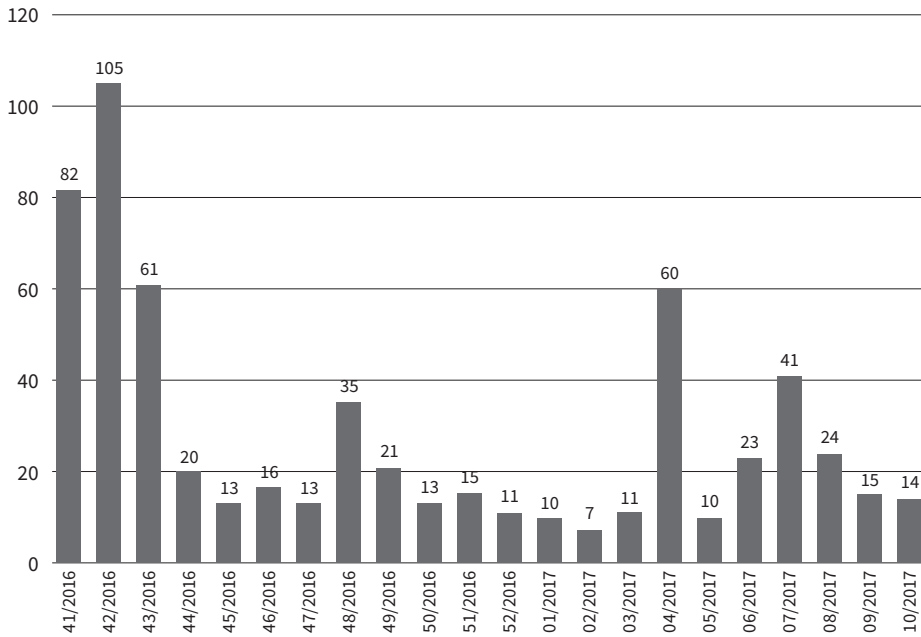
Limitations that may be mentioned, therefore, include the lack of detailed insights into single text compositions. Moreover, since we excluded visual features, readers’ comments and Youtube-like clips, we deviate from the framework put forth by Carvalho (2008). While texts are easy to compare, images, structural organisation and layout play important roles, and this is a limitation of the study that should be mentioned. Finally, our study does not address occurrences before or after the outbreak of the scandal, as we do not use empirical sources prior to the announcement of the anti-doping rule violation.

Results

The main search among the three Norwegian sources resulted in 621 articles. In order to provide an overview of the development of the scandal, Figure 1 highlights the main peaks, which are: the first press conference (week 41, 2016); the second press conference (week 42, 2016); Antidoping Norway’s decision that Johaug would receive a 14-month

suspension (week 48, 2016); the hearing at Ullevaal (week 4, 2017); and, finally, the announcement of the 13-month suspension (week 7, 2017).

Figure 1. Distribution of articles in the Norwegian news media examined (frequencies)



Comments: N = 621. The examined news media are AP (n = 176), VG (n = 249) and nrk.no (n = 196).

The period under investigation has the characteristics of Phases Two and Three in the model proposed by Storm and Wagner (2015). Phase Two signifies the period of the dissemination of information to a wider audience, often focusing on what has happened, where and how (e.g. by introducing the reader to the prohibited substance, which was used in the former East Germany), and then gradually leading to Phase Three, which entails a moral discussion and crisis discussion: Who is to blame? How could this happen? And what will be the consequences for Norwegian cross-country skiing?

Subjectivity: Who talks – and how is Johaug talked about?

As the scandal became known to a wider public after the press release, a plethora of positions uttering their perspectives emerged.¹ Although our design prevents us from comparing the situation with that prior to the press conference, it seems plausible to suggest that a sudden disruption of a hitherto stable order of discourse gave rise to new positions, which is an observation in line with Fairclough (1992). We have grouped these positions into eight categories: 1) family, friends, and support personnel; 2) international doping experts; 3) Norwegian doping experts; 4) the International Ski Federation (FIS); 5) the Norwegian Ski Federation (NSF) and the National Olympic Committee (NIF); 6) cross-country athletes; 7) athletes from other sports; and 8) “other voices”.

