

# Coinciding steroid, body image, and party drug trends among young men in the 'Bruss' subculture

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## Introduction

- Focus group research indicates that young men are under increasing pressure to conform to a cultural ideal of a lean, muscular build (Grogan & Richards, 2002).
- 'Brusses' are an Australian subculture of young men who:
  - spend a great deal of time accumulating muscle mass
  - tend to be well groomed, wear tight/minimal clothing, have spray tans and their own terminology/slang
- These increasing body concerns can result in anabolic-androgenic steroid (AAS) and other body image drug use (Kanayama, Pope, and Hudson, 2001).
- Party drug use in Australia is common in the nightlife and electronic-music festival scene that 'Brusses' regularly engage in.
- This study aimed to gain a more in-depth understanding of body image and/or recreational drug use in the 'Bruss' subculture.

## Methods

- Participants were 14 young men aged 16 to 30 years (*M* age 21.71 ± 2.05 years) who engaged in:
  - bodybuilding 3+ times per week,
  - daily use of bodybuilding supplements, and
  - had used steroids or other body image drugs in the past/present.
- Audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews were conducted (*M* length = 52.78 mins; range = 30-80 mins)
- A content analysis was conducted to identify the most common themes among the group.

## Results

- Results suggest young men in this subculture are faced with the competing demands of the rigidity of a strict weekly training, dieting and body image drug use regime versus a desire to abandon this schedule to experience illicit drug use at nightclubs and festivals.
- Table 1 provides information about the participants' steroid and recreational drug use.
- The thematic analysis yielded three broad themes and ten categories. See Table 2 for example quotes from some of has categories.
  - Precipitating themes included:** Body image issues in childhood and/or adolescence, low self-confidence, previous social challenges, coping with the dissolution of romantic relationships.
  - Perpetuating themes included:** Social media pressures, Bruss culture, sense of control over diet and training, positive attention from others.
  - Resultant themes included:** Body image drug use, alcohol and recreational drug use.

## Discussion and Conclusions

- Party drug use appears to be common among steroid users
- Recreational drug use was seen as a way to:
  - escape from strict training and dieting regimes
  - celebrate their success at music festivals.
- This phenomenon is concerning as simultaneous steroid and party drug use could provoke different, and possibly more dangerous, physiological reactions than those experienced by regular use of party drugs or steroids alone.

Table 2. Example quotes about training, dieting, steroid and party drug use.

<b>Training Attitudes</b>	<p>P04: "Um, six days a week, um, during bulking it's usually two sessions a day and then in cutting it's one gym session and one cardio."</p> <p>P13: "Lifting schedule, I go probably 7 days a week, sometimes twice a day on certain days um, consists at the moment of cardio and about an hour and a half to two hours of weight training."</p>
<b>Dieting Attitudes</b>	<p>P09: "...usually Sunday or Monday I prep my meals or I do it every night if I haven't done that, like the night before. I um yeah I write up a plan, I roughly stick to my macros and my uh percentage breakdown of calories... and yeah I'm eating like 3000 at the moment. 400 grams of carbs, 200 grams of protein, 70 grams of fat, something like that."</p> <p>P06: "...I'm consuming a ton more calories. I'm on about, my diets' set at about 5000 clean calories. Broken down to about 350 grams of protein. 636 grams of carbs, and 103 grams of fat."</p>
<b>Steroid and Body Image Drug Use</b>	<p>P04: "So, at the moment I'm on 750mg of test enanthate [testosterone enanthate], 600mg of boldenone [equipoise] (pause) obviously arimidex [anastrozole] every second day at 0.5mg, and I'll stay on that for about 20 weeks on my bulk."</p>
<b>Recreational Drug Use</b>	<p>P12: "Yeah I like drinking and drugs (laughs). They're fun. Um, yeah, like I, I like um (pause) yeah man like I said I just to get loose... I can drink a f**kload of alcohol before I'm real f**ked up, and like I know my limits with alcohol. But with like pills (ecstasy/mdma in a pill or capsule form) and s**t man, I'll just eat them for days, and I'll just go till I'm f**ked and I can't do anything else."</p> <p>P10: "I ended up in hospital one time um bit a mixture of everything really. A concoction of getting electrocuted during the week at work...and obviously I was on steroids at the time and I was (pause) on that weekend I got drunk and I went out and I took drugs (pause) well I ended up the next week in hospital with heart palpitations and all sorts of dramas, couldn't breathe properly, um all because of that cocktail".</p>

Table 1. Participant's age, typical steroid cycle and recreational drug use.

Participant	Age	Typical Steroid Cycle	Recreational Drugs Taken Regularly?
1	25	500mg testosterone enanthate p/wk for 12 weeks.	Yes - Amphetamines
2	25	1000mg testosterone enanthate p/wk for 10 weeks.	Yes - Ecstasy
3	21	500mg testosterone enanthate p/wk for 12 weeks. 400mg nandralone decanoate p/wk, for 12 weeks.	Yes - Ecstasy
4	20	750mg testosterone enanthate, 600mg boldenone undecylanate p/wk for 20 weeks.	Yes - Ecstasy
5	22	500mg testosterone enanthate p/wk for 12 weeks.	No
6	21	250mg testosterone enanthate p/wk for 10 weeks. 200mg boldenone undecylanate p/wk for 10 weeks.	No
7	18	500mg testosterone enanthate p/wk for 12 weeks.	Yes - Ecstasy
8	21	500mg Sustanon250 (testosterone blend) p/wk for 12 weeks, 400mg masteron enanthate p/wk for 10 weeks, 400mg trenbolone enanthate p/wk for 10 weeks.	Yes - Ecstasy
9	22	500mg testosterone enanthate p/wk for 12 weeks, 300mg trenbolone acetate p/wk for 12 weeks.	Yes - Ecstasy
10	23	300mg testosterone propionate p/wk for 12 weeks, 150mg trenbolone acetate p/wk for 12 weeks.	Yes - Ecstasy
11	21	250mg Sustanon250 (testosterone blend) p/wk for 14 weeks.	Yes - Ecstasy
12	22	350mg trenbolone acetate p/wk for 12 weeks.	Yes - Ecstasy
13	22	500mg testosterone enanthate p/wk for 20 weeks, 350mg stanazolol p/wk for weeks 16-20.	Yes - Ecstasy
14	19	250mg testosterone enanthate p/wk for 12 weeks, 350mg trenbolone acetate p/wk for 12 weeks.	Yes - Ecstasy



## Implications for Translational Research

- Based on this initial exploration of the factors contributing to these risky health behaviours among young men, future research is required to determine whether these results are generalizable in a larger more representative group of young men who engage in bodybuilding and steroids or other body image drug use.

## References

- Grogan, S., & Richards, H. (2002). Body image focus groups with boys and men. *Men and Masculinities*, 4(3), 219-232.
- Kanayama, G., Pope, H., & Hudson, J. (2001). 'Body Image' Drugs: A Growing Psychosomatic Problem. *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*, 70(2), 61-65.