

Using ‘the God of all steroids’ and ‘making a pact with the devil’: The benefits and risks of trenbolone

MAIR UNDERWOOD¹

¹School of Social Science, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia

Presenter’s email: m.underwood@uq.edu.au

Introduction and Aims: While the scientific literature tends to discuss the risks of anabolic-androgenic steroids (AAS) in general (e.g. Pope et al., 2014), bodybuilders discuss the risks of different AAS specifically. This paper brings the bodybuilder perspective on AAS risk to a scientific audience through a discussion of the AAS *trenbolone*. Trenbolone is a veterinary drug that is used to increase the growth of cattle. It is an extremely powerful drug with three times the binding affinity of testosterone (Yarrow et al., 2010).

Approach: A four-year online ethnography of enhanced bodybuilding communities was conducted including 38 interviews with men aged between 21 and 56 years (average 34 years), which were based in Australia (n=18), the U.S. (n=12), the UK (n=3), Canada (n=2), Germany (n=1), and India (n=1).

Key Findings: Bodybuilders describe trenbolone as an extremely powerful and versatile compound that produces a particularly valued (‘dry’ and vascular) aesthetic. While some bodybuilders describe few side effects from trenbolone, others experience significant, sometimes debilitating, physical, mental, social and sexual side effects. Some describe their lives as being ruined by this drug, and some feel that different legislation should apply to it than other AAS. Many bodybuilders describe trenbolone as a risk boundary – that is, something that sensible bodybuilders do not do. Bodybuilders work to reduce the risks of this drug, some by discouraging its use.

Discussions and Conclusions: Trenbolone is a drug that many enhanced bodybuilders describe as dangerous. Their warnings should be heeded and compound specific harm reduction efforts designed.

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