Not surprisingly, the team close to Johaug is of media interest. Since a scandal can be perceived as a social drama (Kantola & Vesa, 2013), the entourage close to the person

central to the moral transgression will be a major actor. But, as outlined earlier in this article, doping and anti-doping policy is a contested field; thus, a group of Norwegian and international doping experts will enter the scene together with representatives from organised sport, including athletes both within and beyond skiing, as well a heterogeneous group that we refer to as “other voices”. Positions belonging to the latter category confirm that this scandal in particular will have ramifications far beyond the sport of skiing itself: other journalists are quoted, researchers are drawn in, and politicians appear as well. By comparing the positions that are included in the texts, one striking feature is that in the Swedish coverage, voices of additional athletes are included among a conspicuous number of other voices; however, one should not overemphasise (and risk misinterpreting) this higher number. We can interpret it as a higher degree of the dispersion of subjectivity in the Swedish debate.

What is of interest here is how Johaug is talked about because it gives an indication of whether she is presented as an actor, an individual deliberately taking care of her own decisions, or a passive object subjected to the flow of the discourse. The *strict liability* principle can be perceived as representing a discourse emphasising individual responsibility to the extreme: no one but the individual athlete bears the responsibility.

The Norwegian coverage is intense from the outset: at the press conference, Johaug herself claims that she has taken responsibility by consulting her physician (app. B. VG, 14.10.16), who, according to her, mistakenly confirmed that taking Trofodermin was not considered doping. Therefore, she claims no guilt. Accordingly, the subsequent Norwegian coverage pays much attention to the athlete-physician relationship (app. B. AP, 22.10.16a): To what extent is Johaug responsible, and to what extent does the blame lie with her physician? This discussion is backed up, but also blurred, by evidence that the product contains a clear sign on its package (doping, prohibited substance). Despite the oscillation between the individual’s responsibility and the physician’s responsibility, the Norwegian coverage is reluctant to frame it as a doping case per se, as numerous experts confirm that the performance-enhancing potential of such a product is non-existent. Gradually, a discourse emerges about the legal rights of athletes (app. B. AP, 17.10.16) and even human rights (app. B. NRK, 30.11.16): the story presented by Johaug at the press conference – that she took the substance due to her sunburned lips – is turned into a debate about Johaug as the victim of a complex global anti-doping bureaucracy chasing innocent athletes. The law complex, and the *strict liability* principle in particular, is an object of intense and critical debate (app. B. NRK, 19.10.16b). Occasionally, individual responsibility is emphasised, for instance, through references to the Swedish media coverage (app. B. AP, 14.10.16). However, Johaug is regularly framed as a victim in a process where global actors such as FIS and WADA, together with Anti-Doping Norway, represent regulations that are far out of proportion, for instance, through the claim that “we cannot sacrifice the innocent in order to catch the guilty” (app. B. AP, 16.10.16).

Thus, a dichotomy surrounds her subjectivity: She is the victim, an innocent object of the anti-doping regime who happened to trust her physician and, due to the rough period she has had to go through, now needs psychological assistance (app. B. NRK 27.10.16). Simultaneously, she is portrayed as the strong and honest athlete who continues to fight despite being accused of doping (app. B. VG, 2.12.16). Occasionally, critical stories appear as she is confronted with her former utterance – that she always rigorously checks substances herself two or three times before intake – which, in this case, contradicts

the story that she only trusted her physician (app. B. VG, 13.10.16). During the trial in January 2017, information also appears that she has not taken the mandatory learning course ‘Clean Athlete’ (app. B. AP, 26.01.17). Yet, the picture of her as being a partly victimised athlete remains. Norwegian and international skiers, as well as athletes from other disciplines, regularly support her. One example is the Norwegian cyclist Alexander Kristoff, who says: “This could have happened to me” (app. B. NRK, 14.10.2016b). An intermediate position is represented by Anti-Doping Norway, claiming that she cannot totally be excused, although they believe the overall story about the mistake made by her physician (app. B. NRK, 19.10.16b), which is used as the rationale for suggesting a 13-month suspension.

In the Swedish media, prominent opinion makers play a key role in setting the agenda. While Swedish skiers appear, they do not criticise Johaug; rather, the affair is claimed to be a “tempest in a teacup” (app. B. Expressen, 11.11.16). In addition, athletes from Finland and Poland are regularly quoted, as well as other journalists and experts. Swedish athletes’ express sympathy for Johaug’s situation, whereas other athletes and opinion makers emphasise her duty to adhere to the *strict liability* principle (i.e. that the fault for testing positive lies with Johaug herself). In that sense, she is seldom portrayed as a victim of circumstances. Rather, examples can be found of other voices indicating that Norwegian athletes are “untouchable” and treated in a privileged and protected way (app. B. Expressen, 01.11.16). This is an allusion to the short ban of two months given to Martin Johnsrud Sundby, and it is often suggested that Norway receives special treatment because of its powerful position within international skiing (app. B. Expressen, 21.02.2017).

National identity construction, Nordic skiing, and doping policy

We use the concept of style to outline how the scandal extended to become a matter of how Norway identifies itself in relation to how others identify the country as a leading skiing nation that has also had a significant anti-doping profile. In our case, we connect style to *us/them* distinctions (Li, 2009).

The Norwegian coverage: the idea of a system failure

Cross-country skiing is regularly referred to as the Norwegian national sport (app. B. NRK, 22.11.16). News coverage immediately after the announcement was loaded with technicalities (what kind of substance is Clostobol?), discussion of the process (how did this happen?), and reactions (what was the reaction among people close to Johaug?). In addition, the consequences for skiing in Norway were heavily debated, and the case was assumed to have a negative impact on Norwegian self-identity: “This is a catastrophe for the skiing nation of Norway” (app. B. AP, 14.10.16).

What seemed to reinforce the negative impact was the fact that, prior to the Johaug scandal, the male Norwegian superstar, Martin Johnsrud Sundby, was also suspended due to the excessive use of asthma medicine, which led to a public debate about Norwegian practice of using asthma medicine for non-therapeutic purposes. Therefore, when the Johaug scandal entered the mass media, there was a pre-existing debate about drug use in Norwegian skiing, and this context is important for understanding the style of the texts (app. B. VG, 15.10.16a). On the one hand, Norway has played an important

international role for decades in outlining and morally defending anti-doping policy (app. B. VG, 17.10.16; NRK 23.10.16), which has also been identified within academic research (Hanstad & Houlihan, 2015; Wagner & Hanstad, 2011). On the other hand, with two cases in a row, the Johaug scandal cannot be isolated as a single incident. Thus, for the media, there is already an awareness of the inappropriate use of medicine in Norwegian sport. The outcome of the debate is seen in the terms “system failure” (Norwegian: ‘systemsvikt’; app. B. NRK, 14.10.16a) and “system error” (Norwegian: ‘systemfeil’; app. B. VG, 15.10.16b). Rather than describing the scandal as part of a doping discourse in which athletes or support personnel deliberately intend to dope or circumvent regulations to enhance performance, the media often propagate the claim that the administrative systems both monitoring and helping elite athletes have failed.

Accordingly, the responsibility for the failure is transferred from the individual to the governing organisational level. During the early phase in particular, direct comparisons with Swedish practices (app. B. NRK, 14.10.16c), and the ways in which other nations, like Russia, Sweden, Finland and Switzerland, judge the Norwegian scandals and practice of using questionable methods (app. B. AP, 22.10.16b), are critical points of awareness, for instance, emphasising that medical treatment is subject to much stiffer regulatory oversight in Sweden (app. B. AP, 15.10.16a), where a positive test automatically leads to immediate suspension (app. B. VG, 16.10.18). In the dominant narrative – that this is more about administrative failure than doping cracks – critical questions sometimes appear. An example of this is “what would we have thought if the same had happened to a foreign athlete?” (app. B. AP, 15.10.16b). The ensuing argument would be that the current case might expose Norwegian double standards or, as pointed out by a Norwegian professor, that alternatives to the existing global regime might be even more insufficient (app. B. AP, 21.10.16). These positions are, however, rare: the dominant perceptions are that the Norwegian system has failed, and, therefore, that the administrative leaders are primarily to blame, not the individual athlete. This is taken even further by some: Johaug is simply innocent and the victim of a witch hunt (app. B. VG, 1.11.16). Ongoing revelations of inconsistent administrative procedures, such as the sporadic testing of Johaug over the summer (app. B. NRK, 18.10.16) and the lack of monitoring of whether athletes have undergone mandatory anti-doping education (app. B. NRK, 25.01.2017, VG, 28.01.2017), support this image of administrative failure. Moreover, this administrative failure is considered harmful not only for skiing, but for Norwegian sport as a whole (app. B. NRK, 21.10.16). Other elite Norwegian cross-country skiers defend their sport, claiming that Norway is not a doping nation (21.02.2017) or a nation that cheats (app. B. AP, 25.10.16), and on opinion pages, views can be found that suspicion is caused by other nations’ envy (app. B. AP, 26.10.16).

The Swedish coverage: a regular doping case

The Swedish media coverage differs significantly from the Norwegian, but there are also differences between the public service broadcaster (svt.se) and the tabloid (Expressen): in particular, the latter covers the scandal extensively. This is done by using a mixture of intertextual snatches containing elements from Norwegian media (VG and NRK in particular) and several Polish and Finnish media (e.g. Ilta-Sanomat), together with texts compiled by the newspaper’s own journalists. The style in the early phase of the

scandal is confrontational, with phrases such as “you must be punished” (with reference to Johaug, app. B. Expressen, 13.10.16), or by using a quote from an SVT journalist as a headline: “The Norwegian people have been brainwashed for several years” (app. B. Expressen, 14.10.16). The front page of Expressen’s sport section lines up all Norwegian cross-country skiing winners during the last two seasons behind a headline asking: “Too good to be true ...?” (app. B. Expressen, 16.10.16a).

This obviously paves the way for another explanation, which becomes a follow-up topic: Norway has a problem when it comes to grey zone practices. Occasionally, voices are heard talking about regular doping use (app. B. Expressen, 10.02.2017), whereas prominent columnists express their belief in Johaug’s version, while maintaining that Norway’s practices as such remain in a critical grey zone where their ethical legitimacy can be questioned (app. B. Expressen, 23.10.16). In contrast with the Norwegian coverage, in the Swedish coverage there is seldom any doubt whether or not Johaug’s positive test represents a doping incident per se; rather, it is discussed how long her exclusion from competitions will be (app. B. svt.se, 27.10.16; svt.se. 14.12.2016).

The immediate debate does not lead to a discussion about a Norwegian “system failure” but rather to a debate on, for example, “Norwegian arrogance” (referring to the way the Norwegians handle the criticism; app. B. Expressen, 23.11.16), their lack of humility (app. B. Expressen, 18.02.2017) and “can Norway be trusted?” (app. B. Expressen, 16.10.16b). The Johaug case, Sundby’s previous positive test and ongoing debates about treating non-diagnosed athletes with asthma medicine create an impression of a pattern and, subsequently, a demand is made for further investigations into Norwegian anti-doping procedures.

Given the intertextual use of snatches from the Norwegian media, voices tending to support Johaug can be identified, but voices that are critical of the harshness of the Swedish coverage can also be found (app. B. Expressen, 14.02.17). The regular intertextual reference to Finland is interesting. It gives voice to a nation that has suffered tremendously from the negative publicity following the 2001 Lahti World Cup doping scandal (Laine, 2006) and enables a position where critique can be pointed at Norwegian grey zone practices, Russian state-orchestrated doping and Finnish skiers wearing oxygen masks during exercise. The examples of practices by athletes from nations other than Sweden represent practices that go beyond what is ethically acceptable (app. B. Expressen, 23.10.16), thus enabling a discursive style that constructs Sweden as the bearer of high anti-doping morals.

While many of the most critical Swedish utterances directed towards Norway appeared in the early phase of the scandal, examples of ongoing critique occurred until March 7, 2017, when the FIS decided to appeal the sanction given by the Norwegian authorities. In mid-February, 2017, when Johaug was banned for 13 months and she was reported as not being satisfied with the length of her exclusion, Swedish anti-doping expert Åke-Andrén-Sandberg, from the Swedish Sport Confederation, reacted as follows:

Here it should be remembered that rules apply to all; and here she has been let off easy. Rules apply to huge, strong, unseemly, and stupid weightlifters from countries we do not much care for – as well as to sweet, kind, nice Norwegian skiers (Expressen, 11.02.17).

Summing up the comparison between Swedish and Norwegian coverage

The Norwegian media coverage contains, essentially, two sides of Johaug: Johaug as an *object*, who is a victim of a failing and unjust system in which athletes' rights are not upheld; and, simultaneously, Johaug as a *subject*, who is strong enough to fight the system but also fails in her obligation to bear responsibility for substances entering her body. This ambivalence with regard to Johaug's subjectivity supports a narrative that is reticent in defining the case as a doping incident per se, and the reluctance towards perceiving Norway as a doping nation.

The Swedish coverage, as shown in particular by controversial statements found in the tabloid Expressen, differs inasmuch as Johaug is portrayed as a subject who failed, not as a victim. Thus, whether she will be sanctioned or not is less of an issue; rather, the debate is over how severely she must be sanctioned. This ascription of subjectivity correlates with a style promoting a critical line of argumentation which emphasises Norwegian skiing as operating in a dubious grey zone. Swedish discourses seem in favour of *strict liability*; thus, the issue of guilt can be ascribed to the individual athlete, who accordingly needs to receive a ban, and to Norwegian anti-doping policy, which is not as consistent as one would expect, and therefore requires a thorough investigation. Norwegian positions are more reluctant to pin the blame on their skiing star. Rather, the system is guilty due to failing administration, and the anti-doping regime is guilty for undermining the rights of athletes. While we detected a major difference between the Swedish tabloid and public service provider, a similar difference between Norwegian sources was not found.

Concluding discussion: contextualising the Johaug scandal

How can we explain these differences? Returning to the historical-diachronic section, we will construct two possible contextual frames in which we point to Fairclough's (1992, 2003) theory: that discourse practice is part of a wider social practice. First, as Norwegians have historically played a prominent role in promoting a severe anti-doping policy (Hanstad & Houlihan, 2015; Wagner & Hanstad, 2011), the sudden appearance of doping within the boundary of one's own system may lead to a situation resembling national shame (Laine, 2006). Similarly to other studies (e.g. Bie & Billings, 2015; Li et al., 2016), our study shows that a nation's own media can exhibit a desire to protect its own national identity linked to a sport by defending the athlete under accusation. Accordingly, it is hardly a surprise that a rival nation – in this case, Sweden – performs the role of the opponent. Rather, one can argue that the Johaug case is an extension of an existing rivalrous relation between Sweden and Norway, as described by Goksøyr (2005).

We argue that the Norwegian way of dealing with the Johaug case shares similarities with a version of the NIMBY (Not in my Backyard) syndrome (Kinder, 2018): for instance, you may support the creation of workplaces, but when it comes to settling a factory near to your own house, resistance is mobilised (Wexler, 1996). Arguing in favour of global anti-doping policy, including adhering strongly to the *strict liability* principle, suddenly becomes questionable when one's own star athletes are suffering from effects of this policy. Nothing tastes as bitter as your own medicine.

A NIMBY approach is a tactic employed for a nation in order to avoid ending up in a situation resembling the national shame witnessed in Finland in 2001 (Laine, 2006).

The Johaug case is potentially disastrous for Norway, as it not only impacts their national sport, cross country skiing, but also undermines the nation's identity as a global anti-doping pioneer. Interestingly, the general sentiment in Norway remained that Johaug was innocent; it might be that the *Synnøve Solbakken* image protected her. During her ban period, she showed off a brave face and remained true to herself and her own ethical values. When returning to sport, she admitted that it had been hard – but she had grown from the experience, both personally and as an athlete: in the 2019 FIS Nordic World Ski Championships (Nordic WSC) in Seefeld, Johaug won three events and she became the “queen” of the championship.

Second, some elements of the Swedish reaction resemble a rhetoric known from social conflicts, or what Bairner (2015: 375) calls “competing identities”. In his Luhmann-inspired analysis of the role of sport in contemporary society, Norwegian sociologist Jan-Ove Tangen (2004) claims that the function of modern sport is to compare the progression of states. This mirror function of sport has often compensated for warfare. This approach is in line with the idea of sport fulfilling the role of a soft-power strategy used by nations to position themselves within a global competitive foreign policy landscape (Grix & Houlihan, 2014). If we adopt this understanding, the Swedish reactions are turned into more than “just sport” as texts literally mediate social practices rooted in a competitive game, where states and political interests compare and compete with each other through sport. The historical study undertaken by Goksøyr (2005) provides rich examples of how sport is used for measuring and comparing the performance of these two rival Scandinavian nations. This rivalry can even occasionally be used as a stepping stone for one nation, like Sweden, to expose its supremacy beyond the Swedish-Norwegian axis of tension, which, according to Boyle and Haynes (2009), can correlate with the growing importance of sport in public life. The distinction between sport news and regular news is vanishing. Accordingly, the Johaug case cannot just be seen as sport news, but news per se.

The Johaug scandal supports existing research (Hanstad, 2008; Hanstad, Smith & Waddington, 2008; Wagner & Pedersen, 2014) in that the incident generated organisational changes: Norwegians were forced to investigate asthma practices, incorporate medical practices used in Sweden, update educational efforts, and optimise administrative procedures in federations. What the case also reveals is the delicate nature of the *strict liability* principle, and thus adds to an ongoing concern about athletes' rights (McNamee & Tarasti, 2010; Møller, 2014, 2016). This should not only be an issue for Scandinavian countries, but even encompass concerns for athletes living in cities in Russia.

Note

1. A complete list of who is given a voice in the texts can be provided by contacting the corresponding author.

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Appendix A: Template for reading and analysing texts

Subjectivity

- Who talks? Who is given a voice in the texts? [dispersion of subjectivity]
- How is Johaug talked about? [the subject as an object of text]

Style and national identity

- How is Nordic skiing related to the construction of national identity?
- How is Nordic skiing related to the construction of national identity of neighbouring Scandinavians?
- How is doping and anti-doping policies related to the construction of national identity?
- How is doping and anti-doping policies related to the construction of national identity of neighbouring Scandinavians?

Inter-textuality

- Which other texts are referred to?
- Examples of manifest intertextuality? [direct appearance of other texts within the text]

Guilt

- Does the text argue in favour of Johaug being guilty/not guilty? Passive victim or active villain?
- Fixation of meaning in relation to guilt [linked to interplay between subjectivity, style and inter-textuality]

Appendix B: Full chronological list of references for the sources referred to in the main text

Aftenposten, AP:

- M. Bugge: Dette er hele skinasjonen Norges katastrofe, 14.10. 2016.
- M. Bugge: I Sverige skal all medisinerings av toppidrettsutøverne godkjennes av to leger. Slik er det ikke i Norge, 15.10. 2016 (a).
- J.K. Bergland: Suveren skinasjon i skammekroken, 15.10. 2016 (b).
- M. Bugge: Vi kan ikke ofre uskyldige for å ta skyldige, 16.10. 2016.
- T. Jagland: Idrettsstjerner har også krav på rettsikkerhet, 17.10. 2016.
- M. Bugge: Vår hyllest av toppidrettsutøvere og hvordan vi håndterer dem, gjør at fallet blir så enormt, 21.10. 2016.
- R.V. Johansen: Alle varsellamper blinket, 22.10. 2016 (a).
- K.B.M. Haugli: Frygter skandalene ødelegger sporten, 22.10. 2016 (b).
- K.B.M. Haugli: Vi har aldri vært i noen gråsoner, 25.10. 2016.
- A.S. Ramussen: Hvorfor fortsettes det å kaste mistanke mot Johaug?, 26.10. 2016.
- E. Nesje, A. B. Foss & O.I. Aas: Det gir ikke noe frikort å være på et landslag med en egen lege, 26.01. 2017.

VG:

- M. Aserud: Johaug for 16 dager siden: – jeg sjekker både en, to og tre ganger, 13.10. 2016.
- J. Overvik: JEG ER I SJOKK. Dette sa Johaug på pressekonferansen, 14.10. 2016.
- Editorial: Idretten i vanry, 15.10. 2016 (a).
- C. Vesteng: Kulturministeren: Vi er den nasjon i verden som kanskje har mest ressurser, kompetanse og erfaring knyttet til vårt landslag, og da skal vi også ha en gullstandard. Så sanne ting skal ikke skje, 15.10. 2016 (b).
- J. Wikborg & O. K. Strøm: Johaug ville blitt automatisk utestengt i Sverige og Finland. Sterke reaksjoner på at Johaug kan delta på samlinger og i konkurranser, 16.10. 2016.
- O.K. Strøm: Denne saken er en kjempetfordring for Norge som moralens vokter, 17.10. 2016.
- L. Welhaven: Slik splitter Johaug folket, 01.11. 2016.
- A.K. Christiansen, M. Aaserud & C. Vesteng: Imponert over hvor positiv, tøff og flink Therese har vært. Her er Therese i trening på Sjusjøen i går, 02.12. 2016.
- Ø. Hernes & A.B. Ould-Saada: Antidoping-blemme: Jeg tok for gitt at dette var fulgt opp, 28.01. 2017.

nrk.no:

- A. Lote: Skikretsleiarane set sin eigen organisasjon sjakk matt, 14.10. 2016 (a).
- A. Skjerdingsstad & A.S. Smith: Kristoff forsvarer Johaug: – Det kunne skjedd meg, 14.10. 2016 (b).
- A.R. Bentsen: Svenskene handler aldri på utenlandske apotek, 14.10. 2016 (c).
- A.I. Tahir & F. Stuve: Gikk fire måneder uten å bli testet: – Uheldig, 18.10. 2016.
- H.S. Mueller, M. Håby & J.A. Lien: Nye tiltak etter Johaug-skandalen: – Det har vært store hull, 19.10. 2016 (a).
- M. N. Støstad, A. Rognerud, H.S. Mueller & J.A. Lien: Johaug sa hun hadde null skyld – Antidoping Norge er helt uenige, 19.10. 2016 (b).
- A. Skjerdingsstad & T. Barstein: Norske utøvere vekket av dopingjegere, 21.10. 2016.

- K. Goplen: Balansen mellom idrettsglede, rettssikkerhet, fair play og rigide regler, 23.10. 2016.
J.A. Lien, H. Thingnes & I.S.R. Høidalen: Johaug har fått psykologhjelp, 27.10. 2016.
M. Svenning: Fotball taper for skiheltene, 22.11. 2016.
A.O. Sandland & G.M. Kjenner: Dopingjakt mot menneskerettigheter, 30.11. 2016.
P. Fløttum & A.I. Tahir: Johaug gjennomførte aldri obligatorisk dopingkurs, 25.01. 2017.
A. Skjerdingstad: De slenger drit, kaller det dopsport og koddet med situasjonen, 21.02. 2017.

Expressen:

- T. Pettersson: Ledsen, Johaug – du ska straffas, 13.10. 2016.
P. Landén: Det norska folket har hjärntvättats i flera år, 14.10. 2016.
Front page: För bra för att vara sant ...?, 16.10. 2016 (a).
L. Holmberg: Dags att ställa frågan – kan vi lita på Norge?, 16.10. 2016 (b).
T. Pettersson: Frågan är varför vi ska bry oss?, 23.10. 2016.
L. Holmberg: Svenska kritiken mot de norska proverna, 01.11. 2016.
T. Pettersson: Jag tycker det är en storm i ett vattenglas, 11.11. 2016.
T. Pettersson: Norges arrogans har inga gränser – fräckt, 23.11. 2016.
S. Mattsson: SVT-profilen: Tolv norska åkare dopade, 10.02. 2017.
C-F. Eriksson: Reglerna gäller även för söta, rara norskor, 11.02. 2017.
S. Mattsson: Ilskan mot Sverige: Dåligt och hätsk, 14.02. 2017.
T. Pettersson: Norge mest inkompetent, 18.02. 2017.
P. Landén: Svens: Norge förstör VM med sin doping, 21.02. 2017.

svt.se:

- M. Johansson: Johaug: Jag har sagt hela sanningen, 27.10. 2016.
J. Kvarnström: Svenske längdbasen: Johaug missar VM, 14.12. 2016.